

remark that the Harbour Board is the authority to carry out the marine works and improvements of the harbour; the Railway Commissioners are, by the 31st section of the Government Railways Act, the authority to decide on all sheds, piers, wharves, jetties, and buildings, &c., and any such works must be authorised by the Commissioners, and as workers of the railway on behalf of the colony they must necessarily decide on the necessity for them.

The Commissioners have carefully perused the remarks of the Board's Engineer, and have caused the report to be examined with the authorised plans. The plans by which the Board is bound are those submitted by the Board and approved by the Governor in Council on the 3rd February, 1891. The Board is not authorised to carry out the works, as shown on M.D.1666. If the authorised plans are being truly and faithfully executed there is no need for sheet-piling, and the expenditure now proposed thereon would be a waste of money, as the plans are arranged to dispense with it.

As regards the many allegations about the existing staiths, they were built many years before the Board was established. They were faithfully carried out, and have required no more repairs than must reasonably be expected with such timber structures. They have answered their purpose well. There is no evidence that any ship has ever been damaged from the stones. The only recorded case of damage to a ship arose from a snag deposited at the berth. Security against such deposits at the berths can only be attained by inclosing them practically by constructing a basin around them. Neither dredging, pitching, nor sheath-piling, will prevent the risk from the deposit of such snags in floods.

The statement of the Chairman of the Board that the staiths "are erected contrary to Sir John Coode's harbour plan and against his advice" is an error. The plan of the staith extension was first submitted to and was recommended by Sir John Coode to be carried out, and is being done in pursuance of his recommendation. The present staiths can load about 250,000 tons per annum; the extension now being made will increase the loading capacity to about 500,000 tons per annum. The largest year's output yet has been 180,000 tons per annum. We, therefore, thought it prudent to advise, in response to queries, that the execution of a great loading-basin, involving the construction and maintenance of a second station-yard and the working of a fresh set of loading appliances, and involving a conversion of the railway rolling-stock, which scheme from first to last is not likely to be effected for much under a quarter of a million, would be unjustifiable; and we still venture to think that if deep-water accommodation is likely to be needed in the immediate future, some more economical scheme should be sought after.

With the insinuations against the Public Works Department the Commissioners are not concerned, except to remark that they attach to those gentlemen who, for the past twenty years have occupied the positions of Engineer-in-Chief and Marine Engineer to the colony, and that all these gentlemen are either absent from the colony or dead, and are, therefore, not in a position to reply, and under such circumstances the Commissioners think the remarks are not in good taste.

I have, &c.,

JAMES MCKERROW, Chief Commissioner.

SIR,—

Westport, 29th April, 1891.

I have the honour to send in a separate parcel by this mail plans in duplicate specification, and estimates for pile-sheathing at the coal-staiths extension contract, and to ask that you will obtain the sanction of the Governor in Council for the work.

The first part of the coal staiths has been erected upon a plan similar to that adopted in the existing contract, let previous to the reconstitution of this Board. As in the former contract, there is in this no provision made to prevent large stones upon the embankment from falling into the water-way under vessels frequenting the staiths. The former omission was a source of great risk, and constant and heavy expenditure until sheath-piling was placed along the staiths. The execution of this work was attended with difficulty and delay, as it could not be done without interruption to the trade; the work itself could not be properly executed because the pre-existing structure was an obstacle to the sheath-piling being regularly and accurately placed in position. The Board have no knowledge as to how or why the omission of sheath-piling in the present contract occurs again after the very severe lesson taught by the previous omission; but the Board has come to the conclusion that it is absolutely necessary to have the work done now, although it will probably cost more than if it had formed part of the original design for the coal-staiths extension contract. Still it can be done more efficiently and at less cost than when the staiths are completed. The work being under present circumstances urgent, you will oblige by forwarding the necessary sanction as soon as possible.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Marine, Wellington.

EUGENE O'CONOR, Chairman.

Marine Engineer's Office, Wellington, 6th May, 1891.

RE pile-sheathing at coal-staiths: The reason this row of sheath-piles was omitted in coal-staiths extension plans was that it is quite unnecessary. A mere glance at the plan shows that the extension of staiths now proposed is situated so far out in the river that there is very little danger of large stones rolling outside the front line of piles, and that any stones which may do so can easily be removed. Also that such stones can be removed without detriment, as there is no necessity to maintain existing slope intact along extension, as was the case along portion of staith already constructed. I therefore consider the work now proposed quite unnecessary, and that it would be simply throwing away £3,000 to expend it on such work. The proposal is, in fact, a very crude and superficial one, and I am afraid the existing system of management will lead to a good deal of this sort of thing, as the mere fact of its being possible for plans of this nature to be submitted for