

Sergeant McGrath has been appointed Inspector of Fisheries at the Bluff, and Constable Sheary Inspector at Blenheim.

The seal-fisheries have been closed during the year, and it has been decided to extend the close season up to the 30th June, 1897. On the 20th February last, E. Morrison was fined £1 and costs for killing a seal which he found on the road at Gore Bay.

On the 15th May, 1895, Andrew Paris was fined £1 and costs for selling undersized flounders at Porirua. On the 27th July, E. Andrews and P. Garbes were prosecuted for having small blue-cod in their possession in Wellington; the former was fined £1 and costs, but the charge against the latter was dismissed, the Magistrate stating that he would give him the benefit of the doubt. On the 12th August, a fisherman named Dorris was fined £10 and costs for taking small rock-cod in the Pelorus Sound. The fish were found by the Inspector at Wellington at a smoke-house in this town.

*Weather Reporting.*—Captain Edwin has carried out the duties of making daily weather forecasts, and of notifying such forecasts to the different parts of the colony in an efficient manner. These forecasts are of great service to shipmasters and others whose business is connected with shipping. He has also continued to perform the duties of Examiner of Masters and Mates.

*Government Steamers.*—The “Hinemoa” has been kept fully employed during the year. She has periodically visited the lighthouses with oil and stores, and has overhauled and cleaned the buoys on the coast and in the principal harbours under the control of this department. She also searched for and discovered the rock in Poverty Bay which the s.s. “Anglian” and “Waihora” touched, and made surveys of other reported dangers on the coast. In addition to this work, she made a special trip to the Snares in connection with the selection of a site for a lighthouse there. She made two trips to the Snares, Auckland, Campbell, Antipodes, and Bounty Islands, and one trip to the Kermadec Islands, to search for castaways, and to inspect the dépôts of provisions and clothing which the department maintains at those islands. No castaways were found, and the dépôts had not been touched. During the trip which was made in October last some wreckage and a considerable quantity of wool were found along the beach at the Auckland Islands. The wreckage is believed to be a part of the French vessel “Marie Alice,” which left Sydney on the 12th February, 1895, for Europe; and a portion of it has been sent by the vessel’s agent here to the owners at Nantes, for the purpose of identification. During the year the “Hinemoa” steamed 27,365 miles, was 3,538 hours under steam, consumed 1,604 tons of coal, carried 2,298 tons of cargo, and cleaned, painted, and relaid 106 buoys. It must be borne in mind, in connection with the amount shown as the running-expenses of the vessel, that she carries a large quantity of cargo for other departments of the Government, a service for which no payment is made, the railways being the only department which pays for services rendered. The Government having decided that Captain Fairchild should proceed to England to bring out the new vessel which is being built at Glasgow, he left the “Hinemoa” on the 8th March last; and Captain Neale, who has for many years been first mate, was placed in command, Mr. Bollons, the second mate, taking the position vacated by him. The Stones’ patent bronze propeller-blades referred to in my last year’s report have been fitted on to the vessel with very satisfactory results. She has also received a general overhaul.

The “Stella,” which had been laid up for a considerable time, was chartered on the 4th June last by Mr. Joseph Fleming, of Auckland, for the coastal trade in the Auckland District; but, as he failed to pay the amounts due under the charter, the Government had to take possession of the vessel on the 11th November. At the time the charter was determined the sum of £119 was owing to the crew as wages, and the department had to pay this amount to clear the vessel. She was shortly afterwards sold to Messrs. Jagger and Parker and Leyland and O’Brien, of Auckland, for the sum of £1,450; but an allowance of £46 5s. had to be made to the purchasers for fittings which were found to be missing.

On the 2nd July last the s.s. “Pilot” was sold by public auction for the sum of £470, and she is now plying in Kaipara Harbour.

*Coastal Surveys.*—The reported rock in Poverty Bay has been surveyed and buoyed, and search has been made for the rock off the Gable End Foreland which the s.s. “Monowai” touched. A shoal patch was discovered, and a further survey will be made the next time the “Hinemoa” is in the locality, if the weather is favourable.

*Wrecks and Casualties.*—A table showing an analysis of the casualties is appended hereto. Those on the coasts of the colony numbered thirty-seven, representing 21,060 tons, as against forty-one casualties, affecting 9,850 tons, in the previous year. The number of total wrecks within the colony, including a small steamer which was burnt and a sailing-vessel which foundered, was eight of 2,070 tons, as against thirteen vessels, of 2,049 tons, in the previous year. The number of lives lost was eight, as against 151 in the previous year. Of these, six were on or near the coasts of the colony—namely, four from the “Comet” (all hands), and one each from the s.s. “Waihi” and s.s. “Poherua.” The lives lost beyond the colony were one each from the “Kathleen Hilda” and the “Coromandel.”

*Survey of Steamers.*—I regret to have to report the death of Mr. W. M. Mowatt, the Principal Engineer Surveyor, and Principal Examiner of Engineers. He died suddenly from heart-disease on the 31st January last. He was a most capable and efficient officer, and one on whose ability and judgment the department placed great reliance. Mr. R. Duncan, who for some years past has been one of the Engineer Surveyors and Examiners of Engineers at Dunedin, has succeeded him. A report on the work done during the year is appended hereto. A request having been made for the issue of docking-certificates in the case of vessels which trade abroad, and which are docked in New Zealand during the currency of their passenger-certificates, it has been decided to grant such certificates when required by the owners at a charge of £5 in each case. In the case of a vessel which is surveyed for her passenger-certificate at the time of docking there is no necessity for a docking-certificate, as the twelve months’ passenger-certificate covers the period for which the docking-