

rockets in use in Victoria explode at a height of about 600 ft. above the sea-level, producing a sharp report which should be heard under favourable atmospheric conditions at a distance of from five to six miles.

A further communication has been received from the committee of Lloyd's on the subject of the committee's proposal to establish signal-stations at Cape Maria van Diemen, Farewell Spit, and Nugget Point. The committee now desire that arrangements should be made for taking shipping reports experimentally at these lighthouses, in order to prove their utility or otherwise as reporting stations, and the department is now in correspondence with the committee with the view of making the necessary arrangements for this purpose.

The service has lost three keepers during the year—viz., Principal Keeper C. E. Johnston, who retired on compensation on account of bad health; Principal Keeper J. W. Cunningham; and Assistant Keeper F. W. Butler, jun., who resigned. The vacancies caused by these retirements have been filled by promotions, and three new assistant keepers have been appointed.

The sum of £19,382 16s. 4d. has been collected for light dues during the year, as compared with £17,851 8s. 7d. during the previous year, being an increase of £1,530 7s. 9d.

*Harbours.*—The buoys in the various harbours under the control of the department, and those marking dangers on the coasts, have been attended to by the Government steamers, as also the buoys in Whangarei Harbour, the Harbour Board in that case paying for the material used in the overhaul. Regulations have been made providing that in harbours under the control of this department boats carrying passengers while in tow of steamers or other vessels are to be licensed for the purpose by the Harbourmaster or other person appointed by the Minister. It was proposed to prohibit the practice, on the ground that it was of a dangerous nature, but as it was found that there was no power to do this it was deemed advisable to regulate it. Before any boat is licensed it has to be provided with certain equipments, and to have a certain capacity for each passenger.

It having come to the knowledge of the department that the Patea Harbour Board was removing stones from the foreshore and disposing of them for road-metal, the matter was inquired into, and the Board was informed that the department could not sanction the removal of the material except in cases where it is required by the Board for harbour-works. The Harbourmaster at Nelson having reported that changes for the worse had taken place in Nelson Harbour, especially at the bar, the Marine Engineer made an examination of the harbour, and furnished a report on the changes. It is also intended to get a report on the harbour from Mr. Leslie Reynolds. Mr. J. E. Fletcher, Harbourmaster at Collingwood, has resigned his appointment, in consequence of going to reside in England, and Mr. F. Stallard has been appointed to succeed him. Mr. Fletcher had filled the position without pay since the 12th January, 1883, and the thanks of the department are due to him for his services. Mr. W. Johnson, signalman at Karamea, has resigned, and Mr. W. Thompson has been appointed to perform the duties of the position.

Plans of a large number of harbour-works have been submitted for the approval of the Governor in Council, and in most cases the works have been sanctioned. A return showing the works authorised, and the licenses issued for the occupation of foreshore, is appended hereto.

The sum of £2,664 16s. 6d. has been collected for pilotage and port charges during the year in respect of the ports under the control of the department, as against £2,649 13s. 7d. in the previous year.

*Oyster-fisheries.*—It having been found that the unrestricted export of oysters taken in the North Island was having an injurious effect upon the beds, the export of those taken in that island has been prohibited. This will entail a loss of revenue to the department, as there was an export duty of 6d. per hundredweight on all North Island oysters exported from the colony. As "The Sea-fisheries Act, 1894," provides that the whole of the revenue derived from licenses to take oysters and from the lease of oyster-beds is to be paid to the local bodies, the department is now in the position of having to defray the cost of the administration of the Act without receiving any revenue under it. It has been suggested that if the annual license-fee of 10s. for each picker were abolished and a license-fee of £10 a year were charged for each boat used in taking oysters, this would be the best means of preventing the indiscriminate destruction of oysters; but after making full inquiry as to the probable effect of this change the department does not see its way to adopt the suggestion. The beds in the northern oyster-fishery are in good condition, but not quite fit for picking. They will therefore be kept closed during this season. The beds in the Hauraki Gulf are open, as their condition is good. As the export has been prohibited, these beds, with the leased areas in Manukau Harbour, and the beds in Hokianga and Kaipara Harbour, which are open, should meet all demands. The New Zealand Native Oyster-fisheries Company, at Wellington, which has a license to occupy about 412 acres of Porirua Harbour for oyster-culture, has applied for an alteration in the boundaries of its lease, in order to take in a part of the harbour which it is believed would be more suitable for oysters than its present area. Sir James Hector, who was asked to report on the advisability or otherwise of acceding to this request, has reported that the company's attempts to cultivate oysters have so far not been successful, and has recommended that the boundaries of the licensed holding should be altered so as to include foreshore better suited for oyster-culture. At the same time, he states that the portion of the harbour between the bridge and Brown's Point should not be included in the license, as the fishermen have built cottages and constructed boat-repairing equipments along the foreshore between these places, and it would not be right to interfere with them. The question of allowing the alteration is now under consideration. H. Shepherd and J. Simpson were prosecuted and fined—the former £1 and costs and the latter £1 10s. and costs—for taking oysters without licenses. No license has been issued for oyster-culture during the year, and Peter Ewing, of Hitaua Bay, Tory Channel, has surrendered his license.

*Sea-fisheries.*—The question of testing the fishing-grounds by experimental trawling has been under the consideration of the Government. Captain Neilsen, who was in charge of experimental