

The annual production of coal since 1939 has been as follows :—

Year.	Tons.	Year.	Tons.
1939	2,342,639	1942	2,680,041
1940	2,516,099	1943	2,787,868
1941	2,639,507		

During 1943 the quantity of coal imported was 37,454 tons, or 53,411 tons less than in the previous year, while exports (42,522 tons) were 12,178 tons less than in 1942.

The output of 2,787,868 tons was a record for the Dominion and is an increase of 107,827 tons, or 4.023 per cent., on the 1942 production.

Compared with 1939, when war broke out, the production for 1943 shows an increase of 445,229 tons.

The output per miner employed underground during the year was 697 tons, a reduction of 35 tons as compared with 1942. The production per man on the pay-roll—i.e., both underground and surface workers—was 519, a decrease of 17 tons on the previous year.

An increase in consumption of coal during the war period was inevitable, and the Government's production plans to meet the growing demand were successful up to last year. Whereas most parts of the Empire have been unable to maintain coal outputs during the war, in this Dominion production has actually increased by 19 per cent. since 1939.

Imports of coal from Newcastle were, however, drastically reduced during the year, only 37,454 tons being imported, as against 90,865 tons in 1942. The loss of imported coal has seriously affected, either directly or indirectly, the coal-supply position of New Zealand, and to it must be ascribed our present difficulties. To compensate for this loss, recourse has had to be made to our bituminous coals of the West Coast, and although the collieries there were developed and equipped to meet normal demands the strain in making up leeway through loss of imports has been severe. It will be appreciated that development of these coal measures for increased production must necessarily be a lengthy procedure owing to the nature of the deposits, and it is impossible to increase output at short notice. The position is further complicated by the necessity for conserving bituminous coal owing to the comparatively limited reserves of this type of coal. When it is further considered that all men recruited to the mines during war years have in great part been inexperienced, the very real difficulties with which the industry is confronted can be realized.

The supply position of bituminous coal has been further complicated by shipping difficulties owing to the West Coast harbours being bar-bound for long periods. Had our normal imports of approximately 100,000 tons of high-grade coal still been available from Australia, there would have been no necessity for restrictions of the railway services, nor would there have been any deficiencies in gas-supply. These imports are fundamental to our whole coal-supply position.

In order to increase coal-production as quickly as possible, New Zealand, along with other countries, has devoted attention to the mining of coal by stripping such portions of the seams that are covered by shallow overburden. Such opencast methods depend upon the use of mechanical strippers and excavators, and their adoption in New Zealand had to be postponed until such time as this equipment could either be released from construction of defence works or obtained from abroad.

Geological surveys, accompanied in some cases by shallow mining, have, of course, been necessary to locate and define possible stripping areas, but real progress is now being made in the winning of coal by these methods, and it is expected that before the end of 1944 a production of some 2,000 tons of coal per day will be obtained from this system of mining from areas both in the North and South Islands.

The following is a table showing the output of coal from the various coalfields, and the comparative increase and decrease, for the years 1943 and 1942, together with the total approximate quantity of coal produced since the mines were opened :—

Name of Coalfield.	Output.		Increase.	Decrease.	Approximate Total Output up to 31st December, 1943.
	1943.	1942.			
	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.	Tons.
North Auckland	81,828	75,123	6,705	..	6,289,264
Waikato (including Taranaki) ..	939,975	855,511	84,464	..	21,091,872
Nelson	8,635	12,266	..	3,631	735,572
Buller	478,439	518,484	..	40,045	27,957,813
Reefton	99,173	88,197	10,976	..	1,442,914
Grey	578,955	572,382	6,573	..	20,495,983
Canterbury	32,329	31,667	662	..	1,263,600
Otago	194,812	180,046	14,766	..	14,721,101
Southland	373,722	346,365	27,357	..	9,445,465
Totals	2,787,868*	2,680,041	151,503	43,676	103,443,584

* Increase, 107,827 tons.