

MINERALS OTHER THAN GOLD

Production of these minerals has declined markedly and in many cases mining activities have ceased owing to slackening of demand and consequent recession of the price level. This trend has been accentuated by the exhaustion of ore reserves and the lack of encouragement under the present circumstances to undertake further development work.

It has become increasingly apparent, as the result of investigations and development work carried out during the war years, that New Zealand's resources of many of these minerals are negligible and that in the future greater importance will be given to the increased production of those less spectacular, but none the less valuable, non-metallic minerals, such as clays, limestones, and silica sands, that are demanded by industry.

Scheelite.—The contract with the Imperial Government, whereby tungsten-ores were purchased at 75s. sterling per unit, terminated on 30th June, 1945, owing to the accumulation of large supplies of tungsten-ore in Great Britain and the decision to confine further purchases to high-grade wolfram-ore. During this period the equivalent of 34 tons of concentrates assaying 65 per cent. WO_3 were produced and shipped, but, although production continued on a reduced scale during the year, no further shipments were made owing to difficulties in obtaining markets and procuring shipping space.

Production of scheelite concentrates calculated to the basis of 65 per cent. WO_3 per ton during the years in which purchase has come under Government control has been as under :—

		Tons.				Tons.
1940	..	79		1943	..	116
1941	..	71		1944	..	145
1942	..	71		1945	..	34

The reduction in production during 1945 was due in great part to the uncertainty as to market conditions, but the exhaustion of deposits has also been a factor. It does not appear, however, that the collapse in the price of scheelite will be as severe as after the 1914–18 war owing to new and expanding uses for tungsten-ores. It is encouraging that recently some 12 tons of concentrates have been shipped on account of an English firm of ore-buyers at a price of 59s. sterling per unit., and it is hoped that a satisfactory long-term contract can be made with this same firm.

A small-scale scheelite-mining industry maintained by small producers now seems assured at Glenorchy for some years, and to assist these producers the treatment plant purchased by the State in connection with its own operations is being retained in the district so that adequate treatment facilities will continue to be available. There was no mining activity by the State during 1945, operations being confined to cleaning up around the treatment plant, from which operations 1 ton of concentrates were produced. Most of the housing and much of the plant and equipment has now been disposed of.

As a result of State activities, some 100 tons of scheelite were produced during the war years, but the extensive development programme carried out showed that there was no basis for mining undertakings of any magnitude, particularly at the normal price level of peace conditions.

Mercury.—Mercury Mines, Ltd., produced 2,294 lb. of mercury from 343 tons of ore from their mine at Puhipuhi in the opening months of 1945, but, owing to the drastic slump in the price of mercury and the need for additional earth-moving equipment, operations terminated early in the year and since then the property has been on a care and maintenance basis.

Production of mercury during the war years has been as under :—

		lb.				lb.
1941	..	5,600		1944	..	6,840
1942	..	11,402		1945	..	2,294
1943	..	7,068				