

No. 2.

The Secretary, General Post Office, Wellington, to the Chairman, Wellington Harbour Board.
 SIR,— General Post Office, Wellington, 31st December, 1898.

I am directed to forward you copy of a letter from the general manager of the New Zealand Shipping Company, drawing attention to the serious delays to the Vancouver mail steamers whenever they arrive here on Sundays, because of the Board's regulation prohibiting the discharging of vessels on Sundays. I have to point out that the delays in question prevented the Vancouver steamers reaching Sydney before Friday or Saturday, which, from the fact that the outward San Francisco mail leaves Sydney the following Monday, is a matter of considerable moment to the business people of New South Wales, as the detention here minimises the interval for replies. It is observed that your Board has already had the matter under consideration, and agreed that the steamers should be allowed to discharge into a hulk moored in the stream. The manager here for the New Zealand Shipping Company points out, however, that, apart from the inconvenience of the proposal, there is no hulk here suitable for the purpose, and that it would be undesirable to transfer perishable cargo, such as fruit, to a hulk used as a collier. Under the circumstances, the Postmaster-General would be glad if the Board could see its way to reconsider the matter, so as to allow the landing of cargo at one or other of the wharves, and otherwise facilitate the discharging and departure of the Vancouver steamers arriving here on Sunday.

I have, &c.,
 W. GRAY.

No. 3.

The Secretary, Wellington Harbour Board, to the Secretary, General Post Office, Wellington.
 SIR,— Wellington, 6th January, 1899.

I have to acknowledge your letter of the 31st ultimo, addressed to the Chairman of the Wellington Harbour Board, drawing attention to serious delays to the Vancouver mail steamers when they arrive here on Sundays, because of an alleged regulation of the Board prohibiting the discharge of vessels on Sundays. I shall have pleasure in placing the matter before the Board at its next meeting. You are in error in thinking that the primary obstacle to the working of cargo on Sundays lies with the regulation of the Board. It is true that the Board have a by-law fixing the hours of business (which excludes Sundays), but they have not yet had under consideration the advisableness of altering this regulation with a view to enable a mail steamer to work cargo on Sundays, because they are advised that such action would be illegal, and that until the law of the colony is altered to enable Sunday work to be carried out they are unable to authorise work to be executed on that day. The Board are advised that Sunday work is prohibited under the provision of "The Police Offences Act, 1884," clause 16 of which provides a penalty for working on Sundays. When the New Zealand Shipping Company approached the Board recently on this subject, asking that they might be permitted to work cargo on Sundays out of vessels arriving from Vancouver, the Board decided that a reply should be sent to them, stating that Sunday work on the wharves was an offence under "The Police Offences Act, 1884," and to point out to them that the cargo could be landed into a lighter or hulk. I think that the difficulty raised by the local manager of the New Zealand Shipping Company—that there is no hulk here suitable for the purpose—is scarcely so solid an argument as I should have expected. Even admitting that it is undesirable to transfer perishable goods to coal-hulks, there at present is in the harbour the hulk "Rowena," specially fitted for the handling of cargo, and also the store-ships "Arawata" and "William Manson," which could be fitted at a small cost.

Trusting that you may be able to point out to the Board that they are exempt from the provision of the Police Offences Act, and that they have a discretion in dealing with the matter, when I can assure you that your suggestions will meet with every careful consideration from the Board.

I am, &c.,
 WM. FERGUSON, Secretary.

No. 4.

The Secretary, Wellington Harbour Board, to the Secretary, General Post Office, Wellington.
 SIR,— Wellington, 30th January, 1899.

I have to acknowledge yours of the 11th January on the subject of the working of cargo from the Vancouver mail steamers on Sundays. The whole of the correspondence was considered by the Board very carefully at its meeting on Thursday last, when a decision was arrived at that they would adhere to their previous conclusion, as contained in the reply already sent to the New Zealand Shipping Company, to the effect that they were advised that working on the wharf on Sunday is illegal under the Police Offences Act, and that they are therefore powerless in the matter. I may, however, inform you that the feeling of the members of the Board was practically unanimous against any Sunday work in connection with the Vancouver mail service, or in any other respect, except that which is an absolute work of necessity, and that the impression left on my mind is that, even if the Government in the ensuing session of Parliament modifies the Police Offences Act so as to legalise Sunday work, the Board would be unwilling to modify their by-laws. It is, however, quite competent for the Government to pass a Bill making it compulsory upon the Board to receive cargo on Sunday if they deem that course to be desirable.

I have, &c.,
 WM. FERGUSON, Secretary.