

the northern subdivision of the Northern Oyster-fishery are open, but those in the middle and southern subdivisions are closed, as they require further rest. The other open beds in the North Island are those in the Tauranga Fishery, in Kaipara and Hokianga Harbours, and the leased areas in Manukau Harbour. It is found that in parts of the Hauraki Gulf rocks which have been denuded of oysters are becoming covered with barnacles and coral. The closing of the district will not remedy this, as oyster-spat will not fix on to the coral. The only way to make the rocks again fit for oysters is to clear the barnacles and coral off them just before the spatting season; and it would appear that the only way in which this can be done effectively is by leasing the foreshore in sections for oyster-culture. Some of the beds in Manukau Harbour have been reserved for the exclusive use of the Maoris for food, and steps are being taken to lease the remaining beds which are not now under lease.

Under the present law the revenue derived from oyster licenses and leases is payable to the local bodies whose districts border on the foreshore in respect of which it is raised, whilst all expenses in connection with surveys, licenses, and leases, and the cost of the administration of the law relating to oysters, is borne by the Consolidated Fund. I think that the law in this respect should be altered, as it is only reasonable that the authority which has to bear the cost of conserving and developing the oyster-fisheries should receive the revenue derived from those fisheries.

Last session a vote of £160 was taken to test the Foveaux Strait oyster-beds, but so far the Department has not been able to arrange for the work. It is proposed, however, to put it in hand during the current year.

There is very little to report on the formation and cultivation of artificial beds by private persons. There are still a few in existence, but the owners have not been very successful with them.

Proceedings have been taken against three persons for illegally taking oysters, and against two persons for attempting to export rock oysters. Conviction was secured in each case.

*Weather-reporting.*—This work has been carried out satisfactorily by Captain Edwin. A further supply of barographs and thermometers has been obtained from England. It is proposed to open a new reporting-station at East Cape Lighthouse.

*Inspection of Machinery.*—The inspection of land boilers, engines, and machinery has been placed under the control of Mr. Duncan, the Chief Inspector.

*Survey of Steamers.*—During the year certificates for 235 steamers and eighteen oil-engine vessels have been granted by this Department. A return of such vessels is appended hereto. Proceedings have been taken against the master of the "Lily" for carrying more passengers than allowed by the vessel's certificate, and against the master of the oil-launch "Rotokohu" for carrying passengers without a certificate. A fine was imposed in each case.

*Masters, Mates, and Engineers.*—The examinations of masters and mates during the year are reported upon by the Chief Examiner in his report appended hereto. New regulations for the examination of engineers, based on the latest regulations issued by the Board of Trade, have been made. For certificates of competency 208 persons passed their examinations and ninety-four failed. Of those who passed, 134 were masters, mates, and steamship engineers of sea-going vessels, sixty-three were masters and engineers of steamships plying within restricted limits, seven were engineers of sea-going vessels propelled by oil, gas, &c., and four engineers of similar vessels plying within restricted limits. Proceedings were taken against the master of the oil-engine vessel "Torora" for going to sea with an uncertificated engineer after engaging a certificated man to enable the ship to be cleared by the Customs, and he was fined £10 and costs. Prosecutions were also instituted against F. Hoskins and H. S. Hall for acting as engineers of the "Hauturu" and "May" without certificates, and they were fined 10s. and costs and £2 and costs respectively.

*Deck Cargo.*—The regulations regarding the carriage of deck cargo have worked smoothly, and it has only been necessary to take proceedings for breach of them in one case. In this case the master of the "Te Anau" was fined £5 and costs for carrying more cargo on deck than allowed by his license.

*Engagement and Discharge of Seamen.*—This work has been carried out satisfactorily. The issue of licenses to persons to procure seamen for vessels has been discontinued, and, so far as the Department is aware, the discontinuance has not caused inconvenience to masters of ships. Superintendents of Mercantile Marine render every possible assistance in obtaining the men required, and men wanting employment can obtain information at the shipping offices as to the vessels which need men. Proceedings have been taken against masters of vessels in five cases for employing and carrying men without putting them on articles, and in one case for not giving a proper discharge. A fine was imposed in each case.

*Wages and Effects of Deceased Seamen.*—The estates of thirty-four seamen, amounting to £197 1s. 7d., were dealt with during the year. Of these ten were new estates. The sum of £170 18s. 10d. was paid to relatives and other claimants.

*Coastal Dangers.*—H.M. surveying-ship "Penguin" has been engaged in surveying on the east coast of the Auckland District, including Poverty Bay, and various dangers have been surveyed by the Government steamers. The Surveyor-General has been asked and has agreed to instruct his officers who may be engaged in surveying on the coasts to determine by observations from land stations the positions of rocks marked "P.D." on Admiralty charts, and also of any others on which they may see breaks. The Department has issued a pamphlet giving information brought up to date concerning dangers, sailing directions, &c. It is proposed to publish a handbook annually containing information regarding the coasts and ports which will be useful to shipowners and mariners. Captain Blackburne, Nautical Adviser, is now preparing the information for publication this year.

*Wrecks and Casualties.*—A table is attached showing the casualties to ships, and an analysis. Those on the coasts of the colony numbered forty-five, representing 28,020 tons, as against forty-