

commission during the year was 104, being seven less than during the preceding year. The reasons for the decline in this industry are—(1) During the dredging boom, nearly a decade ago, a considerable number of machines were installed upon inadequate and unprospected areas; the life of many of these has been short; (2) the gradual exhaustion of the most accessible auriferous gravels, from which gold to the value of, approximately, £9,000,000 has already been won by dredging; (3) preference for the hydraulic sluicing and elevating system for working flats formerly operated by paddock dredges. The first and second reasons require no further comment, but the third may be amplified by stating that by sluicing and elevating (of which there are about three hundred plants at work) a higher proportion of gold is obtained; the bottom is better cleaned; large boulders, timber, and hard seams are more readily overcome; there is less wear-and-tear and consequent expenditure on maintenance, and when the water-supply is adequate (which it generally is in New Zealand) there is a larger output. In working-cost there is not much difference between the two systems, the average cost by sluicing and elevating in New Zealand being under 2d. per cubic yard. The annual gold-production by hydraulic-sluicing plants has therefore increased as that from land dredges has declined.

There were 293 sluicing claims in operation during the year. Fourteen of these, the property of registered owners, declared dividends amounting to £11,411, and thirty-five dredges, the property of registered owners, declared dividends amounting to £51,918. The profits of privately-owned dredges and sluicing claims are unobtainable, but would doubtless exceed these amounts considerably.

COAL-MINING.

It is exceedingly satisfactory to announce to honourable members that, contrary to previous expectations, our coal-mining industry during the period under review shows considerable expansion and continued prosperity, and also to state that this expansion and prosperity was general throughout the various coal-mining districts of the Dominion. The total output for 1910 was 2,197,362 tons, being an increase of 286,115 tons, which is double the increase in any previous year. I am also very pleased to call attention to the fact that our coal-production has more than doubled during the last decade. This large increase in our coal-output is no doubt due to the continued prosperity prevailing in our other industrial pursuits during the last decennial period, together with an improved export trade. The output of bituminous and semi-bituminous coal again shows a large increase, and, as is shown in the following table, the production of brown coal and lignite has also been largely increased.

The output from the three mining districts is shown in the following table:—

COMPARATIVE STATEMENT OF COAL AND LIGNITE RAISED DURING THE YEARS 1908, 1909, AND 1910.

Inspection District.	Output for 1910.	Increase or Decrease, 1909 and 1910.		Output for 1908.	Increase or Decrease, 1908 and 1909.	
	Tons.	Increase	Tons.	Tons.	Increase	Tons.
Northern	400,664	..	52,294	344,927	..	3,443
West Coast	1,341,032	..	218,390	1,063,566	..	59,076
Southern	455,666	..	15,431	452,482	Decrease	12,247
Totals	2,197,362	Increase	286,115	1,860,975	Increase	50,272

The comparative tonnage of the various classes of coal, &c., for the years 1909 and 1910 is summarized as follows:—

Class of Coal.	Output for 1910.	Output for 1909.	Increase or Decrease for 1910.	
	Tons.	Tons.	Increase	Tons.
Bituminous and semi-bituminous	1,495,709	1,257,233	..	238,476
Pitch-coal	6,068	5,473	..	595
Brown coal	594,995	559,509	..	35,486
Lignite	100,590	89,032	..	11,558
Totals	2,197,362	1,911,247	Increase	286,115