

1913.
NEW ZEALAND.

WANGANUI RIVER STEAMER MAIL CONTRACT

(REPORT OF DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE ON).

Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by Leave.

WANGANUI RIVER SERVICE.

SIR,—

Wellington, 12th June, 1913.

We proceeded to Wanganui on the 15th ultimo for the purpose of inquiring into the condition of the Wanganui River service. On reaching Wanganui we made some preliminary inquiries there, and arranged for a boat to convey us down the river from Taumarunui to meet settlers. In order to give no ground for future complaint we issued and distributed to settlers a printed notice of our movements and inviting them to meet us. We also inserted a notice in the *Wanganui Chronicle*, and telegraphed in similar terms to the Postmaster at Taumarunui and to Telephonists in the Wanganui River district requesting them to advise all persons concerned. Having allowed sufficient time to elapse for the information to be disseminated as widely as possible, we proceeded by train to Taumarunui on Monday, the 19th ultimo, and took evidence there the following day. Though Taumarunui was understood to be much dissatisfied with the service, but few presented themselves to give evidence. Some of the gentlemen who had previously made complaints to the Prime Minister failed to attend. But little could be elicited at Taumarunui, and we started down the river on Wednesday, meeting little knots of settlers *en route*, and arriving in Wanganui on Saturday. We were advised that the condition of the roads and tracks prevented many from meeting us, but the general tenor of the information supplied to us all through left no doubt on our minds as to the true position. Two days were devoted to inquiries in Wanganui, but the representatives of the principal business firms there were extremely shy in coming forward. We, however, waited on a number of business people, who explained their views privately, explaining that their business relations prevented them from giving official evidence. The reasons are, of course, obvious. As an instance of this the manager of one large commercial house informed us he could not tender evidence owing to the business relations between his firm and Hatrick and Co. Others concerned were no doubt influenced by similar considerations. With regard to the object of our mission we have the honour to report as follows:—

THE RIVER AND ITS IMPROVEMENTS.

We came down the river at a time when the water was high and the difficulties of navigation were not apparent. There can be no doubt, however, that during several months of the year navigation is difficult and costly, owing to the lowness of the river, and it is during this period that the bulk of the passengers and goods have to be carried.

The Chairman of the Wanganui River Trust supplied statements showing the expenditure of public money in improving the river, the mileages between landing-places, and other particulars. The Chairman also brought under notice the need for a launch for the use of the Trust in keeping the river open. At present a punt has to be used, and it is expensive and difficult to move about, especially up-stream. There can be no question that a suitable launch would be of material assistance to the Trust in carrying on its increasingly important operations.

Another matter mentioned was a project for diverting the water from Lake Roto Aira to one of the tributaries near the source of the Wanganui River. This, it was stated, should not prove any very great undertaking, and would enable the supply of water in the river to be regulated during the dry season. Having regard to the prospective increase of settlement, a