

SHIPPING.

The question of shipping is one that has necessitated much thought during the past year, and has been the cause of very many lengthy communications with the High Commissioner and the Imperial Government Departments concerned.

Reference was made in my previous report to the decreasing number of steamers available for the Australasian trade, and a further marked decrease is noticeable in connection with the year 1918.

The following statement shows the number of insulated steamers which have sailed from the Dominion during the five years 1914–18 inclusive, together with their total insulated carrying-capacity, and furnishes a clear indication of the difficulties which have been experienced in connection with this matter :—

Year.						Number of Steamers.	Total Insulated Capacity : 60lb. Carcases.
1914	..	..	..	..	..	99*	8,800,700
1915	..	..	..	..	..	84	7,682,000
1916	..	..	..	..	..	78	7,322,500
1917	..	..	..	..	..	62	5,626,350
1918	..	..	..	..	..	52	4,926,300

* Including eight steamers used as transports for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in October, 1914, only a small portion of the insulated capacities of which was available for New Zealand produce.

Every effort has been made to obtain additional relief, both by cablegram to the responsible authorities in London, and through the New Zealand Overseas Shipowners' Committee to the London Tonnage Committee, and also by urgent personal representations by the Dominion's representatives attending the conferences in London.

On various occasions attention has been drawn to the accumulation of produce in the Dominion, and comparisons made between the space allotted to Australia and New Zealand, and protests have also been entered against the diversion of steamers to other trades.

To a very large extent these diversions and transfers have been due to the absolute necessity of obtaining the maximum use from the number of steamers available during the currency of the war, and there is little doubt that the utmost effort has been made by the Ministry of Shipping to relieve the congestion which has at different times been so noticeable in the Dominion ports.

During August, 1918, an intimation was received from the Ministry of Shipping that it was anticipated that 5,800,000 cubic feet of refrigerated space would be available from New Zealand to the United Kingdom during the period July to December, 1918, and that 26,000,000 cubic feet would be available to Australasia during the year 1919.

An attempt was made to obtain from the High Commissioner an intimation as to the probable allocation of this latter quantity as between New Zealand and Australia, but it was not found possible to obtain it, as the subsequent allocation of the space depended entirely on the Food Ministry's subsequent requirements.

During the latter months of 1918 further urgent efforts were made to increase the quantity of insulated space then being made available, and on the 25th January, 1919, a despatch was received from the Secretary of State for the Colonies stating that the cessation of hostilities had released tonnage previously engaged in military, naval, and munition services, and ended the war losses, damages, and convoy delays.

Under these circumstances it was found possible to restore to their original trades the majority of liners withdrawn in pursuance of the policy of consolidating all available tonnage on the shortest routes, and the hope was expressed that from February onwards New Zealand would gradually begin to feel the effect of this restoration.