

1920.
NEW ZEALAND.

KAURI-GUM INDUSTRY

(REPORT ON THE) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1920.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly pursuant to Section 5 of the Kauri-gum Industry Amendment Act, 1914.

REPORT.

SIR,— Office of the Kauri-gum Superintendent, Auckland, 4th September, 1920.

This Department has now been in existence for over six years. It owes its origin primarily to a recommendation of the Royal Commission which reported on the kauri-gum land in 1914, and secondarily to the passing of the Kauri-gum Industry Amendment Acts of 1914 and 1915.

In the Act of 1914 authority was given for raising the sum of £50,000 for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of the Act, and subsequently, in the Appropriation Act of 1918, a further authority was given for raising an additional £25,000 for extending the Department's operations. Under these authorities up to the end of the financial year the sum of £53,000 has been raised. Full particulars with regard to the expenditure of the same are given in the Statement of Accounts and balance-sheet on another page.

For the first two years the Department's operations were confined altogether to giving relief to the gum-diggers engaged in the industry. With that end in view advances were made to the diggers of 50 per cent. on the value of the gum, fixed on the basis of prices current in July, 1914. In addition to making advances on the gum, face-digging works were carried out in three localities on the gum-fields—namely, at Mangawai, Waiharara, and Waihopo; a large number of Maoris and Europeans were employed for a considerable time on these works, the men being paid wages at the rate of 1s. an hour and a bonus on the value of the gum produced. These works were the means of giving relief to a large number of men who would have otherwise been in a more or less destitute condition.

Early in 1916 the position began to improve, and with a few temporary slumps since then the industry has been in a progressive state.

Early in 1916 the Kauri-gum Superintendent visited America in order to complete arrangements in connection with the appointment of an agent to represent the Department in the United States and Canada, and to take steps to establish the Government gradings of kauri-gum among the American varnish and linoleum manufacturers. The result of this visit and of the agency established has been very satisfactory.

Of late years the Department's business has been conducted on a strict trading basis, and, as indicated later on, the business is making steady and satisfactory progress.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT.

From the constitution of this Department until the 31st March, 1916, the administration was under the control of the Under-Secretary for Lands. In the early part of 1916, however, it was decided by Cabinet that the Department should be administered in conjunction with the Department of Imperial Supplies. This arrangement remained in operation until the end of last year, when the Lands Department again assumed full control.

RIDDLING AND WASHING PROCESSES FOR GUM-SAVING.

In the early days of the industry only the large or bold gum was saved, but as this began to be exhausted, finer particles which before had been discarded had to be given attention, and during the last ten years gum-digging operations in the kauri-peat swamps have developed very largely into a process of washing and riddling the gum soils to recover, as far as possible, all the gum they contained.

A few years ago it was estimated that the export of the low-grade or small gums, including chips and dust, represented about one-third of the annual export. At the present time the proportion would probably be nearly two-thirds.

The feature of the past year has been the boom that has set in in regard to the exploitation of kauri-chip areas, and various plants and processes have been installed for the purpose of recovering the gum. The methods adopted range from the small hand-sieve and bucket to very pretentious plants worked by motor-power and capable of handling large quantities of the gum soil.

Dredging for gum has also been given a practical test by Mr. F. V. Raymond at Awanui, in the Kaitaia district, with what is claimed as good results, while at Mangawai a fairly large sludge-pump has been in operation for some time with some degree of success.

In theory all these plants are very much the same. The whole of the gum soil is puddled in water and forced through holes of various degrees of fineness, the residue saved on the sieves consisting of gum not small enough to pass through the holes, and foreign matter such as wood, dirt, stones, &c. The recovery of the gum is eventually effected by drying and further sieving, the resulting grades of gum depending largely on the methods used and the amount of labour expended.