

PART 18.—INCIDENCE OF HARBOUR DUES.

Question No. 2 submitted to us by the order of reference is whether at the present time, according to the working of the existing law, the port dues, berthage dues, wharfing dues, charges for labour, charges on goods, and other charges which the Board is empowered to levy are imposed in a manner operating equitably as between different classes of ships, different parts of the harbour, and different classes of persons liable for payment of the said respective dues.

Some evidence was led before us touching recent changes in the rates of berthing dues and of the basis on which those rates were charged. The most recent alteration, which came into operation from the 1st July, 1927, imposes on all vessels other than lighters, a flat rate of 3d. per ton register per trip for the first day, and 1d. per ton register per trip for each day or part of a day after the first day. (See Exhibit No. 40.) For lighters the rate is 3d. per ton register per trip.

These were applied by witnesses to specific ships that habitually use the Napier Harbour, for the purpose of showing how, as compared with past rates, the charges tended to decrease the amount levied for berthage on smaller vessels and increase it on the larger vessels, and it was suggested that this would tend to discourage the bigger vessels from using the Breakwater Harbour, and force them to the roadstead. On the other hand, it was suggested by the Chairman and other officials of the Harbour Board that it was by no means certain that it would tend to force ships into the roadstead, and that the new scale was designed to make a more equitable charge on ships in accordance with the services rendered by the Harbour Board. Typical instances were: S.s. "Kamo," 725 tons—on berthage rates prior to 1st July, 1927, staying two days and discharging 725 tons of cargo, total berthage paid £16 12s. 3d., equivalent to 6·8d. per ton; under new rates, on the same basis, total berthage paid £12 1s. 8d., equivalent to 5d. per ton. S.s. "Kaiwarra," 1,847 tons—on berthage rates prior to 1st July, 1927, staying five days, discharging 1,847 tons, total berthage paid £17 6s. 4d., equivalent to 2½d. per ton; under new rates, on the same basis, total berthage paid £53 17s. 6d., equal to 7·8d. per ton. A lighter loading 60 tons per trip—Berthage at 3d. per ton equals 15s. per trip, or 1·8d. per ton.

We are not prepared to express an opinion as to how this new charge will operate, but we see no evidence that the alteration in the scale is anything but a legitimate exercise of the Harbour Board's right to cast its scale of charges on what, in the exercise of the discretion and knowledge of members of the Board, seems to be an equitable and proper basis. It may be that experience will show that the higher charges will discourage the bigger vessels from berthing at the wharves, and that will quickly reflect itself in reduced revenue for the Harbour Board. We have no doubt that, if this happens, the Harbour Board will be quick to recognize and remedy the position.

A considerable amount of evidence was also tendered in relation to the amount of the charges for labour, and the incidence of those charges; but, in our opinion the evidence tendered by the Harbour Board justified the nature and incidence of those charges according to present conditions.

No other evidence touching on the subject-matter of the question now before us was tendered to us. Our answer is, therefore, that according to the evidence tendered to us the various harbour dues and charges enumerated in the question are at the present time, and according to the existing law, imposed in an equitable manner as between the different interests enumerated in the question.

PART 19.—THE RECLAMATION PROBLEM.

Our order of reference, paragraph 1 (f), requires us to inquire and report upon: "Whether the reclamation of the areas described in the First and Second Schedules to the Napier Harbour Empowering and Loan Bill, 1926, or any other areas within or adjacent to the Harbour of Napier and the lands vested in the Napier Harbour Board should be authorized; and, if so, to what extent, and by what arrangement can any such reclamation be most economically and satisfactorily accomplished?"

The areas described in the said First and Second Schedules are the Awatoto Block, 28-acre Block, North and South Ponds, and part of West Quay Reclamation Block. (See Plan A, Commission's Exhibit No. 3.)

We are of opinion that the authority sought in the said Bill should be withheld, on the ground that the policy underlying it is related to and dictated by the Board's Inner Harbour policy, which we have reported against in the foregoing portion of our report.

We are of opinion that all the said areas should be reclaimed, but that the whole problem of reclamation should now be reconsidered, and that in deciding which areas should be reclaimed first, and what methods should be adopted, a comprehensive view should be taken covering all areas, all methods, and the interests of all public bodies affected by the problem.

We set out our views on these matters in the following pages, and we set out our recommendation at the end of this part.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF AREAS.

The Legislature has vested in the Napier Harbour Board certain landed endowments in the form of areas of land contiguous to Napier. In general, these might be described as low-lying tidal areas capable of being converted into arable and habitable areas by reclamation. Some of these areas have been reclaimed; a notable instance is the portion of the Borough of Napier known as Napier South, the whole of which has been reclaimed and is now a very closely settled residential area. On Plan A, Commission's Exhibit No. 3, we show the principal areas that are now awaiting reclamation, and on the map we have coloured them so that they may be so distinguished and referred to. Firstly, there are two small areas coloured brown and marked respectively "North Pond" and "South Pond,"