

1929.

NEW ZEALAND.

COOK AND OTHER ISLANDS.

[In continuation of Parliamentary Paper A.-3, 1928.]

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

MEMORANDUM.

Cook Islands Department, Wellington, 30th June, 1929.

I SUBMIT the annual report of the Cook Islands and Niue Administrations, together with a memorandum in regard to the shipping services with the islands. The report discloses a satisfactory state of affairs throughout the Group.

It is perhaps not generally realized that the Cook Group contains fourteen inhabited islands widely dispersed over 850,000 square miles of ocean. With the exception of Rarotonga and Niue, communication between these islands is irregular and infrequent, and there is no sea communication whatever during the hurricane season—December to April.

The medical needs of the Group are met by only three Medical Officers and the nursing staffs. The general health of the people is good. The natural increase per 1,000 of mean population during the year was 13·3, and the average increase over the past six years was 11·16 per 1,000.

The education system is extended throughout the Group; in the most outlying islands the teaching is undertaken by Native pastors of the London Missionary Society, under the supervision of the Superintendent of Schools.

The cost of policing the whole Group is less than £2,000 per annum, and that with a remarkable freedom from serious crime.

Radio-stations are gradually being erected, and the Island of Mauke has recently been placed in wireless communication with the outer world. Radio-stations have now been erected at Rarotonga, Niue, Aitutaki, Mangaia, Atiu, and Mauke, and as funds permit these will be extended to the most northerly island of Penrhyn. Many of the northern islands are productive of little revenue, and are subject to periodical droughts and devastating hurricanes. Progress is therefore necessarily slow unless recourse is had to the Consolidated Funds, but this is avoided as far as possible.

In accordance with the policy followed by the Administration in encouraging the Natives to plant ample foodstuffs for their own requirements, the past year has been one of plenty on all of those islands which are fertile. Lack of shipping, however, prevents the export of large quantities of valuable fruit to New Zealand from the Lower Group. The service inaugurated by Government vessels has overcome this difficulty so far as Niue is concerned, and a considerable banana industry is now established between that island and New Zealand.

Owing to the lack of private enterprise, the Government shipping service established in 1925 by the s.s. "Hinemoa" with Niue and Norfolk Island has during the year been extended to Samoa for the purposes of a banana trade with that territory. The "Hinemoa" was replaced in June last by the M.V. "Maui Pomare."

This vessel has not proved altogether satisfactory during the past year, and certain defects in her construction and engines have had to be remedied. The Government's technical advisers have been concentrating on these works for some time, and it is hoped that the coming year will give a more satisfactory service.

Too much is being asked of this vessel, however, in expecting her to maintain a service with New Zealand ports and Niue and Samoa, as well as with Norfolk. Although the Norfolk trade has developed rapidly and shows much promise, it has not been possible to induce private enterprise to take over this service with Auckland. A reduction of the service in the near future to one North Island and one South Island port, and Niue and Samoa, would assist materially in the efforts being made to establish a fruit industry with these islands.

Anticipated cargoes from Samoa did not materialize last year, owing no doubt to political unrest in that territory, and the revenue of the ship suffered accordingly.

Despite the difficulties of the nine months ended 31st March last, and the crippling effect of four New Zealand ports of call (with the consequent long coastal runs and duplicity of port charges), the "Maui Pomare" made fifteen trips from the islands to New Zealand. She has handled nearly 6,000 tons of cargo, including 46,000 cases of bananas shipped direct from the islands for southern ports. The total expenditure for the year exceeded the revenue by £1,972 12s. 1d. The service can be regarded as a satisfactory performance for the inaugural year.

A. T. NGATA,
Minister for Cook Islands.