

The Committee is well aware of the difficulties the Napier Harbour Board has had to face since the earthquake, but taking into consideration the high charges levied the Committee, after an inspection of the port, is of opinion that an effort should be made by the Board to improve the facilities.

To deal with the complaints as outlined above :—

(1) *Loss of Time and Earnings due to Insufficient Depth in the Channel leading up to the "Iron Pot."*—The fishermen complained that the earning-capacity of their boats is seriously reduced because of the insufficient depth of water in the channel to the "Iron Pot," where they are berthed. They asserted that the depth of water in this channel is so little that the larger boats cannot get out or enter in safety except between half tide flood and high tide. This means that the boats often have to leave earlier in the morning than the distance to the fishing-grounds warrants, and that they frequently have to stop fishing early in the afternoon in order to catch the tide at the port so as to be able to unload their fish in time for handling and transport by the packing companies. Fishermen stated that their boats have been damaged through attempting to enter port in heavy weather when there was a heavy swell running, and that the danger of damage was not to be always avoided even by waiting for full tide.

The opinion was expressed that, in view of the smaller amount of silt-laden water now coming into the "Iron Pot," the Board might be urged to make a determined effort to dredge the channel to a depth of 12 ft. at low-water spring tides.

(2) *Bad Berthage Arrangements and no Fixed Berths.*—Owing to the recent slackness in the coastal trade, more space was available for fishing-vessels at the date of the Committee's visit than is normally the case, but it was contended that each vessel should have her own fixed berth from which she should not have to shift, and that at no time should it be necessary for vessels to berth either two or more abreast, as has been the case in the past, and as will be the case again if the full fishing-fleet is in operation at the same time as the coastal boats are working on their normal schedules.

(3) *Lack of Facilities for landing Fish.*—The Committee inspected these facilities under working-conditions, and agrees with the men as to the poor conditions prevailing at this port. The wharf is very high, and fish has to be hauled up by hand from the vessels' decks. When accommodation is crowded and the tide is low, the fish has to be passed across the deck of the vessel having the inside berth and then man-handled on to the wharf. This additional handling tends to bruise the fish and cause damage to its quality. A suggestion was made that a central wharf should be erected with stages to allow easy unloading at all stages of the tide. Another suggestion was the provision of an elevator such as is used at Port Chalmers.

(4) *Lack of Suitable Channel to the only Existing Slipway.*—It was stated that there was insufficient depth in the channel leading to the slipway. This drawback, in conjunction with the high charges levied at the slip, has caused some of the boats to steam ninety-six miles each way to Gisborne, where adequate and reasonable slipway accommodation can be obtained.

(5) *Lack of Slip Accommodation at a Reasonable Charge.*—The alleged excessive charge made for the use of the slip was the subject of much adverse criticism. Their charges are, to the knowledge of this Committee, the highest in New Zealand for fishing-vessels. As an example, one small trawler is charged £12 for the first two days and £2 per day for each day thereafter. For four days, the normal slipping period, the cost was £14. The same service is provided by the Gisborne Harbour Board for £5 7s., so there seems to be no justification for this high charge at Napier. There is also the necessity in some cases for the vessel requiring the service to be towed to the slip owing to the shallow water in the channel. This entails a further charge, in some cases amounting to £3.

(6) *Excessive Overtime Charge for Water supplied after 5 p.m.*—The normal charge for water taken aboard vessels at Napier is 5s. per 1,000 gallons, which, although on the high side, may be passed as reasonable. The Committee was informed, however, that if a vessel required water after 5 p.m. an overtime charge of 7s. 6d. per hour has to be paid. Now, with the shallow channel governing the hour at which these vessels may enter or leave port, they are often compelled to enter at such a time as to make it impossible for the crew to land the catch and be ready to take in water before 5 p.m. Under the circumstances, the Committee thinks that the imposition of this overtime charge is unfair. If the normal charge were applicable up to 6 p.m. it would give vessels working a late tide the opportunity to unload and take in their supply of water in time to escape the penalty of the overtime payment. If this concession were granted, the overtime charge thereafter would be justified, because there must be a limit to the time when the water service can be rendered at normal rates.

(7) *Excessive Wharfage charged by the Harbour Board.*—In view of the poor service which this Harbour Board renders to the fishermen, the Committee cannot but agree that the wharfage rates levied by the Board are too high. Taking into consideration the unhealthy state of the production side of the fishing industry at this port, these charges are a severe hardship on the owners of the vessels. No item escapes wharfage; that on fish, 6s. per ton, is very high, although it is admitted that the amount paid will be relative to the production of the vessel, but the high wharfage rates on coal and fuel oil in times when catches are low form a serious burden, and any relief would be of great assistance to a struggling industry.