

1938.
NEW ZEALAND.

DERAILMENT OF SPECIAL EXCURSION TRAIN NEAR RATANA ON 26th MARCH, 1938.

(REPORT OF BOARD OF INQUIRY.)

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.

The Hon. the MINISTER OF RAILWAYS, Wellington.

SIR,—

Wellington, 8th July, 1938.

By your warrant directed to us dated the 28th March, 1938, and extended on 20th April, 1938, 24th May, 1938, and 22nd June, 1938, we were appointed a Board of Inquiry and required and authorized to inquire into and report to you concerning the derailment of a special passenger-train near Ratana on the morning of 26th March, 1938, with specific reference to the following matters, namely :—

- (1) What was the cause of the derailment of the said train ?
- (2) Was any employee in the service of the Government Railways Department guilty of any dereliction of duty which directly or indirectly contributed to the said derailment ?
- (3) Generally are there any circumstances in connection with the said derailment which call for comment, particularly in respect of the said rolling-stock and the permanent-way in the locality of the derailment ?
- (4) What steps (if any) might be suggested to prevent a recurrence of a similar derailment ?

We have held an inquiry as directed by you, and now have the honour to report as follows :—

INTRODUCTORY.

A special passenger-excursion train, officially designated as “W 4,” was scheduled to run from Wellington to New Plymouth, leaving Wellington at 9.40 p.m. on Friday, 25th March, 1938.

“W 4” consisted of engine A 829 and six passenger carriages and a guard's van. The passenger carriages and guard's van, with their tare weights, were as follows :—

							Tons.	cwt.	qrs.
Car A 1791	..	..	..	..	..	..	21	8	0
Car A 1796	..	..	..	..	..	..	20	10	3
Car A 1797	..	..	..	..	..	..	22	16	2
Car A 1413	..	..	..	..	..	..	20	11	3
Car A 1572	..	..	..	..	..	..	20	1	0
Car A 1790	..	..	..	..	..	..	21	9	0
Van F 501	..	..	..	..	..	..	17	19	2

There were 197 passengers on the train when it left Marton, and, when allowance is made for the weight of the passengers, the gross weight of the train (exclusive of the locomotive) can reasonably be estimated at approximately 158 tons.

W 4 was in charge of Guard Thomas Henry White, and the engine crew consisted of Engine-driver Edward Clifton Percival and Fireman and Acting Engine-driver Kenneth Albert Millar. Fireman and Acting Engine-driver Millar acted as fireman.

The running of the train to Ratana was normal. At a distance of approximately 1 mile 15 chains north of Ratana there is a curve of 6.4 chains radius. At the commencement of the curve the train was derailed, and, as a result, six passengers were killed. Fireman and Acting Engine-driver Millar suffered extensive scalding and other severe injuries, to which he subsequently succumbed. Engine-driver Percival suffered severe though less serious injuries, and has since made a good recovery. Several passengers were injured, some severely.

THE INQUIRY.

An inspection of the track at the scene of the derailment was made by the Board on 11th April, 1938. On the same afternoon the locomotive, carriages, and guard's van that had comprised the service of the wrecked train were examined at East Town Workshops, to which they had been removed pending inspection by the Board. In the evening the Board travelled over the line between Turakina and the scene of the derailment, in order to ascertain the conditions of night travelling over that portion of the track. A further examination of the damaged rolling-stock and of the track was carried out by the Board on the following day.