

Higginson, who only saw it under unfavourable circumstances; and I am so satisfied with that river, that I have bought the steamer "Comerang," now trading between Napier and Auckland, and which will carry 150 tons of coal, and am going to send her into the Ngakawau River. On Mr. Higginson's own showing, the river is nearly always navigable for small steamers of not more than 8 feet draught. When laden with 150 tons of coal, the "Comerang" will not draw more than 6 feet 4 inches. The proprietors, who are now represented by the Albion Company, have spent £1,600 on that river in clearing it, and the expenditure is still being continued. In three months' time, I expect to have the "Comerang" coming out of the river with 150 tons of coal. A few days ago, I went down in the little steamer "Result" with Captain Leech, the Harbour Master at Westport, and three other gentlemen, to Ngakawau, and on sounding the bar, the Harbour Master found a minimum depth of 9 feet of water. He admitted that there was nothing to prevent the "Comerang" following us in, except a few boulders, which we are now adopting means to remove. The master of the steamer, who was interested in having the Ngakawau coal exported from the Buller, admitted also that there was nothing to prevent the "Comerang" from following us in. We took 16 tons of coal on board, and in coming out sounded again, when a minimum depth of 10 feet was found. I again asked, and they admitted that they could see no reason why steamers such as the "Comerang" could not follow us out. I make this statement because Mr. Higginson reports against this river as a site for a harbour. Without a signal station, without a whaleboat or warp-posts, and with nothing at all to assist them, light draught vessels have been going in for the last eight or nine months, and bringing out small quantities of coal, and I think that if some improvement were made, vessels drawing considerably more water could bring out cargoes of 150 or 200 tons. We want the Government to assist us in regard to this Colonial industry, which may be developed indefinitely. I may say that I am an engineer myself, and I am satisfied, notwithstanding what Mr. Higginson has stated, that it is possible to ship coals in large quantities from Ngakawau. I believe that it will be found expedient ultimately to make the railway to the Buller. I do not oppose it being made; but I say that as far as the Albion Company are concerned it would be useless. Besides, I see no immediate prospect of the harbour at the Buller being completed. The Albion Company have by their lease to get out 5,000 tons this year, 10,000 tons next year, and 15,000 tons the year after; but I see no prospect of getting the harbour at the Buller and the railway within three years. *I feel interested not only as a managing director, but as a large shareholder. I have had opportunities of studying the subject to a much greater extent than Mr. Higginson has had.* The Albion Company have already spent £10,000, and they have now a number of men improving the river; and whether the Government assist or not, we shall have to carry out extensive works.

28. *The Chairman.*] What is your opinion, as an engineer, respecting a line of railway from Ngakawau to Westport? A line can be made at a small expense. I would be willing to take the contract at half Mr. Higginson's estimate: £1,500 per mile ought to be sufficient for that coal tramway; Mr. Higginson's estimate is £55,355.

29. Would your estimate include rolling stock? The rolling stock on such a line as I propose would be of a rough character, merely coal trucks, which would belong to the companies using the line. The only rolling stock would be the locomotives. I have spoken of a line with reference to the Albion Company. I believe that a railway will be extensively useful to the companies working between the Buller and Ngakawau, and that eventually a line must be made. I think that the harbour ought first to be made at the Buller, and then the line.

30. Are you aware that it is necessary to get the line made to procure material for the harbour works at the Buller? Mr. Higginson says so, but I do not know where he proposes to procure it from. I have been some distance up the proposed line, and I have seen no stone available for the purpose. There is suitable stone at Ngakawau, and also up the Buller, but I do not know where Mr. Higginson proposes to get the stone from. I have not studied the subject of a railway at all, except so far as affects the Albion Company; and if a line were made, the Albion Company would probably not use it.

31. How soon could that line of railway be made, in your opinion? I could not say at present. When I say the line could be made for half the cost set down by Mr. Higginson, I spoke of a coal tramway, and not a line of railway, as apparently estimated for by Mr. Higginson. A great deal of the line over which the railway would pass is already cleared.

32. What is the nature of the assistance required to improve the port at Ngakawau? [Witness read part of Mr. Higginson's report, recommending that to improve the Ngakawau two piers would be required, costing £51,250.] I think that the only reason why these piers would be required is in consequence of the coastal drift from the south forming a bar. Mr. Higginson estimates that each pier would have to be 25 chains long, but I think that half that length might be sufficient. I do not think the piers ought to cost above £20,000; and we wish for assistance to that amount, in addition to the river improvements which are now being made by us. I believe that in two or three months we will be able to take the "Comerang" in; and I see no reason why a sufficient number of vessels to supply the whole of New Zealand with coal should not go in, if only £20,000 is spent on the harbour in erecting two pier heads, besides the river clearance above spoken of.

33. *Mr. J. Shephard.*] The pier to the south would be also required for the protection against the coastal drift? Yes. Some time ago, Captain Leech, Harbour Master, made a report on the Little Wanganui River, by which it is shown that a line of rocks just outside the south entrance, by obstructing the drift, gives three or four feet more water on the bar. I do not see why we cannot construct artificially at Ngakawau what nature has done there. We ask the Government to assist us in the erection of the necessary pier-heads to obstruct this coastal drift. The Little Wanganui is a river similar to the Ngakawau, but it has 4 feet of water on the bar when the Ngakawau is nearly dry; the difference being occasioned by the obstruction of the coastal drift in the case of the Little Wanganui.

34. Mr. Leech's report simply confirms the opinion that it is only to the south that a pier is required to direct the course of the drift? When Captain Leech was there, he showed me that when there was a westerly swell coming in, the drift was from the northward, and he has been long aware