

believed that protective works might be erected at a reasonable cost, and that the bar might be kept open all the year round; at all events that there would be an average depth sufficient for vessels to enter during any season of the year. I think that that can be done by uniting these two waters into one channel, and if that could be accomplished very great advantages would be derived therefrom. I would moreover say this in connection with the improvement of the harbour: The Harbour Board have now got full plans of the river prepared. They are calling for competitive designs, to be sent in on the 16th of this month, showing the best means for improving the harbour. It is hoped that these will show us some practical plan by which the work may be done. Of course it is more an engineering question than anything else; still, as I have resided there for a number of years, and have watched the bar very carefully, I have no hesitation in saying that I think that for a very moderate sum of money considerable improvements might be effected which will be beneficial to the whole of the districts supplied from the Port of Hokitika. The whole district, extending from Teremakau to Okarito inclusive, are supplied from the Port of Hokitika, Jackson's Bay; and other southern places are also supplied to a large extent from there. In fact, I may say that from the Teremakau South the whole traffic of the country passes through Hokitika, and that any improvement which may be made in the Hokitika Harbour must inevitably lessen the cost of articles of consumption to persons all throughout that district. One thing that adds greatly to the cost of articles is that vessels when coming to that port are uncertain how soon they will get away again, and therefore the owners charge much higher rates of freight than they otherwise would do. Besides, when vessels have to stay there for two or three months, expenses go on the whole of the time, and the owners of the vessels must get from the consumers of the goods a sum for carriage proportionate to the whole annual cost of the maintenance of the vessel.

85. Were you in Hokitika during the last block?—Part of the time.

86. Have you anything specially to say in connection with that?—I saw that five vessels were blocked in, and that the captains were obliged to pay off their crews and lay their vessels up. They were detained there, I should think, seventy or eighty days.

87. *Hon. Mr. Gisborne.*] That was inside. Were there any vessels outside?—Yes, there were some outside as well. During the present season a similar block has taken place, though not quite so protracted, and one of the vessels has lost two men overboard, while the vessels themselves have been injured. Others have had to put back to Nelson and discharge the whole of their cargo, never having yet reached their destination at Hokitika. Of course this is a very serious matter. During the last year the block led to such serious results that persons were actually starting to cart overland from Greymouth (a distance of something like forty miles) flour and similar supplies, and if the blockade had not broken up it would have been necessary to cart supplies from Christchurch and elsewhere. Of course a few small vessels were able at intervals to enter the bar with cargoes—a fourth of the ordinary cargo at increased risk—so that the freights were high, and this did not affect the market price of provisions.

88. *The Chairman.*] Are you aware whether any merchants are giving up business?—Yes. One merchant lately has gone away, owing, I hear, to the risks in the way of business; and I believe that others have left or are going in consequence of these serious impediments to trade. I am quite certain that if something is not done to remedy the present state of things very few persons will continue to remain there. I believe the population will be materially reduced. I will point out another very important feature in this case. In the neighbourhood of Hokitika there are a large number of saw-mills that give employment to a considerable working population, and these operations are very seriously hampered, indeed, so much so that several saw-mills have had to work only half time, and some have entirely stopped, although large orders are in hand. I know that during two months this year saw-millers have had large orders which they have been unable to supply owing to the blockade of the port. Therefore one of our principal industries is being very much injured in consequence of the present condition of the harbour, and this is to be the more regretted, as in a bush country like this, saw-milling must always be a very important industry.

89. Almost every vessel which leaves the port, I understand, has timber on board?—Yes. Nearly every one takes timber, in large or small quantities; and I have no doubt that, if persons could depend upon having their orders fulfilled, there would be an increased demand for timber from that part of the colony.

90. *Sir R. Douglas.*] I suppose you wish to see the work done well?—Distinctly.

91. Do you think it would be requisite before the work was commenced that proper plans should be made?—Certainly. At the present time the Harbour Board has plans. They were drawn up by an engineer under the supervision of the Government Engineer in the district, and the Board have had soundings taken in connection with the plan. Competitive designs have been called for, a bonus of £250 being offered for the best. As soon as these are sent in, I presume they will be forwarded to the Government Engineer for his approval and decision as to the best and most practical plan at a reasonable cost.

92. In the case of the Oamaru Harbour, the best advice obtainable was got. I suppose the Hokitika Board will do the same?—Yes. The circumstances of the two cases, though, are somewhat different. The Oamaru Board had to throw out a breakwater against the whole force of the sea. That is not so in our case.

93. I understood it was the shingle banks and the habit to silt up which they had to contend against in Oamaru?—That is at Timaru. I would point out this, that the bulk of our works would be inside the river. We want to throw the whole body of the river into one channel, whereas at present it is divided into two streams, each of which runs in a different direction from the other. We wish to unite the two bodies, because when united it will force itself through the sandbanks which accumulate; and if you can accomplish this, the continual scour of the stream will keep the channel clear. [Plans produced, and proposed operations described on plans by witness.]

94. What do you suppose would be the cost of doing this work?—The general idea is that a sum of £50,000 would be sufficient to do all that is required.

95. Do you think that sum of money is fairly chargeable against the colony?—Certainly.