

officers progressing from grade to grade, and gives an opportunity for members of crews to improve their studies and eventually sitting for certificates for officered rank and also provides an avenue for rehabilitating men of the services who have previously been employed on the sea or have expressed a liking therefor on their return from active service.

The forty-second edition of the "New Zealand Nautical Almanac and Tide Tables" was published again on the due date, the breaking of the publication into two parts, which was given effect to last year, proving in no way an inconvenience to mariners. The abnormal shipping activity in our ports during the past year has brought about an increased sale of this publication. Notices to mariners, so necessary under wartime conditions, were published as required during the year, and our shipping officers in the various ports have maintained an excellent service to shipping in general by assisting in the provision of crews when necessary, and particularly when required urgently, by providing for immediate return of personnel to their home ports, the provision of pocket-money to British seamen awaiting transport back to their homes, and generally by ensuring that any member of the Merchant Marine in any matter at all is dealt with expeditiously, particularly those who have met with the misfortunes of war.

PROSECUTIONS

Prosecutions instituted under various statutes of the Department during the year amounted to 20 cases, of which 14 were concerned with breaches of the Fisheries Act, 1 of the Inspection of Machinery Act, and 5 in reference to the Shipping and Seamen Act.

SICK AND INJURED SEAMEN

The total amount paid by shipowners to sick and injured seamen under the provisions of the Shipping and Seamen Act, 1908, and amendments, was £15,064, as against £15,583 for the previous year.

REGISTRATION OF SHIPPING

As at 31st December, 1943, there were on the register of vessels in the Dominion 45 sailing-vessels of 3,553 net tons register, 130 steamers of 62,264 net tons register, and 280 motor-vessels of 18,342 net tons register, as compared with 45 sailing-vessels of 3,553 net tons register, 134 steamers of 70,426 net tons register, and 295 motor-vessels of 19,197 net tons register at the end of the previous year. The number of seamen employed on board was 2,506, as compared with 2,585 for the year 1942.

HARBOURS

The Department has continued to control the harbours at Westport, Picton, and Dargaville.

At Picton a satisfactory service has been maintained, and work there has been added to by the maintenance of lights in the Cook Strait area, which at times has to be carried out under fairly hazardous conditions. At Dargaville also our staff have maintained the harbour services, including the replenishment of navigation lights.

At Westport early in the year, due to the absence of freshes in the river and predominating westerly weather, there was an appreciable increase in retrogression in working depths at the entrance. In May, 1943, a depth of 18 ft. was, except for 17 ft. 7 in. in March, 1934, the poorest for any month for many many years. By early June improvement in bar depth was being effected as a result of continued dredging on the bar when practicable, and in an effort to maintain a satisfactory depth the dredge "Rubi Seddon" was reconditioned with a view to this dredge and the "Eileen Ward" being employed on the shoaling at the entrance, and it is pleasing to report that at the close of the year the satisfactory depth of 13 ft. at low water had been achieved.

It must be remembered that spells of dry and bad weather have an adverse effect on the bars of river harbours, but serious consideration is being given to the question of substantial improvement to Westport and Greymouth Harbours, upon the efficient working of which our North Island railways and industries largely depend. There were two distinct adverse periods during the past year where a continuance of bad conditions for a few more days would have meant retarding industry at a critical war period, and the Department has arranged for an inspection and report by Mr. F. W. Furkert, an eminent harbour engineer, with a view to steps being taken, particularly at Westport, to ensure normal inwards and outwards coal traffic for the future. This may well mean increased expenditure, which it is hoped will be more than justified by the results obtained. The main export item from Westport is, of course, coal, which showed a reduction in the past year compared with the four previous years, the figures being as follows:—

	Shipments. Tons.
1939-40	408,380
1940-41	486,960
1941-42	487,450
1942-43	446,500
1943-44	401,370

For portions of the year when Greymouth bar was unworkable the coal was railed to Westport for shipment, and it is interesting to note that, notwithstanding this, the coal shipments from Greymouth were 28,600 tons in excess of the previous year as against a decrease of 45,130 tons in the case of Westport. Bunkering trade has been almost negligible due to the phosphate-vessels being off this run. Dredging operations for the year amounted to 675,180 cubic yards an increase of 125,200 cubic yards on the previous year. The bucket dredger "Maui," which had been released for urgent defence work elsewhere at the end of the previous year, was returned for her normal pursuits during the year.