

1944

NEW ZEALAND

FORDELL AND TURAKINA TUNNELS

(INQUIRY UNDER THE PUBLIC SERVICE AMENDMENT ACT, 1927)

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by leave

It was decided to hold an inquiry in terms of section 12, Public Service Amendment Act, 1927, with regard to the culpability of any officers of the Public Works Department for defects found in the Fordell and Turakina Tunnels. Under this section the Public Service Commissioner may institute inquiries without formal complaint being laid against any particular individual officer. For purposes of this inquiry there were associated with the Commissioner for professional and technical assistance and consultation Mr. H. Vickerman, M.Sc., M.Inst.C.E., as Consultant Engineer, and Mr. W. Brooke, a practical tunneller. At the inquiry Mr. H. Watkinson, Inspecting Engineer, represented the Public Works Department, Mr. D. O. Haskell, Resident Engineer, appeared for the Public Service Association on behalf of the engineers and other staff, and Mr. S. Roberts, Inspector, Public Service Commissioner's Office, conducted the examination of witnesses and acted as Secretary to the Committee.

The order of reference adopted in the inquiry was as follows:—

- (1) What system obtains in the Department for the recording of discussions on projected works and of decisions taken at these discussions?
- (2) In whose hands does the authority lie for making final decision for the plans and operation of approved major works? Is such authority delegated by the Engineer-in-Chief to responsible senior officers, and, if so, to what extent?
- (3) In this particular case, who was the officer responsible for the adoption of the tunnel section used on this job? Was any consideration given to the fact that the class of country to be tunnelled was entirely different from that encountered where this tunnel section had previously been used, and, if so, were any factors to compensate for the different class of country considered?
- (4) What measure of supervision was exercised over the job, and by whom? Assuming its inadequacy on the results shown, whose responsibility was it to see that adequate supervision was provided and exercised?
- (5) Generally to assess the degree of culpability attaching to officers and employees of the Public Works Department for their acts of omission and commission in the execution of the job;

And the Committee to make any other general inquiries that were thought fit and proper.

The Committee held a preliminary meeting at Wellington on 23rd May, 1944, and proceeded to the sites of the Fordell and Turakina Tunnels on 24th idem, where a personal investigation of the faults in both tunnels was made by members of the Committee on 24th and 25th May. The taking of sworn evidence of witnesses was commenced at Wellington on 6th June and concluded on 14th June. In all, twenty-two officers were examined, including the present Engineer-in-Chief, Public Works Department, the previous Engineer-in-Chief, all Engineers, Overseers, Foremen connected with the organization, supervision, or construction of the tunnels, and the headmen of the co-operative parties engaged on the work, with the exception of the previous Assistant Engineer-in-Chief (deceased), one foreman (deceased), and one headman who through ill health was unable to attend. (See list of witnesses.)