

*Wool Fires Commission.*—In consequence of the occurrence of fires on ships loaded with wool and flax, a Commission was appointed in August last to inquire into and report on the cause of fires on ships whose cargo is wholly or partly composed of wool, flax, tow, or other combustible material. The Commission consisted of Dr. A. McArthur, Stipendiary Magistrate, Wellington, who was Chairman, and Mr. W. G. Foster and Captain H. S. Blackburne. The Commission made exhaustive inquiry and took a great deal of evidence in various parts of the colony, and its report has been received, and will be presented to Parliament.

*Coastal Dangers.*—A vote was taken last session to establish a marine survey, and Commander Sinclair, R.I.M., of the Indian Marine Survey, was engaged for the work. As he considered that the s.s. "Hinemoa" and "Tutanekai" were not suitable for the survey, application was made to the Admiralty for one of three naval sloops which were laid up at Hong Kong, but a reply was received expressing regret that there were no suitable vessels available. The only vessel in the colony which Commander Sinclair considered could be made suitable was the training-ship "Amokura," but as it would cost about £5,000 to make her fit, and as her use for the survey would have interfered with the training of boys for the sea, owing to there being no other suitable vessel for a training-ship available, the Government did not see its way to allow her to be used for survey work. Under these circumstances it has been decided not to proceed with the establishment of the survey at present.

The buoys marking coastal dangers have been overhauled and cleaned by the "Hinemoa," and are now in good condition. The Wigham light on Jackson's Head beacon went out on several occasions during the year, and the Department is now testing an acetylene-gas light to see whether it is reliable enough to justify its being substituted for the present light.

The New Zealand Nautical Almanac was issued in December last, and has sold well. Its value is becoming so well known that booksellers in Australia now obtain copies for sale there.

*Wages and Effects of Deceased Seamen.*—The estates of 52 seamen, amounting to £364 13s., have been dealt with during the year, and the sum of £307 1s. 2d. has been paid to relatives and other claimants. A list of the estates is appended.

*Wrecks and Casualties.*—Tables showing casualties to ships and an analysis thereof are attached. Those on the coasts of the colony numbered 90, representing 32,166 tons register, as compared with 55, of 29,601 tons register, in the previous year. The total wrecks within the colony were 15, of 3,801 tons register, as compared with 6, of 1,686 tons, in the previous year. The total number of lives lost was 39, as compared with 22 last year. Of these 38 were within the colony—viz., "Ronga," 6; "Sir Henry," barquentine, 4; "Aotea," auxiliary schooner, 11; "Haeremai," scow, 5; "Rangi," scow, 1; "Sterling," s.s., 1; "Togo," s.s., 1; "Akitio," oil-launch, 2; "Medora," 1; "Waikonini," scow, 1; "Kotiti," s.s., 1; "Kahu," s.s., 1; "Kassa," scow, 1; "Tui," steam-launch, 1; and "Surrey," s.s., 1.

The attached wreck chart shows where the casualties occurred.

*Weather and Meteorological Office.*—The Meteorological Office, which had until then been connected with the Museum, was, on the 1st December last, amalgamated with the Weather Reporting Office, the work of both offices being placed under the control of Captain Edwin, with the Rev. Mr. Bates, who has been carrying on the meteorological work under the Museum Department, as his assistant. Weather forecasts are now sent to fishing ports, and are posted up for the information of fishermen. The question of issuing an evening weather forecast in addition to the morning forecast, and the publication of a monthly bulletin giving information as to rainfall and other meteorological information, is under consideration. This would involve an increase in the staff of the office, but I think that the benefit that would be derived from the publication of a second forecast and of such bulletin would justify the necessary expenditure.

*Government Steamers.*—The "Hinemoa" has performed the work of attending to light-houses and of overhauling and relaying buoys. She has also visited the Auckland, Campbell, Antipodes, Bounty, and Kermadec Islands to search for castaways, and to examine the depots of provisions and clothing. On her last northern trip a depot was built on the largest of the Three Kings, and a supply of provisions, &c., placed in it. A notice to mariners regarding its establishment and position has been published. The "Tutanekai" has been again placed under the control of this Department. In July last she made a search for the missing vessel "Haeremai," and was put into regular commission in October, since which time she has been employed on various services, including a trip to the Southern and Chatham Islands with the Governor, during which the depots for castaways were examined. A new oil-launch for her has been built by Logan Bros., of Auckland. A regulation has been made to govern the leave of absence to be granted to the masters and officers of the steamers, and an increase has been made in the remuneration of the deck officers, so as to give them the same rates as agreed upon between the Merchant Service Guild of Australasia and outside owners.

*Training-ship.*—The Government having decided that the s.s. "Amokura," formerly H.M.S. "Sparrow," which was purchased from the Admiralty for a training-ship, should be transferred from the Defence to this Department, this was done in February last, and the first boys were taken on board on the 12th March last. The first lot of boys selected numbered twenty-four, and these were all on board within a fortnight of the date the first one joined. Three of these have since left the ship. The ages of those on board are from 12 years 7 months to 15 years 11 months. Two are under 13½ years, five between 13½ and 14, one between 14 and 14½, seven between 14½ and 15, five between 15 and 15½, and one between 15½ and 16 years.

The conduct of the boys is satisfactory; they are willing and eager to learn, and are making good progress. There are at present four instructors on board, and the boys are taught everything necessary to qualify them to join the merchant service. They are also trained in the use of the rifle.

His Excellency Admiral Sir Wilmot H. Fawkes visited the ship on the 7th instant, and inspected the boys and the arrangements on board.