

## PROBABLE LIFE OF BULLER COALFIELDS.

69. The Government Geologist has stated that the known amount of extractable bituminous coal now remaining in the Buller Coalfields, of which Westport is the natural outlet, on an optimistic estimate, is 69,000,000 tons, of which a large portion is soft and friable, and therefore not mined to any great extent at present.

The coal shipped from Westport in 1912 was 820,000 tons. There are also unproved beds of brown coal in the Inangahua Valley, and near Charleston. From a paper read by Mr. Morgan before the Australian Institute of Mining Engineers this year he states: "It is likely that the proved coal resources of the Dominion will be practically exhausted within a hundred years, and if the present wasteful methods of extraction continue the end of the higher-grade coals at least will be in sight much sooner." In evidence given to the Commission he gives the life of the Buller Coalfield as from forty to fifty years.

## FLOATING BASIN.

70. In the year 1906 plans were approved and work started upon the construction of a floating basin on the eastern side of the river, having an entrance at the lower end of the crane wharf. Messrs. Darley and Holmes in their reports have suggested modifications, differing in themselves, to the design on which the work has been commenced, and work on the basin is not being actively pushed forward.

No adequate scheme of railway accommodation for working the coal traffic at the basin has been prepared, and the Board has not taken steps to secure the necessary land abutting on the basin that would be required for railway-yards. Up to the 31st March last the sum of £57,939 has been expended in partial dredging of the area and on wharf-construction with reinforced-concrete piles in connection with this proposed basin.

Upon the foregoing facts we are able to answer the questions submitted to us by Your Excellency as follows:—

Question (a): "*Has the administration in the past been satisfactory?*"

In our opinion the administration in the past has not been satisfactory, and in particular in regard to the matters above set forth under various headings. In making this statement we have not lost sight of the fact that we are reviewing the operations of successive Boards extending over a long period of years, and that we do so with the experience resulting from their operations. In view of this we have to a large extent discounted or modified the inferences that might have been drawn from the facts placed before us, and have endeavoured to place the facts before Your Excellency in an impartial manner. Some of the matters to which we have referred call for special comment.

1. The expenditure of the Board, whether from loan or from revenue, has not been watched with that amount of care that should reasonably be expected from any Board entrusted with the expenditure of public moneys. The members of successive Boards have appeared not to have realized that they were trustees acting under statutes, and they failed to realize the essential fact that their duties under that trust were to administer the funds in the interests of the Dominion, and not primarily in the interests of the people of Westport. For example,—

(a.) In so far as general traffic is concerned on the Cape Foulwind Railway, the interests of the district have been considered rather than the objects of the trust. More labour has been employed in its maintenance than was necessary, high rates of wages have been paid, excessive passenger-train mileage has been run without benefit to the works, the tariff rates were too liberal, and some of them were not properly enforced. Sidings have been constructed by the Board for private individuals without payment or rental.