

WAIHI HOSPITAL BOARD.

It came out in evidence that the Waihi Borough Council is the sole contributing body towards the maintenance and upkeep of the Waihi Hospital, but that, notwithstanding this, a separate Hospital and Charitable Aid Board exists for the district, apart from the Borough Council. It seems that the borough is completely responsible for the Hospital, and yet has no direct control over it and its expenditure.

The Commission recommends that the Borough Council be made the Hospital Board for the district, which district, we understand, embraces merely the Borough of Waihi. This alteration should tend to both economy and efficiency by fixing the responsibility for the expenditure on the shoulders of those who have to find the money.

NAVIGATION OF THE WAIHOU RIVER.

We agree with the 1919 Commission that the improvement of the Waihou River from the sea to Paeroa to give 5 ft. minimum depth at low water, and the proper maintenance of the channel to this depth, is of supreme importance not only to the lands between Ngahina and the sea, but also to the whole district.

We also concur in the further finding of that Commission that the importance of navigation, and the inseparable way in which it is bound up with the other river-improvement works, has not been sufficiently appreciated by the Public Works Department.

Evidence was brought before the present Commission to show that in the earlier years of settlement small vessels were brought up to a wharf which then existed in the Town of Paeroa adjacent to the traffic-bridge over the Ohinemuri River near the Criterion Hotel; also that the steamers of the Northern Steamship Company regularly traded to the Railway Wharf, which was connected with the Paeroa Station by a short siding. Traffic to this point was discontinued fully twenty years ago, however, and the wharf has since been removed. "The Junction"—viz., near the confluence of the Waihou and Ohinemuri Rivers—then became the head of steamer navigation, but even this point had to be abandoned a few years after in favour of the present wharf at Puke, which is about two miles from the Town of Paeroa by road, and about seven miles by the course of the Ohinemuri River. Evidence was given by the master of the "Taniwha," which is now the only seagoing steamer visiting the port, that navigation to Puke is becoming increasingly difficult, and that whereas it was formerly a pleasure to bring his vessel up the river it is now a misery, and that the vessel is "dragging" nearly all the way from Hikutaia to Puke. It is evident, therefore, that the condition of the river is worse than it used to be, and that it is getting worse still, and that unless something tangible is soon done there is a grave possibility of seagoing steamer traffic to even the Puke Wharf being discontinued.

The navigation of the Upper Waihou is also stated to be more difficult and restricted than it was. The Paeroa agent of the Northern Steamship Company reported in April, 1920, that until the previous summer the tug-boats, when the river was normal, made the run from Paeroa to Te Aroha in seven to eight hours, whereas now it is impossible to get over not only one shallow, but several, without lines being made fast ashore and the winches on the steamers used for hauling them over. This, he says, is not a small matter, and takes from four to eight hours of continual hauling. He also stated that only once during the previous six months had the tugs been able to get from Paeroa to Te Aroha in the same day, and on that occasion the river was in flood. He adds that at one time cargo that left Auckland on Tuesday arrived at Paeroa Wednesday morning, and was landed at Te Aroha the same evening, whereas now it takes twenty-four hours longer. In forwarding this report to the Te Aroha Chamber of Commerce the general manager of the Northern Steamship Company said, "I hope you will be able to approach the Government concerning the very unsatisfactory state of the Waihou River, which is fast becoming unnavigable." It is clear that immediate action is called for to improve the navigability of the river.