

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE

TAKEN BEFORE THE INTER-PROVINCIAL COMMUNICATION COMMITTEE.

EXAMINATION OF CAPTAIN MILTON.

WEDNESDAY, 28TH MAY, 1856.

1. *By the Chairman.*—You, as master of the “Zingari” steamer, have been on the coast of New Zealand for about eighteen months, and are acquainted with all the ports between Manukau and Otago?—Yes.

2. Would it be possible to maintain a fortnightly communication, with one steamer, between Manukau and Otago, calling at the intermediate ports of New Plymouth, Nelson, Wellington, and Lyttelton, both going and returning, provided that a detention of not more than twenty-four hours was allowed in any one port?—It would be possible to make two trips a month, calling at the ports mentioned, provided a detention of a few hours only took place in each port. The actual time of steaming would be only nine days, which would leave twenty-one days for detention in harbour.

3. From what you know of the coasting traffic of New Zealand, what size vessel would be best adapted for the trade; and what power should she possess to enable her to make, say twenty-two trips in the year, calculating that two trips would be lost in making repairs, &c.?—I think that a vessel of 350 tons register would be large enough, because she would not be required to carry cargo; she ought to be guaranteed to run eight knots an hour.

4. Would you object to state to the Committee what, in your opinion, should be the probable bonus which such a vessel should receive, to induce her to enter on such an undertaking?—I should think not less than £10,000 a year; but I think that an arrangement might be made by the owners to run a vessel, by guaranteeing a fixed interest on the capital advanced.

5. Do you believe a vessel of the character described could be procured from the Australian Colonies, which would be willing, on receiving the bonus you have named, to undertake the maintenance of such a communication?—No; I think not; I made enquiries when I was in the other Colonies, and there was not a single vessel that would answer the purpose.

6. Will you favour the Committee with an opinion as to the best mode of proceeding to obtain the services of such a vessel?—I should think by advertising, first in the Australian Colonies; and if not successful there, then in England.

7. Do you think a rapid communication between the ports mentioned could be maintained regularly by sailing vessels?—No; most decidedly not; I think there is no part of the world where it would be more difficult than on the coast of New Zealand.

8. *By the Colonial Secretary.*—What is at present the average stay of the “Zingari” in each port?—About three days in each port, with the exception of Taranaki.

9. What is the average speed of the “Zingari”?—I cannot say for certain; I think about six knots an hour in fine weather.

10. Do you not think that the speed might be increased?—By the substitution of a new boiler her speed could be increased to an average of six knots an hour in all weathers; but she would be obliged to go off the coast for about two months, for the purpose of making the necessary alterations. The owners of the “Zingari” would not be disposed to make this alteration unless there was a contract entered into for not less than two years.

11. Supposing the above mentioned alterations to be made at what rate per annum would the owners undertake a monthly trip to all the ports including Otago?—I think for about £6000 per annum, but I am not prepared to enter into any contract at present.

12. Supposing the Government to enter into the arrangement, when could the “Zingari” commence her trips?—About four or five months from the time of the arrangement being entered into.