

REPORT OF THE SURVEYOR-GENERAL TO THE MINISTER OF LANDS.

SIR,—

Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 18th June, 1897.

I have the honour, in compliance with section 39 (2) of "The Land for Settlements Act, 1894," to report as follows on the "condition and settlement" of lands acquired under the above Act which have been handed over to this department to deal with.

Details of the operations connected with all the estates purchased will be found in the accompanying table, whilst that below shows those which were offered for selection during the year ended the 31st March, 1897.

District.	Area of Estate.			Area unselected, 31st March, 1896.			Number of Selectors.	Annual Rent.		
	A.	R.	P.	A.	R.	P.		£	s.	d.
Hawke's Bay—										
Raureka	427	2	0	...	...	...	20	534	2	0
Elsthorpe	10,293	0	0	97	1	18	39	2,269	7	0
Waimarie	430	1	30	25	0	19	17	435	10	0
Marlborough—										
Omaka	3,898	0	0	...	...	...	13	589	6	8
Canterbury—										
Orakipaoa	384	0	31	...	...	...	27	397	10	8
Highbank	9,121	3	8	8	0	0	74	3,039	13	6
Rakitairi	3,526	1	16	4	0	0	23	1,061	7	8
Waiapi	1,124	2	36	...	...	...	15	518	19	10
Otarakaro	39	3	9	5	2	0	6	96	19	8
Wharenui	73	1	10	47	2	7	7	106	16	10
Otago—										
Ardgowan	4,234	0	0	...	...	...	69	905	4	6
Makareao	2,367	3	31	40	0	22	35	390	18	0
Westland—										
Poerua	3,230	1	6	410	0	0	17	224	6	6
Total	39,151	1	17	637	2	26	362	11,570	2	10

The above figures refer to the estates that came in for selection during the year. There were also a number of selections made in those opened previously, and many forfeited sections were also taken up. The forfeitures last year numbered nineteen, and the arrears of rent at 31st March amounted to £640 0s. 10d.

The reports of inspections made by the Crown Lands Rangers all speak of the large amount of improvements that have been placed on the lands, but, as inspection was not due in some cases on the 31st March last, the figures can only be given in the cases which had been settled long enough to require inspection. These figures are: Value of improvements, £44,448 3s. 6d.; number of people living on the lands, 1,051; number of houses erected, 220. The above figures refer to all the estates opened for selection since the Act came into force. The detail reports on each estate will be found appended to the report of the Department of Lands and Survey for the period under consideration.

The net cost of the thirty-six estates paid for is	£541,218
But of these three estates had not been opened for selection at the 31st March last, their value being	94,705

The cost of the estates offered to the public is therefore	£446,513
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The annual rental of the land disposed of is £22,292, which is equal to interest on the total cost at the rate of 4·99 per cent. But as there are 4,424 acres still unlet, of the value of £17,877, the interest earned by the land which has been disposed of is 5·2 per cent., thus leaving a fair margin for rent in arrear and for failures.

During the year fresh regulations governing applications for lands under this Act were issued—4th February, 1897—and four estates were selected subject to them—viz., Rakitairi, Waiapi, Otarakaro, and Wharenui.

It is too early yet to say how these regulations will work, but so far as can at present be seen they will have the effect of securing a class of settlers better able to undertake the duties in connection with the high-priced lands the regulations affect. The power of selection placed in the hands of the Boards has been used freely, and many applicants who did not seem to those bodies to have sufficient means or were otherwise ineligible settlers were excluded from taking part in the ballots.

The provisions relating to workmen's homes have been applied to only one estate, that of Wharenui, but they have not been taken advantage of to the extent it was anticipated. The reason assigned is that the allotments are too small, whilst the rent is high.

S. PERCY SMITH,
Surveyor-General and Secretary of Crown Lands.

The Hon. J. McKenzie, Minister of Lands.