

Special mention is made in this report of the activities of the Ngati-Ponke Maori Association, which takes a prominent part in all matters relating to the physical, social, and moral welfare of the Maori residents of Wellington and the outlying suburbs, and has for its purpose the fostering of a more liberal understanding between the two races. At present the association is directing its energies towards patriotic purposes, and the provision of comforts for Natives serving with the forces. The reception of Maori soldiers returning from the front is its special concern.

Reports of the Board of Native Affairs and the Maori Purposes Fund Control Board are contained in parliamentary papers G.—10 and G.—11.

NATIVE LAND COURTS.

A statistical return of the business dealt with by the Courts during the period under review is appended in Table A.

During the year sittings of the Native Appellate Court were held at Auckland, Gisborne, Wanganui, and Wellington. At the Auckland sitting several appeals fell to be determined which involved important questions touching mud-flats and accretions to the foreshore, and the Native Land Court's powers to enter upon inquiries as to the ownership of them. The burden of the Appellate Court's decisions was to the effect that, save on partition proceedings where it was a matter of apportioning an excess of area admittedly due to accretion, the Native Land Court had no jurisdiction to determine the ownership of accretions and mud-flats which did not fall into the category of Native customary land—that is to say, once it was shown that the mud-flat or accretion was not customary land, the Native Land Court could not hear any dispute, even as between Natives, as to the ownership. Another appeal dealt with at this sitting concerned the “surplus lands” issue—that is, lands which remained in the Crown as surplus from the grants made by the Land Claims Commissioners out of areas purchased by the early settlers before the founding of the Colony and which on the coming of sovereignty reverted to the Crown. The Native Land Court held that two islands which were part of the surplus were Native customary land, the freehold of which could be transmuted to the Native owners by orders made by the Court. This judgment was reversed by the Appellate Court, which held that the customary title of the Natives had already been extinguished, and could not be subject to investigation by the Native Land Court.

NATIVE TRUSTEE.

The ordinary business of the Native Trust Office has been maintained throughout the year.

The Native Trustee's liability to his beneficiaries at 31st March, 1943, was £677,896, and his accumulated reserves totalled £129,370. Assets were represented by mortgage investments and advances to estates, £569,253; war-loan stock, £3,000; miscellaneous securities, £23,409; deposits at short call and cash balances, £94,940. During the year advances on mortgage totalling £15,788 were approved.

By arrangement with Army Base Records, the Native Trust Office acts as the clearing-house for estates of Maoris killed in action, by filing certificates of administration and collecting arrears of pay and allotments, which funds are held pending grants of probate, letters of administration, or succession orders to personalty by the Native Land Court. The accounts of 230 deceased Maori soldiers have already passed through the Native Trustee's hands; the Office makes no charge for this service.

MAORI LAND BOARDS.

The collective cash turnover of the seven Maori Land Boards for the year under review, with the figures for the preceding year shown in parentheses, were as follows: Receipts, £479,546 (£479,759); payments, £503,280 (£439,385). At the 31st March, 1943, the total liability to Native beneficiaries was £570,071, whilst assets included the following:—

Government securities—							£
Ordinary	..	..	..	..	..	..	52,463
War loan	..	..	..	..	..	..	106,650
							----- 159,113
Mortgages and charges	..	..	..	..	..	..	279,717
Deposits	..	..	..	..	..	..	214,093
Cash balances	..	..	..	..	..	..	21,347

The Board's total reserves for general and specific purposes now amount to £212,195.

To assist in meeting the requirements of the armed forces and increasing local demands, the Maori Land Boards are interested in encouraging Natives to grow kumara for marketing; in the Auckland, Rotorua, and Gisborne districts considerable areas have been planted. In addition to this crop, the Boards are giving every support to maize-production and potato-growing as part of the Maori war effort; the response generally has been most satisfactory.

The collective investments of the Maori Land Boards in war-loan securities now amount to £106,650.

STAFF.

The personnel of the Department as at the 31st March, 1943, numbered 575 officers, including 7 Judges of the Native Land Court, and comprised office staff (252 permanent and 216 temporary) and field staff (18 permanent and 89 temporary). These figures include, however, 175 officers serving with the armed forces, either overseas or in New Zealand, and their replacement by 75 wartime assistants, principally female clerks, also 13 officers seconded for duty with other Departments for the duration of the war. In addition, the Department employs some 128 men (chiefly Natives) on a regular weekly-wage basis as shepherds, stockmen, and general farm hands, but the bulk of the labour required for its land-development and farming operations is obtained by engaging Maoris on co-operative contracts. Excluding farm workers, 142 officers on the regular staff are members of the Maori race, and of this number 43 are serving in some capacity with the armed forces.