

New Appointment.—Chief Judge George Patrick Shepherd, the new Under-Secretary and Native Trustee, first joined the Justice Department in 1906. In 1916 he undertook work on the Native affairs side of the combined Justice-Native Departments, and in 1919, when the Departments were again separated, he transferred to the latter Department. He was promoted to Chief Clerk in 1922, admitted as a solicitor in 1926, and also appointed Research Officer in 1938, later in which year he was elevated to the Native Land Court Bench as Judge of the Ikaroa and South Island Native Land Court Districts. He became Deputy Chief Judge in 1940 on the retirement of Chief Judge C. E. MacCormick, and in February, 1941, was appointed Chief Judge of the Native Land Court.

Legislation

The Native Purposes Act passed on the 26th August, 1943, contained nineteen clauses, eight of which touched the general laws dealing with the Maori people and Native land. Probably the most important of these were two clauses which gave power to the Native Land Court to declare trusts in regard to Maori-owned land and Crown land reserved for the Maori people. The large number of owners which is frequently met with in Native land makes the administration of the land difficult. The legislation enables the Court, with the consent of the majority in value of the owners, to declare trusts for the common use of the owners for any purpose and to appoint trustees, who may farm or reclaim the land or do anything else which the Court permits them to do. Another power which will become more and more useful is that enabling the Court to appoint successors to the interests of Europeans in Native land. This will do away with the necessity of having to bring a title on to the Land Transfer Register simply for the purpose of effecting transmission of the interest of a deceased owner who is less than a half-caste Maori. Other amendments extend the powers of the Maori Land Boards in acting for the Natives in the enforcement of the covenants of leases of Native land, make more certain the offences attaching to unauthorized cutting of timber on Native land, and permit land taken for public works and no longer required for those purposes to be re-vested in the former owners by the Native Land Court. In addition, there were the usual "washing-up" clauses.

Native Land Courts

A statistical return of the activities of the Native Land and Appellate Courts during the year is appended in Table B, while details of the individual Courts are given under the district reports.

Native Appellate Court

Sittings of the Native Appellate Court were held during the year at Auckland, Rotorua, Wanganui, Gisborne, and Wellington. The sitting upon which most interest centred was that which commenced in Wellington towards the end of March. At this the appeals by the Crown against decisions given by the Native Land Court in respect of the ownership of Lake Waikaremoana and the Wanganui River came on to be heard by the Chief Judge and the five Judges of the Native Land Court. In the case of the Waikaremoana Lake a final decision of the Native Land Court awarding the lake to certain specified Maoris was under appeal. In the case of the Wanganui River only a preliminary determination by the Court that the bed of the river was customary land at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi was called in question. The proceedings were still in progress at the end of the year under review.

Native Trustee

The Native Trust Office has continued to assist in respect of the estates of Maoris who have had their lives taken in the present war. The balances of pay, &c., are collected and the necessary papers are lodged with the respective Native Land Courts, thus facilitating the receipt of the moneys by the beneficiaries. No charge is made for these services. Accounts to the extent of 384 have been handled to 31st March, 1944, the balances in the great majority of cases having been paid to those entitled. Details of the Native Trustee's investments and financial operations are given in Table A appended.

Maori Land Boards

The administration of some 660,000 acres of vested lands and the collection and distribution of rents, royalties, and purchase-money from these lands and from freehold areas which have been alienated have been fully sustained. Supplementing these normal operations, which are summarized in Table A appended, is the sponsoring and financing of efforts to increase primary production.

Welfare

The Government has decided to form a special Welfare Branch of the Native Department with carefully selected Maori officers attached to each District Office. Not only should this step ensure that full advantage of the various benefits and services available to the Maoris from the State is obtained—but also provide the means of better liaison or direct contact with the other State Departments whose activities embrace matters of Maori welfare—namely, Health, Education, Social Security, Man-power, Internal Affairs, and Rehabilitation. It will be necessary for the Welfare staff to act as Placement Officers