

industry. Although there now appears to be a gradual transition taking place from defence to general building works, the position with regard to shortage of materials and labour still remains difficult. It is anticipated, however, that the requirements of Native housing will receive its measure of priority under the national general works policies which are being formulated. In order to provide a more effective control of a progressive Native housing programme, it has been found necessary to establish a housing and building construction organization within the Department. This need arises from a number of causes, chief of which is the necessity for a closer contact with the Maori people in all matters dealing with this important foundation to their social and general welfare. The question of training Maoris in useful technical trades and allied occupations becomes of considerable importance in developing any building organization. It is proposed to promote the vocational aspect in conjunction with the general future development of the organization. Construction work will be undertaken as far as possible by small groups of Maori workers under the direction of qualified tradesmen who will also act in the capacity of instructors. As a measure to provide added amenities in keeping with a progressive welfare policy and at the same time to offset increased building-costs, as well as to bring its assistance within the reach of a larger number of Maoris, the Department has revised the basis of its lending policy to one not only offering easier repayment terms, but also a higher standard of home consistent with the need for improved living standards among the Maori people. Better housing-conditions can be considered as the basic solution to many of the health and sociological problems confronting the Maori race, and although present industrial emergencies will no doubt restrict building operations meantime, a progressive policy directed towards better standards of living for the Maori people will be vigorously pursued. During the year under review the Department's efforts resulted in a total of 97 homes being provided. Under the provisions of the Native Housing Act, 31 dwellings were erected or renovated and 17 houses purchased. On Native-land development and settlement schemes, 23 houses were completed and 26 renovated. The total number of dwellings erected or renovated for Maoris up to 31st March, 1944, was 2,451, while nearly 2,000 farm buildings have been provided for our Native-land settlement.

The investments of the Native Trustee and the seven Maori Lands Boards are controlled by the Board of Native Affairs and are in a sound position. At the 31st March last the funds invested by the Native Trustee amounted to £676,000, including £387,000 on mortgage securities to 374 Natives, £142,000 on overdraft to stations and other properties being farmed, £12,000 held in Government stock and local-body debentures, and £135,000 deposits at short call. The corresponding figures for the Maori Land Boards at the same date were: total investments, £759,000, including £147,000 by way of loans to 387 Maori mortgagors; £102,000 advances on farming properties and primary production projects; £213,000 in other Government securities and war-loan stock; and £250,000 on deposit with the Native Trustee.

On behalf of the Government, the Board of Native Affairs, and the staffs of the Native Department, I express heart-felt sympathy to the relatives of those men of the Maori Battalion and other units, many of whom were engaged on Native development schemes, who have been killed, injured, or imprisoned.

Towards the end of 1943 the Government approved of the appointment of the Maori Rehabilitation Finance Committee, as a joint committee of the Rehabilitation Board and the Board of Native Affairs, to control the repatriation of discharged returned Maori servicemen through the Native Department. The personnel of this committee comprises the Permanent Heads of the Departments of Native Affairs, Rehabilitation, Lands, and Treasury together with a second representative of the Rehabilitation Department (Mr. E. L. Cullen, M.P.). Under the general allocation of functions in the rehabilitation scheme envisaged for Maoris, the Native Department will administer loans for land-development and the purchase of farms, houses, furniture, businesses, and tools of trade for Maoris living in Native settlements or communities. Such applications from Maoris living as Europeans in European communities will be handled by the State Advances Corporation and the Rehabilitation Department. Maori tribal executive committees are acting in an advisory capacity, in conjunction with the local Rehabilitation Committees, for all applications to the Native Department from Maori ex-servicemen.

The organization of the Native Department is well equipped to undertake the responsibilities of Maori rehabilitation through the land and in the provision of houses. The amount of vote "Native Land Settlement" has been increased by £200,000 to cover the Department's functions in repatriation during the coming year.

I take this opportunity to record the Government's appreciation of the way the Maori farmers and the Maori people generally have responded to the call to increase production of that first necessity of war, the food-supply, an appreciation also of the services of the members of the Board of Native Affairs, and of the loyal and untiring efforts of the officers of the Native Department, whose zealous administration has so greatly contributed to this result.

Accompanying this statement are district reports on the various farming and land-development activities controlled by the Board of Native Affairs, and statistical and financial data concerning its operations are appended.

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