

assistance was given to local authorities and others interested in local government. Owing to the detailed nature of the work involved, it is not possible to deal with all the matters which came before the Department, but amongst the more general matters dealt with were—

- (a) Alterations of the boundaries of various local districts, particularly in relation to the City of Christchurch, where such problems became very prominent arising from several petitions for the inclusion of lands in that city;
- (b) Abolition of the system of separate riding finance in counties. Seventy-seven County Councils have now abolished this system;
- (c) The alteration of county riding boundaries and riding representation, which were more numerous by reason of the pending general elections of City Councils;
- (d) Inquiries and correspondence concerning the local-body elections, which were due to be held in May, 1944;
- (e) The appointment and election of members of Fire Boards, the approval of agreements for fire protection, the issue of loan authorities to Fire Boards, and allied matters;
- (f) Matters affecting the financial requirements of local authorities involving approvals and other action;
- (g) Rating and valuation questions, including urban farm land rating;
- (h) The administration and rehabilitation of Thames Borough and Matakaoa County;
- (i) Proposals for the constitution of new town districts;
- (j) Special questions arising out of the Auckland City Council's proposals to develop further its water-supply from the Waitakere and Hunua Ranges, and the alternative proposals advanced by certain objecting local authorities that the supply should be obtained from the Waikato River;
- (k) Miscellaneous activities relating to the problems of local bodies arising from day to day.

B. LEGISLATION

(1) *Statutes Amendment Act, 1943*

Several sections in this Act affected Acts administered by this Department. An important provision authorized County Councils to institute action for the control of nasella tussock, which, in some counties, has menaced farm production to a considerable extent.

(2) *Local Legislation Act, 1943*

A total of thirty-two clauses was included in this Bill as finally passed. The Act dealt with a wide range of local-government activity.

(3) *Local Acts*

Eight local Bills were submitted to the Department for examination and report, and these were duly passed into law. The Department was represented at the meetings of the Local Bills Committee when these Bills were under consideration.

(4) *Local Elections and Polls Amendment Act, 1941*

Towards the end of the year the Government indicated that, as a matter of policy, it desired to introduce legislation making certain important changes in the law relating to local-body elections and membership. These changes involved two main features:—

- (a) The introduction of the residential franchise for rural areas; and
- (b) Giving the right to employees to stand as candidates for the local authority that employs them.

Other changes proposed were incidental to these two main features, and involved the use of the parliamentary rolls for local elections, the removal of the disqualification for non-payment of rates, amending provisions as to voting by declaration, and altering the date for holding certain elections of specially-constituted Boards in Auckland and Christchurch so as to ease the congestion on normal polling-day.

A Bill embodying these proposals was referred to the Local Bills Committee to give organizations and others interested an opportunity of presenting evidence thereon. A considerable amount of evidence was brought before the Committee, necessitating lengthy sittings, throughout which the Department was represented. The Local Bills Committee recommended a large number of changes in the Bill as introduced. Most of these changes were largely of a machinery nature and there were none of a really fundamental character. The biggest change was the dropping of the proposals to use the parliamentary rolls for local elections. The evidence clearly showed that the scheme, whilst having much to commend it in principle, would not work out satisfactorily in practice. In place thereof provision was made for the compulsory enrolment of electors in boroughs and town districts. Upon the Bill being reported back to the House, it was evident that considerable opposition would be raised to certain of the provisions, and this opposition steadily developed during the later stages of the Bill, involving very lengthy sittings of the House. The Department was represented throughout the whole of the proceedings, and considerable use was made of departmental officers in giving information to members on the various aspects of the Bill which were under debate.

As finally passed, the Bill provided for the following main subject-matters:—

- (a) Postponement of local-body elections for one week;
- (b) Extension of time for closing of rolls in boroughs, town districts, and counties;
- (c) Compulsory enrolment of residential electors in boroughs and town districts;
- (d) Adoption of residential franchise in counties, road districts, electric-power districts, harbour districts, hospital districts, and catchment districts;
- (e) Special residential provision for returned servicemen of the present war;
- (f) Certain defaulting ratepayers to be allowed to vote at local-body elections;
- (g) Amending provisions as to voting by declaration;
- (h) Employees of local authorities to be qualified for membership thereof;
- (i) Postponement of Christchurch Drainage Board and Christchurch Tramway Board elections.