

There has been a noticeable increase in applications affecting lands subject to Part I of the Native Land Amendment Act, 1936. The expansion of the housing programme has also resulted in the making of several partition and vesting orders for dwelling-sites.

Rates on Native Lands

This question continues to take up a great deal of the Court's time. Of the 2,253 cases notified for hearing, 908 were in connection with rates. The Rangitikei County Council is one of the local bodies in this district which makes application regularly to this Court for orders under the Rating Act, 1925. In the area controlled by that county is a large tract of unoccupied Native land situated in the vicinity of the Kaimanawa Ranges. This area is wind-swept, non-revenue producing, and is not likely to be farmed. For the reasons shown, the county has had applications made under section 104 of the Rating Act, 1925, and at the last sitting of the Court at Tokaanu on the 12th March recommendations were made for the release of twenty-one blocks from the payment of rates.

Exchanges of bush areas and open country in the Tokaanu area are still being made between the Crown and the Maori owners, thus making available to the Maoris for farming purposes large areas hitherto unoccupied. One aspect of these exchanges which is of the utmost importance to the work of development in this locality is the question of rabbit control. With the bringing-in of large tracts of unoccupied Crown lands infested with rabbits, better measures can be devised for the control and ultimate extermination of this pest.

Alienations

Confirmation of alienations, with due regard to the protection of the interests of the Maori owners, continues to be an important phase of the work of the Native Land Court. Confirmation of leases forms the bulk of this branch of the work of the Court, and it is pleasing to record that a number of such leases were in favour of Maori lessees. Confirmation of transfers are not, in the main, encouraged by the Department, but where a sale is confirmed it is usual for the proceeds to be paid to the Maori Land Board for administration under section 281 of the Native Land Act, 1931. It is pleasing, also, to record the close co-operation that exists between the State Forest Service and the Native Land Court in connection with confirmation of timber grants, thus affording the fullest protection to the Maori owners.

Maori Land Board

The Maori Land Board has again endeavoured to ensure that the proceeds of sales of Native land received by it under section 281 of the Native Land Act, 1931, are utilized, with the approval of the Court, to the best possible advantage, either in the purchase of some tangible asset on behalf of the beneficiaries concerned or in assisting them with their housing or farming projects. During the year several leases were executed by the Board under the provisions of Part XVIII of the Native Land Act, 1931. Meetings of the owners of the Morikau Farm were also held under Part XVIII of the Native Land Act, 1931, to consider proposals to set aside amounts totalling £9,000 for the reconstruction, repair, and renovation of the pā on the Wanganui River and as a contribution to the Ngarimu Scholarship Fund. All such proposals were approved by the owners. The owners of the Morikau Farm are to be commended for their liberality and foresight. In the interest of the Maori owners, the Board is taking full advantage of the provisions of section 4 of the Native Purposes Act, 1943, in ensuring that the lessees of Native land are complying with the covenants of their leases. For this purpose, periodical inspections of leased lands are made by the Board's Supervisors, and, where necessary, action is taken to enforce the covenants of a lease or to recover damages for breach of covenant.