

granted for the holding of the triennial election of members of the Auckland Metropolitan Drainage Board so as to fit in with the November elections. The Eltham Drainage Board was authorized to vary the mode of publication of its balance-sheets for the years ended 31st March, 1946, and 31st March, 1947. Following final schemes issued by the Local Government Commission, the Ellesmere Lands Drainage Board was dissolved and the powers and functions thereof transferred to the North Canterbury Catchment Board, and the Pyramid Block Drainage District was abolished. The Hauraki Plains West Drainage Board passed a special order subdividing its district and fixing representation. Arrangements were made for the gazetting thereof.

(6) *River Districts*

The Benmore-Limehills, Winton, and Upper Winton River Districts were abolished on the recommendation of the Local Government Commission consequent on petitions presented under the provisions of section 141 of the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act, 1941. The river-control work in those areas will now be undertaken by the Catchment Board having jurisdiction over the area.

(7) *Fire Districts*

On 18th November, 1947, a disastrous fire, involving the loss of forty-one lives and substantial property, occurred at the premises of Messrs. J. Ballantyne and Co., Ltd., Christchurch. The Government decided to set up a Royal Commission to inquire into the cause of the fire and to make recommendations with respect to fire-prevention measures. The Commission was duly appointed, and consists of the Honourable Sir Harold Featherston Johnston, K.C. (Chairman), Mr. A. J. Dickson, City Engineer, Auckland, Mr. C. A. Woolley, Fire Brigade Superintendent, Wellington, and Mr. A. W. Croskery, Secretary, of Wellington. An officer of the Department was appointed as Secretary of the Commission. The Commission held a preliminary meeting in Christchurch on 17th December, 1947, and commenced taking evidence on 27th January, 1948. Evidence was still being heard at 31st March.

During the year, the triennial election and appointment of members of Fire Boards was carried out, and, in addition, steps were taken to make new appointments in respect of fifty-two extraordinary vacancies which occurred through resignations and various other reasons. Of these new appointments, three were in respect of Government members, twenty were insurance-company representatives, and twenty-nine were elected by contributory local authorities.

Effect was given to a final scheme issued by the Local Government Commission providing for the constitution of a new united fire district to cover the North Shore areas, including the Boroughs of Devonport, Takapuna, and Northcote, and the previous Fire District of Birkenhead. Subsequently the first members of the new Fire Board were appointed, and notification thereof published in the *Gazette*.

An extension of borrowing-powers was granted to the Timaru and Masterton Fire Boards, both in respect of new building proposals. Loan authorities were issued to several Boards, and consents were also given to a number of agreements for fire protection outside fire districts.

The usual list of fire-insurance companies carrying on fire-insurance business in New Zealand was published.

The estimates of expenditure of all Boards were reviewed and approved in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Brigades Act, 1926.

As in previous years, the annual report of the Inspector of Fire Brigades (H.-12) will be published as a separate report.