

B. FIRE DISTRICT : NORTH SHORE, AUCKLAND

The only inquiry involving fire districts was that mentioned earlier concerning fire protection in the North Shore boroughs of Devonport, Takapuna, Birkenhead, and Northcote, commonly known as the North Shore boroughs, Auckland.

The inquiry had its origin in the decision of the Devonport Borough to apply for the constitution of Devonport Borough as a fire district. Negotiations had proceeded some distance before the Commission came into existence. Devonport Borough had taken a poll of the ratepayers on the subject, but the response of the ratepayers was very unsatisfactory. Out of a total electoral roll of 7,400, only 216 electors voted, and the voting was 189 to 27 in favour of the establishment of a fire district.

It should be mentioned in passing that the fire-brigade services in Devonport prior to this date were under the control of the Borough Council. As there was no fire district constituted, the Borough Council did not receive any subsidies from the insurance underwriters. By the creation of a fire district, the borough and the underwriters would contribute equally to the fire-protection service, while a small subsidy would be available from the Government. One of the factors which brought this question to a head in Devonport was the existence of the Devonport Naval Base, which constitutes a very serious fire risk. Negotiations had proceeded for some time with the Government for the handing-over of the protection of the Devonport Base to the civilian Devonport brigade, so releasing the personnel at present engaged by the Navy Department for fire-fighting at the Base. The Devonport Borough was prepared to take over this protection, subject to satisfactory subsidies being available from the Government.

Prior to the application being made to the Local Government Commission, certain tentative proposals had been made to the other boroughs in the vicinity, particularly Takapuna, with a view to arranging for some united fire protection to service both boroughs. No finality, however, was reached. When the proposal to constitute a Devonport Fire District came before the Commission, certain investigations were immediately commenced, and the Commission felt that in all the circumstances there was a *prima facie* case for the establishment of a united fire district covering the area of all the four boroughs.

In addition to the Devonport Borough, Northcote and Takapuna Boroughs each maintained their own fire services. Birkenhead, which had the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's works as a major fire risk in its area, was a fire district under the control of a Fire Board. Birkenhead was therefore the only area where subsidies from the underwriters were available for fire-protection services. The whole question of the fire services on the North Shore, including the protection of the Devonport Naval Base, was thoroughly investigated at an inquiry held by the Commission on 22nd July, 1947, and the following day. All the local authorities, together with several other persons and institutions, gave evidence, and the advantages and disadvantages of united fire control were exhaustively examined.

The decision of the Commission was that a united fire district should be set up comprising the districts of the boroughs of Devonport, Takapuna, Birkenhead, and Northcote, and that the united Fire Board when established should also provide protective services for certain small areas of the Waitemata County contiguous to the above districts. It was also provided that the united Fire Board should undertake the protection of the Devonport Naval Base, subject to certain financial arrangements between the Government and the Fire Board.

Although there were certain objections as to detail, no serious objection was raised, and the united Fire District came into existence on the 1st April, 1948. The position now is that the insurance underwriters are responsible for their proportion of the costs of fire protection over the whole of the North Shore. The boroughs have been relieved of the responsibility for fire-protection services, and in general the services available to the residents will in the future be of a much higher character than formerly and probably at considerably less relative cost.