

SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Hon. T. H. McCOMBS, Minister in Charge of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

I HAVE the honour to submit herewith the annual report of the Department for the year 1947-48.

The year just completed has seen an expansion of the Department's activities in order to meet a marked increase in the immediate demands for scientific assistance which has arisen in every State Department and industry in this phase of the post-war period. Moreover, a policy of endeavouring to anticipate the scientific needs of the next decade has been adopted in all branches where opportunities have permitted it. In view of the momentous progress which is taking place overseas in physical, biological, and chemical sciences, the Department has not been unmindful of its responsibility to keep abreast of these developments and to be aware of their significance in so far as they may affect the welfare of the Dominion. Accordingly, arrangements have been made for a number of officers to undertake courses of studies in overseas institutions and to attend scientific conferences abroad. Through these means, through scientific liaison officers overseas, and through the provision of local facilities to enable work in the newer scientific developments to be done here, definite steps are being taken to ensure that the knowledge and benefits of scientific advances made in other countries are brought to New Zealand.

The extent to which State Departments and industrialists are referring their problems to the Department has been the cause of some embarrassment owing to the difficulties still being experienced in regard to shortages of qualified staff and accommodation. These difficulties have caused delays in the completion of problems on which advice was sought, with consequent disappointment. Again it has been found that sudden demands for extensive assistance have arisen where some promising results have emerged from scientific explorations done on a modest scale. The staff situation at present has unfortunately prevented such demands being adequately met. The shortage of experienced and qualified staff is a very real handicap, but perhaps even more serious for some branches of the Department is the now totally inadequate buildings in which they are housed. The efficiency and output of work from such branches could be greatly improved if they were provided with adequate accommodation. Furthermore, the time is rapidly approaching when the Department will be unable to undertake some important national tasks unless additional and better accommodation is provided.

There has been an increase in collaboration between various branches of the Department and with other State Departments in dealing with problems which require approaches from a number of different angles. This has enabled progress to be made and has lessened, to some extent, the handicaps imposed by shortage of staff and accommodation.

The Head Office organization of the Department has been strengthened in order to meet the administrative needs of the extending activities of its research branches.

A Hop Research Association was, at the request of hop-growers and brewers, established during the year, funds for the research work proposed being provided by the industry and the State in equal amounts.

Tanners and footwear-manufacturers have combined their resources for the formation of a Leather and Footwear Research Association, which will extend the scope of the existing Leather Research Association.

Geophysical investigations associated with the examination of dam-sites for hydro-electric power-stations and for coal surveys have been actively pursued, and this work will be extended now that staff and equipment from overseas seem more likely to be available.