

MINISTER'S STATEMENT

IN the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research provision has to be made to deal with science and research from a number of different standpoints. At one extreme the day-to-day service problems of Government Departments and industry require the scientific attention so essential to modern sound administration; at the other extreme, that reservoir of scientific truth from which all new knowledge springs has to be replenished by fundamental research. This is being achieved partly by grants to University colleges and partly by effort in the Department's own branches. In between these two limits there exists a large number of different types of activities. Research committees and associations provide for the problems of specific industries; branches of the Department deal with research into soils, pastures, crops, plant diseases, insect pests, botany, and biometrics, which are of interest to farming industries in the main; other branches cater for the service, development, and research needs of manufacturing industries, with their physics, chemistry, and engineering problems. The structural geological characteristics and mineral resources of New Zealand are in the province of the Geological Survey, and between the Survey and the Observatories (dealing with terrestrial magnetism, seismology, ionospheres, and oceanography) close association of effort exists on a number of problems of local and international significance.

In the year ended 31st March, 1949, the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, in its various branches, has contributed markedly to the solution of problems affecting the interests of the primary and manufacturing industries of the Dominion and various Departments of State.

Results have come rather from an aggregate of small achievements in a large number of fields rather than from a few outstanding developments. The position has now been reached when the demands made on the Department for assistance are greater than its resources of man-power and accommodation can provide for. This involves some postponement of work which is recognized as being of real national importance, and this, regrettable as it may seem to be, is an indication of the extent to which scientific guidance is necessary for both industry and Government.

In a country such as New Zealand the range of problems requiring scientific assistance is necessarily wide, and it has been the policy of the Department to render help wherever possible. This has left it open to the charge of dissipation of effort, a criticism which has been partly justified, but which has been met by the establishment of branches and research associations which focus attention on the problems of particular groups with common interests.

It is generally accepted to-day that only by collaborative action on the part of scientists trained in different techniques can problems be satisfactorily attacked and speedily solved. The departmental organization has been arranged to make provision for such co-operative attack, and a number of problems are being dealt with to-day on a collaborative basis, which often includes joint effort with other Departments.

Every effort has been made to shorten the time between the attainment of useful results and their being put into practice, despite difficulties experienced in rapid publication of results.

Full use was made of the help available from the presence in New Zealand of some 200 overseas scientists on the occasion of the Seventh Pacific Science Congress. It is impossible to assess the great value accruing to New Zealand's scientific effort from the exchange of ideas which took place during a Congress which was a pronounced success and a unique occasion in New Zealand's scientific history.

The Commonwealth aspects of scientific effort also received consideration arising out of the visits of Sir Ben Lockspeiser, Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Supply, Great Britain, and Sir Henry Tizard, Chairman of the Defence Research Policy Committee and of the Advisory Council on Scientific Policy of Great Britain.