

One fact that will be apparent from the following report is that throughout Australasia two main forms only of local bodies exist—viz., shires and municipalities, or, as we should say, counties and boroughs. In New South Wales I went exhaustively into the whole question with representative men in the shires, municipalities, and Government departments, and I was assured that their system worked excellently, and that they could not understand why in New Zealand it is necessary to have such a multiplicity of local bodies; and in every other State that I visited the Minister and Government officials said the same thing, and testified to the efficiency of their own systems. The Australian systems are much more simple than the New Zealand one, and in some of the States the law relating to shires and municipalities is almost identical—the name only is different.

I found also in all the States strong opposition to the subdivision of local bodies, and, in fact, in some States the law is such that a shire or municipality cannot be constituted unless it can command a certain minimum revenue by rating. There is also a decided movement to compel an amalgamation of the suburban boroughs in and around Sydney and Newcastle, and the Government is assisting in this project.

QUEENSLAND.

There are two main forms of local authority in Queensland—viz., shires and municipalities. There are 133 shires and 33 cities and towns. These bodies have powers similar to our counties and boroughs, and the main Act under which they all work is the Local Authorities Act, 1902, with its amendment of 1910.

The franchise is as follows: Generally, every person of either sex of the age of twenty-one who is a natural-born or naturalized subject, and who is rated as occupier or owner of rateable land, can vote. The number of votes depends on the value of the land, thus: Land valued at less than £500, one vote; land valued at from £500 to £1,000, two votes; and land valued at from £1,000 and upwards, three votes.

Rates are levied on the unimproved capital value, but the general rate must not exceed 6d. in the pound nor be less than $\frac{1}{2}$ d., and special rates must not exceed 3d. in the pound; and the minimum rate payable on any separate piece of rateable land is 5s.

Money may be borrowed either from the Central Government or from outside sources by debentures, or by overdraft on current account; but before a local body can borrow on debentures it must first give public notice of its intention, and, if demand be made by ratepayers having in the aggregate twenty votes, a poll must be taken, and in any case the local body must obtain the approval of the Governor in Council.

Local bodies have power to make their own by-laws and regulations, and, generally speaking, their powers are similar to those of counties and boroughs in New Zealand. There are, however, a few special matters to which attention may be drawn.

Thus, the Governor in Council may suspend, amend, or rescind any resolution of a local authority, or may prohibit the expenditure of any moneys from the local fund upon any work he deems unnecessary, or which will impose undue burdens on the ratepayers.

A local authority may require any land or any road to be fenced, or, if the fence is in disrepair, it may require the owner to repair or refence the same.

The Act makes provision for the preparation of model by-laws, but I am informed that none have yet been made.

The Auditor-General has power to require local authorities to keep their books in such form as he may decide.

There is power to set up joint local authorities for many special purposes. When this is done, representatives of local authorities so joined form one legal entity, with power to bind their respective Councils. This is of very considerable advantage in cases of works or questions that affect more than one local authority.

There is also power for the Governor in Council to make regulations prescribing the qualifications required by candidates for employment as engineers and surveyors by local authorities.

NEW SOUTH WALES.

There are two main forms of local authority in this State—viz., municipalities and shires. The municipalities have for the most part been in existence for many years, and they have been incorporated under various Acts since 1858; but the shires were constituted under the Shires Act, 1905. The Local Government Extension Act, 1906, amended and consolidated the law relating to municipalities, and it extended the principles of the Shires Act to municipalities. A later Act, called the Local Government Act, 1906, consolidated the two previous Acts, and in a most comprehensive form applied the same law to both municipalities and shires. Amendments of this last-named Act were passed in 1907 and 1908, widening the powers of the local bodies, and making important amendments to the main Act. I mention this because the authorities in New South Wales contend that their law is the most perfect form of local government in Australasia, and, moreover, that it was designedly placed piecemeal before Parliament as the only way that the great reform which it is contended has been brought about could have been accomplished.

There are certain features in these Acts that are novel, and which differ from those in force in any of the other Australian States or in New Zealand. The main statute contains only 211 clauses, and they deal for the most part with broad principles, and in simple language. They are not filled with a mass of conditions, machinery, or details. The Act, which is a model of brevity, provides that the Governor in Council may from time to time make, alter, or repeal Ordinances for the purpose of carrying out the principles laid down in the Act, and that these Ordinances shall have the force of law; and, moreover, that such Ordinances may apply either over the whole or any part of the State. Many of these Ordinances are in the nature of what we should call by-laws and regulations, which the local bodies in New South Wales have no power to make of their own motion.

There are many and varied powers provided for in the statute which apply to shires and municipalities, but many other powers are provided for that do not affect any local body unless so applied by an Order in Council, which the local body must itself apply for if it thinks it