

WELLINGTON.

(T. N. BRODRICK, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

LANDS OPENED FOR SELECTION DURING THE YEAR.

The area offered was 31,489 acres. This added to the area remaining open for application on the 1st April, 1914—viz., 11,225 acres—made a total of 42,714 acres available for selection during the year.

The lands placed on the market comprised principally the Gorge Block, 3,198 acres; Kaipare Block, 1,505 acres; Haurangi Block, 12,814 acres; Hurupi Block, 3,556 acres; small grazing-run, Momahaki Survey District, 2,397 acres; six lots in Falloon Settlement, 1,031 acres; one lot, Hikawera Settlement, 632 acres; and other lots in Karioi, Makotuku, Hunua, Whirinaki, Puketoi, Mount Cerberus Districts, Hawtrey and Heatherlea Settlements, &c. Auctions were held of lots in Mawaihakona, Pohangina, Kakahi, and Pongaroa Townships.

During the year a total area of 37,728 acres was selected by 161 applicants. The keen demand for land is shown by the fact that 1,558 formal applications were received.

LANDS TO BE OPENED.

It is proposed to offer for sale or selection during the current year over 250 lots, having an area of about 59,000 acres.

Steps are now being taken to offer for cash by public auction about 5 acres of the Wilford Settlement, Petone, in fifty-three lots; 1,233 acres of the Normandale Settlement, Lower Hutt, in eight lots; and 69 acres of the Hawtrey Settlement, Johnsonville, in fifty-six lots. It is hoped that the reduction of prices proposed under provisions of section 43 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1913, in the case of the last two settlements, may result in the disposal of lots for which there is no demand at the rents hitherto fixed.

Of the areas mentioned above, the survey of about 35,000 acres has been completed, and the sections are ready for offering to the public.

SALE OF TIMBER.

Fourteen lots of milling-timber, comprising 98,775,700 superficial feet, situated near Raetihi, Horopito, and Pokako, were offered at upsets aggregating £52,011. For twelve of the lots no bids were received, probably owing to the depression in the timber industry caused by the war. These twelve lots remain open for sale, and doubtless will be taken up when this industry revives. Two lots of timber in the Raketapauma Block, comprising 4,869,200 superficial feet, were also offered by auction and disposed of. In addition to a number of timber-cutting licenses granted over small areas, one lot comprising 9,903,600 superficial feet, situated near Horopito, was disposed of at a royalty of £5,137; another to the south of Owango, comprising 4,107,500 superficial feet, at a royalty of £1,602 15s. 7d.; and the Railway Department was granted the right to mill 13,303,592 superficial feet on an area of about 736 acres north-east of Ohakune at a royalty of £7,466 4s. 3d.

In connection with a proposal which is now under consideration for the exchange of milling-timber on Crown lands for the freehold of about 4,500 acres near Rangataua Township, portion of which is suitable for settlement, estimates have been made of the milling-timber on 1,250 acres of the Rangataua North Block and 2,280 acres of the Rangiwaia No. 1 Block. The quantity of timber on the former area is found to be 10,557,000 superficial feet, estimated royalty £3,384, and on the latter area 19,673,550 superficial feet, royalty £4,918. A proposal to set aside part of the Rangiwaia Block along the railway-line as a scenic reserve will reduce the exchangeable area in this block to 1,585 acres, the timber on which is valued at £3,422.

An appraisalment has been made of the milling-timber on an area of about 1,053 acres south of Owango, west of railway. There is here a quantity of 18,864,000 superficial feet, the royalty on which is estimated at £9,386. This timber can now be dealt with in whatever manner may be decided upon.

EXEMPTION FROM RENT AND RATES.

A matter that has received a great deal of consideration during late years was the reiterated complaint by the settlers in part of the North Waimarino and Retaruke Blocks that their rents were so high as to prevent the profitable working of their holdings. In September last these lands, which comprised sixty lots, having an area of 54,400 acres, were brought under the operation of section 127 of the Land Act, 1908, and exempted from payment of rent and rates for one year under the special power given by section 25 of the Reserves and other Lands Disposal, &c., Act, 1911, which provides that this concession may be granted to Crown tenants in cases where, owing to exceptional circumstances over which they have no control, they are prevented from occupying their holdings profitably. This resulted in a remission of rents to the amount of £4,179 15s. 6d. It was also decided, under the power given by section 13 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1912, and its amendments, to postpone payment of any rents in arrear after deduction of the amounts remitted. These concessions appear to have settled satisfactorily a long-standing grievance.

In order to give other settlers advantages enjoyed by tenants in their vicinity, steps are now being taken to bring also under the operation of section 127 of the Land Act, 1908, under the special power mentioned above, the Waipapa Valley Block, in South Waimarino, offered in April, 1913, which comprises an area of 5,417 acres in ten lots, giving an exemption for a period of three years; also two sections in Mangatiti and Morinui Blocks, having an area of 2,038 acres, one with exemption for two years and the other for four years. This remission of rent will amount to £2,103 10s.