

GENERAL.

The phenomenally dry season has been a serious drawback to the settlers, a considerably large area having been planted in wheat and barley which turned out in the majority of cases a failure, consequently the supply of grain from local sources is much below the average, which means a higher cost to the settler for seed for the coming season, which is to be hoped will be a good one to compensate for the one just past; but in spite of this the settlers are generally contented and hoping for better times.

CONCLUSION.

I have to thank the staff for their assistance and co-operation at all times.

WESTLAND.

(H. D. M. HASZARD, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The crisis through which the Dominion, in common with other parts of the Empire, is passing has not had the effect of retarding the progress of settlement in this district; in fact, in the matter of selections the area dealt with was in excess of the estimate made at the beginning of the year when peaceful conditions existed. The revenue anticipated under headings other than timber has been realized to within £50. The total receipts have fallen short of the estimate by £1,960, over £1,900 of this shortage being due to the restriction of sawmilling operations resulting from a temporary decrease in the demand for timber on the outbreak of war and the lack of steamers for freightage to Australia.

As a result of the high prices ruling for stock and produce the position of the settlers has made very satisfactory improvement, despite the somewhat adverse climatic conditions that existed during the spring and summer. The continuous wet weather had the effect of reducing the milk-yield, and, although there was an abundance of grass, attempts to save hay for winter feed were generally unsuccessful. Owing to the excessive rainfall, which militates against haymaking operations, it is surprising that more attention is not given to the making of ensilage, as settlers would be amply recouped for the outlay required to install the necessary plant by the certainty of having winter feed for their stock and the consequent increase in the carrying-capacity of their holdings, which is to a very large extent dependent upon the number that they are able to winter. The output of the butter and cheese factories was very satisfactory, and, in the case of those factories that did not enter into contracts for the sale of their products at a fixed price, very much enhanced returns will result from increased prices ruling for butter and cheese.

The first purchase of land in this district under the Land Settlement Finance Act was completed during the year by the Harihari Land Settlement Association, which acquired a property adjacent to the Harihari Dairy Factory. The whole of the members of this association come from the Taranaki District, where they have been engaged in dairying; and, as they have brought with them a herd of 140 cows from good milking strains, their advent to the district will result in material benefit to the cheese-factory. Should their venture meet with success, of which they are very sanguine, I anticipate that further operations under the Land Settlement Finance Act will follow.

In the early part of the year operations in the direction of disposing of new lands were restricted in anticipation of amendments to the statutes that were likely to result from the report of the Commission that was appointed to inquire into the conditions affecting tenures available in this district. As the report was not, however, dealt with by Parliament last session, the lands that had been subdivided for settlement were offered for selection under the tenure provided by the Karamea and Westland regulations. Although this tenure does not meet with very general approval, on account mainly of the absence of right to acquire the freehold and the refusal of the State Advances Department to accept the titles as security for advances, the number of applications received discloses a keen demand for land suitable for dairying.

The action of the Government in appointing a Commission with a view to devising a process by which the position of settlers as regards the tenures of their holdings might be improved was very much appreciated, and future developments are now awaited with interest.

The whole of the unoccupied pastoral runs in the district which had been withheld from selection for some time were offered for lease by auction, and nine runs, containing a total area of 153,260 acres, were disposed of; the remaining runs will be open for selection by public application early in the coming year. The right of renewal conferred upon holders of pastoral-run licenses by the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1913, has so improved the tenure as to create a keen demand for the more easily accessible of these runs, and numerous inquiries are now being received for them from persons in other districts.

Hitherto the land in this district has been dealt with very largely by free selection under the regulations for the occupation of pastoral lands in Karamea and Westland Mining Districts, this course being rendered necessary, as conflicting oil-boring, mining, and timber rights prevented the offering of blocks of any dimensions. These difficulties have now to some extent been overcome, especially in regard to oil-boring rights, and several blocks of land were offered for selection by public application during the year, while others will be available at an early date. The preparation of lands for selection and also the issue of titles to unsurveyed areas granted by the Land Board are seriously retarded owing to the reduction in my survey staff. In the matter of areas that have hitherto been granted as temporary grazing licenses, more permanent tenures not being then available on account