

HAWKE'S BAY.

(W. H. SKINNER, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The total area offered for sale or selection during the year ended 31st March, 1916, was 28,595 acres. The lands placed in the market comprised, mainly—Gwavas Settlement, 5,989 acres; Otamauri Settlement, 6,887 acres; Mangamaire Block, 8,594 acres. In addition, scattered sections in various parts of the district were offered and selected.

The number of applications dealt with during the year was 899, and the area selected under all tenures comprised 170,769 acres by 110 selectors. A good few applications were rejected in the public interest from single men of military age, and who were unable to produce evidence from the military authorities of their unfitness for active service.

Lands to be opened.—It is anticipated that an area of 101,605 acres will be offered for selection and selected during the ensuing year. The greater part of this area is to be opened for discharged soldiers.

Settlers throughout the whole of the Hawke's Bay and Poverty Bay districts have, generally speaking, had a good year on account of the high prices ruling for stock, wool, and all farm products.

In the Poverty Bay district a mild winter was experienced, with warm rains early in the spring, which brought on a great flush of pasture, and prospects generally looked very bright. Dry weather, however, set in about the middle of September and continued right through to February. Crops which promised well in the early spring were not as successful as they might have been. Oats were badly affected by blight or "rust," and were also attacked by caterpillars, while maize and pumpkins were also affected by blight. Cape barley, however, was slightly above the average, and rye-grass also did well, but threshed out on the light side. Dairy-farmers had splendid prospects at the beginning of the season, but the continued dry weather brought down the milk-supply rapidly, although the high prices ruling improved matters considerably. The well-established sheep-farmer, however, is reaping a rich harvest owing to the abnormal prices of wool and fat stock.

During the year a new freezing-works was established (the fourth in the Poverty Bay district), and killing was started in February last. This has already been the means of relieving the congestion in fat stock, and will greatly assist the farming community, especially the small farmers, who feel the lack of freezing-spaces most acutely.

Amongst items of interest is the Tobacco Company's farm at Clive Grange, and the crop is expected to yield some 90,000 lb. from an area of 100 acres. A factory is now being erected at Port Ahuriri for the manufacture of the tobacco for market. The Hawke's Bay Fruit-canning Company opened their new factory at Hastings in December last, and this promises to be an important industry. A new cheese-factory has also been erected by the Norsewood Dairy Company. This industry is seriously threatened owing to the lack of space for shipping the cheese output to England. If the position becomes more acute the factories will have to turn their attention for a time to the production of butter.

The demand for medium-sized areas of good land is still unsatisfied. At the recent ballot for sections in Mangamaire Block 291 persons from all parts of the Dominion applied for thirteen sections.

The season has been a very prosperous one: good prices have been obtained for stock, wool, and all farm-products.

The revenue received is a record for the district, and the outstanding rents are very small.

Transfers.—The Land Board dealt with 170 applications to transfer, covering an area of 104,013 acres, the value of improvements effected according to the Crown Lands Rangers reports being £131,507, and the consideration paid £306,491. Twenty-seven were declined, principally on account of the high consideration asked for the goodwill, or the proposed transferee not being landless, or being of military age and unable to produce evidence of inability to serve his country.

Land Board.—The Land Board held sixteen ordinary meetings at Napier and Gisborne, and there were also three special meetings held at Waipawa, Waipukurau, and Napier, in connection with ballots for Gwavas and Otamauri Settlements and Mangamaire Block. Mr. George Wright, whose term as nominated member expired, was reappointed.

Land for Members of Expeditionary Forces.—The concession made in last year's amendment of the Land Act permitting those absent with the Expeditionary Forces to apply for and to participate in the ballots for lands through accredited agents has been greatly appreciated by all parties concerned, and already taken advantage of in a number of cases. In the ballot for the Mangamaire Block in December three out of the four absent soldiers applying drew sections, and the land is being farmed by their parents or accredited agents during their absence. In the recent ballot of the Otamauri Estate (land for settlements) both returned (discharged) soldiers and those still at the front participated, and three members of the Expeditionary Force who are serving at the front drew sections.

TARANAKI.

(G. H. BULLARD, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

From a farming point of view, owing to favourable weather-conditions generally, resulting in a plentiful supply of feed, coupled with high prices for farm-products of all classes, the past year has been one of the best ever experienced in Taranaki. This is specially the case with those settlers who were well established and handling a payable number of stock, the returns from wool, butter-fat, and fat stock has been unprecedented.