

APPENDIX.

REPORTS OF COMMISSIONERS OF CROWN LANDS.

AUCKLAND.

(H. M. SKEET, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

DURING the year an area of 14,832 acres was opened for selection by discharged soldiers only, in addition to the preference given at ordinary ballots to such selectors. The number of provisional applications for land received up to the close of the year was 450, but the actual number of applications received for lands opened was only 134, and the number of holdings selected was seventy-two, comprising an area of 10,882 acres. From the time of selection the office has kept in close touch with the selectors, attending to their requirements in regard to advances, purchasing and inspecting stock, obtaining necessary mortgages and bills of sale, and making payments for stock and materials purchased, all of which we have endeavoured to arrange with the least possible delay in the interests of tenants. The total amount of advances authorized up to the end of the year was £24,488, and the amount actually paid was £6,902. It is, of course, scarcely necessary to remark that in order to enable the work to proceed smoothly and with a minimum of delay and inconvenience to the tenants it is essential that there should be the utmost possible elasticity, and no more formality than is absolutely necessary to protect the interests of the State.

It is satisfactory to record that nearly all the tenants have already made excellent progress on their holdings, and they are displaying an energy and enthusiasm that augurs well for their future success.

On the 31st March, 1917, there were twenty-eight sections, containing 7,780 acres, still available for selection.

HAWKE'S BAY.

(W. F. MARSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

It is now almost a twelvemonth since the first ballot under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915, took place, and the experience so far gained has been varied and profitable.

Of the two large blocks—viz., Otawhao and Purahotangihia—already settled, the former is adapted wholly for dairying, and the latter almost exclusively for sheep-farming; in each case good progress has been made, and the most inspiring sign is the general satisfaction expressed by the settlers.

The blocks known as Watea and Marakeke to be opened very shortly present a different problem, as they will require the close attention of men willing and able to devote all their energies to successful mixed farming under closer cultivation.

Surveys are partly complete, or near completion, of lands aggregating about 45,500 acres suitable only for sheep-farming, and which will be ready for offering at the opportune season; and it is such class of land which appeals most to the settler in Hawke's Bay.

It is a matter of regret that the Tiratu Block of 5,730 acres, near Dannevirke, although subdivided, could not be put on the market this season—due to the absolute necessity of providing proper road access for the small-holders for whom the block was intended. In the meantime, however, it is well let.

The examination and selection of applicants under the Act have caused the Land Board much thought, and very careful consideration has been given in all cases. Generally speaking, applicants are of three classes—those who know the game and are prepared to see it through; those who have not the experience but are determined to seize the opportunity offered them, quite realizing that they may have to suffer hardships; and finally those who have no experience, not much determination, and the belief that the land is a loving stepmother to all her children. The first will go straight ahead, the second will require nursing for some time, and the third will gradually drop out and make room for others.

It may be mentioned that the first year of a soldier settler's term entails a lot of departmental office-work. With the ordinary settler this is almost negligible, but the soldier settler's primary needs make almost a personal equation, and those members of my staff who have been most in contact with the duties have not spared themselves in the endeavour to extend every assistance to the selector.

TARANAKI.

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

There has not been very much inquiry on the part of returned soldiers for holdings in this district, and little competition resulted for the sections that were made available for settlement. This may be due largely to the fact that the sections offered have been mostly bush country, more or less remote, and suited only for men physically fit and possessing experience at bushwork. A total area of 8,340 acres, comprising thirteen sections, has been made available to date. Other discharged soldiers have acquired Crown leases by transfer, or were possessed of such before going on active service, and both classes are now by the amending Act of 1916 entitled to the benefits of the advance up to £500 for improvements provided for in the original Act of 1915. The total number of discharged soldiers holding land in the district is thirteen, aggregating 4,381 acres.