

REPORT.

SIR,—

Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 14th July, 1919.

I have the honour to submit herewith the report on the operations of the Department of Lands and Survey for the year ended 31st March, 1919.

I have, &c.,

T. N. BRODRICK, Under-Secretary.

The Hon. D. H. Guthrie, Minister of Lands.

REPORT.

THE activities of this Department during the year have been largely concentrated on the settlement of soldiers upon the land and in making advances to them for the purpose of developing their holdings. A separate report upon Discharged Soldiers Settlement (C.—9) deals with this matter.

CONDITIONS OF SETTLEMENT.

War conditions prevailed for the greater part of the year under review, and the progress of settlement was greatly retarded by the shortage of labour due to the absence of many experienced farmers and farm labourers on active service, and the high cost of fencing-material, grass-seed, &c.

In the South Island farming operations in the spring were hindered by an unusually wet season, consequently the harvest was late, but a fair yield was obtained. A very dry autumn was experienced in Hawke's Bay and Auckland, and caused much loss amongst stock.

Generally speaking, however, owing to the high prices ruling for stock and farm-produce, the majority of the landowners have had a successful year, as may be gathered by a perusal of the reports of the various Commissioners of Crown Lands which appear in Appendix I.

The dairying industry is still flourishing, and in many parts of the Dominion very high prices are asked for well-established dairy farms. During the serious epidemic in the latter part of the year this industry, in common with others, suffered severely, and for some weeks in the height of the season the falling-off in factory supplies was very marked.

Now that the war is over and the majority of our soldiers have returned home closer settlement and increased production may be expected, so that when normal conditions prevail once again and new markets are opened overseas to receive the Dominion's produce the future prospects of the farming community and the country generally must be regarded as very bright.

LEGISLATION.

The following is a brief summary of the legislation passed by Parliament during last session affecting the operations of this Department:—

Land Laws Amendment Act.—This was a short Act of eight sections. Section 3 increases the allowances payable to members of Land Boards from 15s. to £1 a day while attending Board meetings. Section 4 provides that section 53 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1913, fixing the minimum age-limit of applicants for pastoral leases at twenty-one years, shall not apply in the cases of persons engaged on military service beyond New Zealand, or of soldiers discharged from such service. Section 5 provides machinery for the effective working of the two land districts into which the old Auckland Land District has been subdivided. Section 6 provides that in the case of renewals of small grazing-run leases under sections 182 of the Land Act, 1892, and 218 of the Land Act, 1908, it shall be held that Land Boards have at all times had the power since the commencement of these Acts to fix the annual rents at not less than 2½ per cent. on unimproved value. Section 7 gives power to subdivide small grazing-runs granted under the Land Act, 1892. Section 8 prescribes the method whereby compensation shall be paid for land resumed by Crown under Part VII of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1913, in cases where it is decided to take private lands where aggregation has occurred.

Appropriation Act.—Section 19 provided for the expenditure on roads to open up lands for discharged soldiers of an amount of £20,000 out of the sum annually provided for roads, &c., under section 63 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1913.

Repatriation Act.—Section 18 provides that all discharged soldiers who have been classed as medically fit for service abroad and who have served as members of an Expeditionary Force in a military training-camp, and remained attached to that camp on the 12th November, 1918, shall be eligible to obtain the concessions that may be granted under sections 2 and 3 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917.

Reserves, &c., Disposal Act.—This Act, which authorizes special dealings with public reserves, &c., contains sixty-nine clauses, which relate to matters of purely local interest.

DIVISION OF AUCKLAND LAND DISTRICT.

For some time past the division of the Auckland Land District, which contained 13,525,540 acres of the Dominion's total area of 66,292,232 acres, has been under contemplation, and strong representations as to the necessity of accomplishing this at an early date were made by Mr. V. H.