

The greater part of the material for the distribution-lines has already arrived, but owing to shipping difficulties the delivery of the poles has only recently commenced, and until more are available it will be impossible to commence the erection of the lines.

An agreement has also been negotiated with the Waihi Grand Junction Gold Company under which their spare steam plant is to be at the disposal of the Government over periods of heavy load or of breakdown, thus enabling the spare unit of 1,400 h.p. at Horahora to be put into regular service, and rendering this additional output available for sale.

ELECTRIC-POWER BOARDS.

The function of the Government in connection with hydro-electric supply consists essentially in the construction of main generation stations and the main transmission-lines and substations from which the power will be sold in bulk to the local distributing authorities. The latter will be left the duty of reticulation and retail sale. The Government policy will be to throw upon local organizations practically the whole business side of the undertakings other than the primary generation, high-tension transmission, and sale in bulk. In the past the only local authorities available have been the Borough and County Councils, but in order to provide a stronger and a specialized organization the Electric-power Boards Act, 1918, was passed. This Act provides that several adjacent local districts may unite and set up an elected Power Board, with rating-powers. The provisions of this Act have now been taken advantage of by ten electric-power districts. Although the Act provides for inner and outer areas, most of the Boards have taken in the whole of their district as an inner area irrespective of the density of settlement, thus expressing their confidence in the development of the back country and in its settlement by farmers who will be sufficiently progressive to make full use of the advantages of electric-power supply.

With regard to the future the principles on which the boundaries of electric-power districts should be determined are not set out in the Act, but under clause 3 the responsibility of deciding whether proposed boundaries are desirable or otherwise is cast on the Governor-General in Council. Hitherto no amendment has been made in the districts as sought in the petitions submitted, but it is obvious that if the whole Dominion is to be dealt with in the best manner possible it is essential that a comprehensive scheme should be drawn up. This has been done, and in future it will be necessary for the petitions to be submitted to the Minister for approval before they are circulated, and any necessary alterations made in the boundaries. Difficulties will probably be encountered in the districts which include the larger of the power-supply undertakings, owing to the fact that country distribution, though the most important part of the Power Boards' activities, and the most profitable from the national point of view, cannot be as remunerative as the city supply because of the longer lines that are required. The cities and larger towns, however, must realize the extent to which they are dependent for their prosperity on the country business, and co-operate heartily in comprehensive systems even including in each case substantial portions of less remunerative country reticulations.

Five of the Power Board districts already constituted have submitted their loan proposals to the ratepayers, amounting in all to £1,980,000. This amounts to over £20 per head of the populations of the districts concerned, and it gives some indication of the future extent and importance of the Electric-power Board activities. The almost unanimous votes by which these loan proposals have been carried indicate, however, the public opinion in the matter.

OTHER LOCAL ELECTRIC-POWER SUPPLY AUTHORITIES.

There are now seventy-one local electric-supply authorities operating in the Dominion, with a total capacity of 45,805 kilowatts, as compared with 43,899 kilowatts last year. The demand for additional power has been very urgent, but the extensions have in most cases been delayed owing to the difficulty in obtaining plant and materials. It is now expected that with the reversion to more normal conditions these difficulties will be overcome. Each of the main cities is proposing large extensions. The seven main local authorities have proposals in hand which will add 33,500 kilowatts to their installed capacity—at a proposed capital outlay of £1,582,000. In each case there is provision that the proposed plant shall work in with the Government hydro-electric supply when available.