

and their reissue in an amended form so as to permit the deposit of tailings only on such conditions as will obviate all liability to damage to either the rivers or adjacent agricultural lands, and also on payment of the charges referred to on page 23 hereof.

CROWN LANDS TO BE LOADED FOR IMPROVEMENTS.

Evidence was obtained from officers of the Land Drainage Department that a large area of Crown land will not only be greatly benefited by the river-improvement works, but also that such land is and will remain practically valueless without such works. It will therefore be fair to load such lands with the value of the benefit to be gained.

Mr. Thompson, the Chief Drainage Engineer, stated that about 27,000 acres between the Waihou and Piako and across to the Waitoa would be benefited, and that in this area there is about 2,000 acres of really good land south of Kerepeehi, in the delta of the Awaitei and the Piako. As regards this latter block he stated that its capital value in the books of his Department at present was £1,600, but that when drained it will be worth £30 per acre, and that it will cost about £10 per acre to drain it. He thought it would be fair to load that block at the rate of £3 per acre on account of the Waihou River improvement works. The next block was one of 6,300 acres, which Mr. Thompson thought might also be loaded to the extent of £3 per acre. Out of the whole 27,000 acres he thinks 13,800 acres will be directly benefited by the Waihou River works, and can be loaded at rates varying from 10s. to £3 per acre.

From the manner in which Mr. Thompson gave his evidence it seemed clear that he wished to quote figures that would be well on the safe side. In view of the prices that agricultural lands are now realizing it is probable that the lands above referred to could stand loading at a higher rate than Mr. Thompson quotes.

If these lands are to be sold for cash they should be loaded at rates at least equal to those suggested by Mr. Thompson, and at higher rates if practicable, and the loading, when paid, should be credited to the Rivers Improvement Account. If, however, the lands are leased, then the due share of the annual rent should be so credited. The rating on these lands to be paid by the Minister of Lands until they are disposed of.

SETTING UP OF RIVER BOARD.

The Act (section 20) provides for the setting-up of a River Board to control the rivers and to carry on all the works, and generally to exercise all the functions at present vested in the Minister of Public Works regarding them, but such Board is not to come into existence until the works authorized by the Act have been completed. There is a good deal of local feeling, however, in favour of setting up the Board without further delay. It is pointed out that the works have already been in progress for ten years and are not yet half-finished, and it may possibly be another ten years before they are entirely completed, and the settlers in the meantime have no voice regarding them.

If the settlers, either directly or through the local authorities, are now to be called upon to make substantial contributions towards the cost of the interest, sinking fund, and maintenance of the works, it is reasonable, no doubt, that some Board of management should be established on which the local ratepayers could be represented. On the other hand, it would not be reasonable for the conduct and control of the works to be entirely removed from the Government if the Government is still to provide all the money required and to pay the interest or half of it. It seems to your Commissioners, therefore, that the time for setting up the Board has scarcely yet arrived, but when it is decided to bring it into existence we think that a smaller Board than that provided in the Act would suffice. A Board of eleven members was contemplated when the Act was drawn, and the Hauraki Plains County—the largest ratepayer—was not provided for, as the county was not in existence when the Act was passed, and Matamata County was not provided for either, as that county was not included in the rating-area.

If representation on the scale contemplated in the Act is required, and members allotted to the Hauraki Plains and Matamata Counties also, it would mean esta-