

1922.

NEW ZEALAND.

LAND FOR SETTLEMENTS ACT, 1908

(REPORT ON THE).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly in compliance with Section 85 of the Land for Settlements Act, 1908.

The LAND PURCHASE CONTROLLER to the MINISTER OF LANDS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 31st August, 1922.

I have the honour to submit the report of the Department for the year ended the 31st March, 1922.

The operations of the Department have been very much curtailed during the period, the number of estates offered being 148, with an area of 137,611 acres. There were, however, others offered direct to the local Land Purchase Boards. The area purchased and mostly settled by ballot was 5,165 acres, of a value of £97,887. In this amount is included the purchase of live and dead stock on McDonald's and Mount Pisa (Otago), as well as a considerable sum on the latter for fencing, water-rights, &c.

The area purchased under section 3 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act, 1917, for forty-seven individual soldiers, was 3,099 acres, valued at £122,059. Of properties selected by discharged soldiers under section 2 of the Act the purchase is approved of by the local Land Boards and does not pass through this office. Notwithstanding the slump in stock and produce, the value of land generally has not fluctuated much and has not yet reached a payable level, consequently very few sales are taking place. There are, however, signs of a better demand.

In January last the unoccupied portion of the Clifton Settlement, near Balclutha, was taken in hand under the direction of this Department, and already about 1,000 acres have been ploughed, mostly with the digger-plough. It is proposed to sow the bulk with catch-crops. A small area has been lined and sown down, and the prospects of a successful sward are very encouraging. There will be, say, 200 to 300 acres in oats, 100 acres in rape, 200 to 300 acres in turnips, 200 acres in oats for feeding down, and the balance grass, mostly temporary. The stock (sheep and cattle) are doing remarkably well, and the manager speaks enthusiastically of the results so far.

The returns from Teviot have been quite satisfactory. The wool averaged 1s. per pound net, or a total of £12,035, in store at Dunedin. The number of sheep (Corriedales) shorn was 28,632, and weight of wool 239,005 lb. net, including twenty-two bales of crutchings. Eight thousand lambs were marked. The surplus sheep sold at prices much in advance of last season. The flock of nearly thirty thousand is now of a high standard. The rabbit pest is being energetically dealt with, and there is now a marked change in the appearance of the country. There are four settlers in possession of sections.

At Mount Pisa the principal work is directed to the destruction of rabbits. It is hoped to have them well in hand before the winter is over. The sheep taken over were a very mixed lot, and a very large proportion was only fit for boiling down. The number of breeding-ewes is not sufficient to maintain the flock, therefore outside sheep have had to be purchased to make up the decrease for culling and loss. The right sort is most difficult to pick up; besides, strange sheep take time to settle on the country. About 1,800 two-tooth Merinos and "comebacks" were secured in April. I am afraid if the property is disposed of in small blocks the settlers will largely depend upon the rabbit for their revenue, and if an inexperienced person gets a section disaster will certainly follow.

Land Settlement Finance Act.—As in the case of recent years, there were no transactions under this Act.

Mr. T. N. Brodrick, I.S.O., O.B.E., late Under-Secretary for Lands, has retired from the Board. Mr. Brodrick has had a very long experience in the subdivision and settlement of lands purchased for settlement. He held the position of Commissioner of Crown Lands in the important districts of Hawke's Bay, Canterbury, and Wellington, and for the past seven years was Under-Secretary for Lands, and has been a member of local and the Dominion Land Purchase Board. For the past thirteen years I have been closely identified with him, and can speak with every confidence of the care and judgment he has at all times bestowed upon the business before the Board. I offer him my best wishes for a pleasant time in his retirement. Another member of the Board, Mr. G. H. M. McClure, has also retired after a long period of strenuous work in the interests of settlement. I also tender to him my best wishes upon his retirement.

JOHN D. RITCHIE,
Land Purchase Controller.