

NATIVE LAND PURCHASE BOARD.

There have been 114,035 acres of Native land purchased by the Crown during the year, and 129 blocks, comprising 45,690 acres, have been proclaimed Crown land. The total area of Native land purchased by the Crown since the 1st April, 1910, is 1,247,200 acres, the purchase-money being £2,952,092—an average of 104,000 acres acquired each year, at an average expenditure of £246,000. The attached tables will show the land proclaimed and those blocks of which a partial purchase has been made. Of the area purchased, tenants have been enabled, under the provision in that behalf, to freehold some 11,712 acres.

The total expenditure under the Native Land Settlement Account last year amounted to £178,735.

NATIVE-LAND MATTERS.

The Urewera Lands Act of 1921, enabling the Crown purchases in that district to be consolidated, and providing for the issue of freehold titles to the Natives for the residue, became law in February, and Messrs. Carr and Knight were appointed Commissioners. They are proceeding with the duty of consolidating and locating the Crown and Native interests.

In addition to the Urewera lands, several consolidation schemes are in progress on the east coast of the North Island, where the Natives have already had experience of the benefit of grouping the scattered interests into a compact block. The advantage, too, from a settlement point of view must be obvious. It is anticipated that other sections of the Natives, with the examples before them, will also adopt the system, and thus save the expense of numerous partitions while incidentally lessening the work of the Courts and the Department.

According to the previous figures published, the estimated area of land held in the North Island by the Native owners is as follows :—

	Acres.	Acres.
Estimated at 31st March, 1921	..	4,639,573
Sales to Crown	114,035	
Sales to private persons	53,189	
		167,224
Balance still held	..	4,472,349

This takes no stock of lands that have become European lands by descent, by Court order, or by the owners becoming Europeanized. The number of Natives declared to be Europeans since the passing of the Native Land Amendment Act, 1912, to the 31st March last total fifty-four, of which ten were declared such during the past year.

NATIVE WELFARE.

The census of the Maori population which was published during the year has an encouraging effect on those who have the well-being of the Maori at heart, in the disclosure that the Native population, in spite of the war and the influenza epidemic, increased since 1916 by nearly 3,000 souls, giving a total Maori population of 52,751 persons. The whole of the increase is accounted for in actual Maoris. The half-castes living as Maoris have decreased by 413, but this decrease is probably more apparent than real, as very many half-castes adopt the European style of living and would probably be included in the European count.

The census also discloses that the Maori gradually is adapting himself to pastoral and dairying pursuits. The total Maori-owned sheep shorn during the 1919–20 season was 420,880, while 153,651 lambs were tailed, making a grand total of 574,531 sheep owned by Natives. They also owned 16,389 dairy cows, 43,383 other horned cattle, 13,577 horses, and 10,334 pigs. The sheep returns for the 31st March, 1921, show that in the North Island the Natives owned about 460,000 sheep. In two of the east coast counties, Matakaoa and Waiapu, where the Natives take a keen interest in the pastoral industry, the Natives own about 225,300 sheep out of a total of 664,097, or about 34 per cent. All of this is a hopeful sign.

The health of the Natives has been receiving special attention from the Health Department, under the special supervision of one of their own race, Dr. P. H. Buck, Director of Maori Hygiene, and a body of devoted nurses, who are doing splendid and effective work, supplemented by the Native-school teachers; while the spiritual welfare of the Maori is safely left in the hands of the Christian Churches, who have a band of heroic workers employed in their self-imposed task.

The Maoris have not escaped the result of the business depression, and in some extreme cases relief has had to be given to them; but in the majority of cases they have set a wonderful example of patience and self-restraint, and a very ready response to the call to help one another to tide over the worst of it.

R. N. JONES, Under-Secretary.