

The volume of work dealt with in the office shows on the whole comparatively little diminution, that which has been lost in some directions being counterbalanced by increases in others. The work of the inspecting staff has been particularly arduous, and the efforts which they have made to cope with the work at the sacrifice of the leisure to which they are entitled is deserving of great praise. The office staff, especially the senior officers, have done their best to cope with the work satisfactorily, and to their efforts credit is due for much of the success of the year's work.

HAWKE'S BAY.

(W. F. MARSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

It is no exaggeration to state that settlement in Hawke's Bay has suffered severely during the past twelve months, due in a great measure to a fourth consecutive dry year, in conjunction with the great fall in the prices of stock and staple products. For the first nine months of 1921 the rainfall was so phenomenally low that, despite splendid heavy rains in October, the year finished with the lowest rainfall record since 1888. The October rains had such a wonderful effect on all crops and pasture that it was confidently anticipated the returns from a bountiful harvest would, to a considerable extent, compensate for the losses in stock and wool. But the unexpected happened, and most of the crops grown in the district were completely spoilt by exceptionally wet weather in January and February, 1922.

At the present time it is difficult to take an optimistic view of the prospects of general farming: prices for sheep, cattle, wool, and butter have apparently taken a steady upward tendency, but the losses sustained by climatic and financial causes have been so severe that a considerable period must elapse before conditions can again become normal. It is unfortunately becoming probable that some settlers who acquired holdings with State assistance within the last two or three years will have become weary of the struggle against adverse circumstances, and must give place to men of greater experience and endowed with a sufficiency of capital. As, however, more than the average duration of dry seasons has been experienced, and all classes—agriculturists, pastoralists, dairy-farmers, and fruitgrowers—have now participated in the general slump, there is a certain solace in the belief that the worst has really passed, and that the Hawke's Bay District is facing the dawn of a brighter future.

Lands opened for Selection.—The lands offered comprised fifty-one allotments, of a total area of 26,886 acres, of which 4,972 acres were made available exclusively for discharged soldiers, and 7,524 acres for ordinary selection for the first time with preference conditions (including discharged soldiers) indicated in section 4 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1920. The remainder of the area comprised lands that were included in the Land Guide as being open exclusively for soldier settlement, which, having proved unattractive to discharged soldiers, probably on account (in part) of the cost of clearing, grassing, and fencing, were made available for general application by other qualified persons who were seeking land. The auction sales effected during the year were ten allotments, of a total area of 37 acres 2 roods, comprising a subdivision of suburban land at Ruatorea, all of which realized very substantial prices when offered. In addition to the foregoing an area of 6,372 acres in the Wairoa district was leased to the Maori Soldiers' Fund Incorporated Trustees, Gisborne, for a term of thirty-three years, with a renewal of another term of thirty-three years, under the provisions of section 35 of the Reserves Enabling Act of 1919.

Land Board Work.—Sixteen meetings of the Board have been held at Napier and Gisborne. The aggregate number of items dealt with was 1,605, the bulk of which concerned the settlement of discharged soldiers, and required special consideration in order that the now large body of settlers under that heading might be afforded every reasonable facility to make a success of their undertakings, while at the same time the financial interests of the State might be adequately safeguarded.

Revenue and Arrears.—The total revenue for the year under all headings was £228,965, out of which £77,315 was received for the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account as principal and interest on amounts advanced for the purchase of properties, or for stocking and improving the same. The total number of tenants at the close of the year was 2,192, occupying an area of 1,101,235 acres, and carrying an annual rental of £211,489. The arrears at the close of the year amounted to £25,602, owing by 360 selectors; but the position cannot be regarded as very serious, in view of the difficulties that have confronted tenants during the present financial crisis. Every case has received separate and studied consideration, and it is confidently anticipated that with the return of prices to more normal conditions during the ensuing year, and judicious postponements where necessary, the present outstandings will, in the majority of cases, gradually disappear. It is hardly necessary to add in this connection that the collection of the revenue during the year has been a matter presenting many difficulties and causing much anxiety, and in meeting a situation unparalleled in the history of the Department the whole of the resources of the Land Board and the staff have been fully drawn upon.

Recent Legislation.—The important legislation enacted in the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1921–22, relating to small-grazing-run holders and deferred-payment licensees will very materially ease the position of the men holding land under these two tenures. The concessions referred to in the foregoing legislation were timely, and will relieve the settlers affected to a very considerable extent, and enable them to arrange their finances and carry on during the existing financial stress.

Land remaining for Future Selection.—The land available for early disposal consists of about forty allotments, of a total area of about 60,236 acres. The principal areas are as follows: The Waikopiro Block, of 1,790 acres, in five sections, situated in a good district near Ormondville, and