

1925.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEPARTMENT OF LANDS AND SURVEY.

PUBLIC DOMAINS OF NEW ZEALAND

(ANNUAL REPORT ON).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

SIR,—

Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 4th June, 1925.

I have the honour to report on the public domains of the Dominion for the year ended 31st March, 1925.

Eight new domains, totalling 85 acres, were brought under the provisions of Part II of the Public Reserves and Domains Act, 1908, during the year. Boards have been appointed to control five of these new areas, and arrangements are well in hand for similar appointments in the other three cases. Additions totalling 156 acres were also made to eight existing domains.

Domains to the number of 653, comprising a total area of approximately 72,600 acres, are now administered under Part II of the Act. This includes, however, the Wanganui River Trust Domain of over 23,000 acres. The various Commissioners of Crown Lands control forty-nine of these domains, 227 are administered by local authorities acting as Domain Boards, while the remainder are under the control of local Boards appointed from time to time.

Various domain matters requiring special legislation were dealt with in the Reserves and other Lands Disposal and Public Bodies Empowering Act, 1924. By section 3 of the corresponding Act of 1907 an area of 19 acres 3 roods 35·8 perches at Port Albert was vested in the Albertland South Road Board for the purposes of a public recreation-ground. The Rodney County Council (successors to the Road Board) applied to have control of the reserve taken over by a Board of local residents, and to enable this to be done it was necessary to declare the area a public domain subject to the provisions of the Public Reserves and Domains Act, 1908. This action has been followed by the appointment of a local Domain Board. Authority was granted for the expenditure on other reserves in the borough of the surplus of certain funds raised by public subscription for the purpose of providing playing equipment for children on the Onehunga Domain. The reservation over an area of 3 acres and 7 perches of the Kawakawa Domain not required for recreation was cancelled with a view to its being added to an adjoining farm held by a discharged soldier. The Manukau County Council was empowered to sell and transfer to the Crown the East Tamaki Recreation Reserve. Provision was made for cancelling the reservation over that portion of the Pahurehure Domain known as the Old Market Square, and for the proceeds from the sale thereof to be applied towards the purchase of a recreation-ground fronting Young's Beach, Manukau Harbour. An area of 1 acre 1 rood 39·5 perches of closed road adjoining the Whatawhata Domain was declared subject to Part II of the Public Reserves and Domains Act, 1908, and added to the domain. Provision was made for the sale, if necessary, of any of the building lots within the Hamilton Domain not suitable for parks or playing-fields, to provide funds for meeting claims and costs in connection with the taking of an area at Hamilton Lake for recreation purposes. The Taupiri and Taupiri Mountain Domains were amalgamated for convenience of administration and placed under the control of the Taupiri Domain Board. Authority was granted for the exchange of portion of the Whakatane Domain for certain private land. In 1910 that portion of the Ormond Domain known as the Kohi Bush was removed from the control of the Domain Board and placed under the Commissioner of Crown Lands. It has been leased since that date, a very considerable sum having accumulated to the credit of the reserve, and power has now been provided to expend the credit balance in the acquisition of other lands for recreation purposes. Suitable arrangements in this matter are now being made by the Department. The Kaitieke Domain was found to be unsuitable for recreation on account of its being intersected by two creeks, and the reservation over the area was accordingly cancelled. A more suitable ground has been reserved in its place. Provision was made for the revocation of the reservation over an area of 4 acres 2 roods 14·7 perches of the Ohakune Lakes Domain. This particular area is required as an extension of the adjoining cemetery, and has been vested in the local authority for that purpose. An area of 635 acres 3 roods 34 perches of the Wanganui River Trust Domain was declared subject to the provisions of the Land Act. This area

has been held under leases granted by the River Trust, and the legislation will enable the lessees to exchange their old leases for renewable leases under the Land Act. There will be no right of freehold, and the rentals will be applied towards the purposes of the Wanganui River Trust Act, 1891. Power was provided to grant leases over portion of the Lake Ellesmere Domain, authorizing the lessees to erect dwellings under suitable conditions on the lands comprised in their leases. For many years part of this domain has been let in allotments on temporary tenancies for week-end houses and huts. It is not proposed to encourage the building of permanent residences, but to provide, in the interests of effective administration, power to issue valid leases or permits restricting residence to the fishing season, &c.

Three warrants under section 4 of the Public Reserves and Domains Amendment Act, 1921, authorizing the erection of halls on public domains, were issued during the year. Orders in Council were also issued appointing over forty Boards to control domains for further terms, and numerous vacancies on current Boards were filled by the appointment of suitable gentlemen selected by the particular districts concerned. A large volume of correspondence in connection with these appointments was dealt with, general inquiries answered, and advice to Domain Boards on various points of administration furnished as required. The members of the Rotokare (Ngairi) Domain Board resigned during the year on account of difficulties that had arisen with adjoining owners over the question of boundary-fences. Control has been taken over by the Department, which is arranging to have the fencing put in order, and when this necessary work has been completed it is anticipated that the people of Eltham and surrounding districts will be prepared to take over the control and provide for the improvement and maintenance of this beautiful reserve. An area of 1 rood 30·46 perches of the Ngaruawahia Domain was taken under the Public Works Act for the construction of electric works in Ngaruawahia Borough. The land has been vested in the Central Electric-power Board, and the compensation therefor paid into the Domain Board's account. The money will be applied towards the improvement of the domain or for the purchase of additional land for recreation.

It is pleasing to record an improvement this year in the matter of furnishing the annual reports required under section 45 of the Act. In the past it has been somewhat difficult to obtain these at all from certain Boards, while others have been content to give very little information in their reports. These annual reports form a valuable record of the administration of the Dominion's domains and playing-grounds, and they also provide the Boards with a suitable means of expressing their views on any particular point that may have arisen during the year's working. Any suggestions that may be offered will be welcomed, and the Department is always pleased to assist and advise Domain Boards as far as it possibly can. It is hoped, therefore, that the various Boards will recognize that as the reports form one of the principal means by which the Department can best keep in touch with them it is important that the documents should be as full and complete as possible.

The proper method of leasing domain lands for grazing, &c., appears to be but imperfectly understood by a good many Boards. The authority for such leasing is contained in section 34 of the Act, which provides that leases must be executed by the Governor-General. As a means of obtaining revenue for improvements, &c., the Department is in favour of grazing leases being granted over domain lands where such grazing would not injuriously affect the domain and damage any scenic bush thereon, provided, of course, that the rights of the general public to use the reserves can be safeguarded in an adequate manner. A form of lease is provided for the use of Boards desiring to arrange for the leasing of the land under their control, and advice and assistance is freely offered in the matter by the Department. All such leases should, of course, be offered by public tender, and the terms and conditions submitted for the approval of the Department.

Another matter that appears to require some explanation is the leasing of portions of public domains to sports bodies for their particular purposes. It is manifestly undesirable that public reserves should be leased for the sole use of any particular section of the public, the principle to be followed being, of course, that the rights of the general public are of paramount importance. At the same time it is necessary in many cases, particularly in country districts, that facilities for tennis, bowls, &c., should be provided on domains, and where the controlling Boards are not in a position to provide such facilities themselves the difficulty can best be met by the issue of a suitable lease or permit over portion of the domain in question to the sports club concerned. The Department, however, will not approve of such leases or permits unless it can be shown that the value of the domains for the purposes of general recreation will not be materially impaired thereby; and, further, a condition is laid down that any member of the public may have the right to play on the court or greens, &c., upon payment of a reasonable fee per game, and compliance with the rules of the controlling club for the conduct of play, &c. The use of public domains for such games as cricket and football does not, of course, present the same difficulties, and should be encouraged by the Boards in a reasonable degree.

I have, &c.,

J. B. THOMPSON, Under-Secretary.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands.

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