

The provisions of section 223 of the Land Act, 1924, which authorized borrowing and the making of advances for inferior lands, have been repealed, and new provisions with respect to residence, improvements, &c., provided. Regulations have been issued prescribing the mode of disposal and the conditions to be observed by licensees. No rent will be payable, and a freehold title can issue at any time, free of cost, after the completion of improvements to the value prescribed in respect of the period of six years after the date of selection. Not less than one-half of the total area of any section is to be laid down within six years in permanent cultivated grasses and clovers, and in addition substantial improvements of a permanent character to a total value of not less than £1 10s. per acre, are to be placed upon the land.

Hauraki Plains Act, 1926.—This Act is a consolidation and amendment of the law dealing with the settlement of the Hauraki Plains.

Hutt Valley Lands Settlement Amendment Act, 1926.—Contains special provisions for the disposal of land for industrial purposes, and certain machinery amendments to facilitate the working of the Act.

Peel Forest Act, 1926.—This Act sets aside the Peel Forest and certain adjoining land as the Peel Forest Park. Provision is made for the appointment of a Park Board, on which body appropriate powers of control and management are conferred.

Scenery Preservation Amendment Act, 1926.—Under this Act the Minister may authorize the taking or killing, as may be found necessary, of animals within scenic reserves, subject to certain stringent conditions. Power is conferred on local authorities to contribute towards the cost of acquisition of scenic reserves, and towards the improvement and maintenance of same.

Swamp Drainage Amendment Act, 1926.—Amends, where necessary, the Swamp Drainage Act, 1915, and confers additional powers for the carrying-out of the drainage-works.

Reserves and other Lands Disposal Act, 1926.—Contains thirty-six clauses dealing with Crown land, reserves, &c.

LANDS FOR SELECTION.

During the year 456,590 acres were selected under all tenures, the numbers of selections being 1,711, the average size of holdings being 266 acres. Except for exceptionally good dairying-country and open sheep-grazing land, the demand for Crown land continues to be restricted, although there is a good demand for first-class dairying and sheep country. An area of 152,454 acres of Crown, settlement, and endowment rural lands was opened for selection during the year, the total number of holdings being 475. No noteworthy blocks were subdivided and offered during the year, the bulk of the offerings being scattered forfeited sections throughout the Dominion.

There is at all times a large area of Crown land available for selection, although the remaining Crown lands are not at the present time so attractive as the average Crown lands offered in past years. At the present time there is a total area of about 519,579 acres of Crown, settlement, national-endowment, and other lands open for selection.

Two estates acquired under the Land for Settlements Act were offered during the year—viz., Te Wera Settlement, in the Gisborne District, and Tupurupuru Settlement, in the Wellington District. The former settlement, comprising 9,285 acres, subdivided into eleven sections in areas ranging from 510 to 1,400 acres, was opened in March last, and no applications were received, although the settlement comprised good healthy country suitable for the purpose for which it was acquired. Doubtless the dearth of applications resulted from the unsatisfactory pastoral conditions ruling at the time. Several inquiries have been made for sections in the settlement, but the Government has decided to stock the block and withhold the disposal of the sections until conditions are more favourable.

The Tupurupuru Settlement, purchased from the estate of the late Sir Walter Buchanan, was offered in three sections, and there was very keen competition for the sections, which were all disposed of.

Several groups of residential sections in the Hutt Valley Settlement were offered, and up to date practically all sections offered have been disposed of at satisfactory prices.

Blocks of typically poor pumice south of Auckland and clay lands north of Auckland are being prepared for disposal under the provisions of the Land Act regulating the disposal of inferior lands under the provisions of last year's legislation, and the result of the offering of these blocks will be awaited with considerable interest. No advances will be made to selectors of these sections, but the Act briefly provides for the issue of a license for a term of ten years, with restrictions on the size of sections that can be selected. No license can be transferred unless with permission, whilst the licensee is exempt from payment of general rates for a period of four years. Conditions of allotment provide that within six years the licensee shall have laid down in permanent cultivated grasses and clovers not less than half of the area, and have placed upon the land substantial improvements of a permanent character to a total value of not less than £1 10s. per acre. All areas brought under cultivation have to be maintained in good order, and no improvements can be effected until approved by the Land Board. Provided the licensee resides on the land, the improvements required are reduced by half. After six years, on completion of the prescribed improvements, a Crown grant is issued over the land.

REVALUATIONS.

During the year forty-one Crown leaseholds were revalued under section 216 of the Land Act, 1924. The capital values were reduced as a result from £48,164 to £26,552, and the annual rentals from £2,075 to £1,301. The total revaluations from the 11th November, 1913, to the 31st March last number 561, with a reduction in capital value from £1,287,599 to £1,009,499, and in annual rental from £58,328 to £45,859.

The revaluations of properties held by discharged soldiers is dealt with in the annual report under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915.