

TARANAKI.

(W. D. ARMIT, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

General Conditions.—The past season has been an exceptionally good one for the grazier, and an improved inquiry is evident for grazing-lands. The increased use of fertilizers has resulted in increased output of fat stock from the grazing districts, and the generally high level of wool-prices and all classes of sheep for the past season has placed numerous back-country settlers in a much improved financial position.

The secondary burning of large areas of fern and scrub has been carried out, although in some districts the fires got out of hand and swept over considerable areas of pasture. Measures were taken to provide fire-relief loans for grass-seed, and the services of the Departmental Field Inspectors were utilized in collaboration with the District Valuers to investigate applications and formulate recommendations for loans on this account. It is anticipated that a great amount of benefit to the back country will result from the various burns, and a succession of drier seasons would prove of immense advantage in combating deterioration of pasture-lands to fern and secondary growths. The dairyman experienced an early season, and prospects were exceptionally good for a record year. The prolonged dry season up to March has caused a definite falling-off of milk-yield, and the season cannot end so favourably as first indications promised. Early root crops suffered to a very great extent, but the recent rains have prevented what would otherwise have been crop-failure. Hay and silage yields have also been on the light side. A good price return for butter and cheese must be reported, many factories paying the equivalent of 1s. 5d. per pound advances on butterfat.

Operations of Deteriorated Lands Act.—During the past year 404 applications for relief in terms of this Act have been dealt with. Remissions of rental up to twelve years in exceptional cases have been granted conditional on improvements being carried out as specified by Land Board. In a number of cases mortgagees have been approached for concessions to the lessees with a view to more successful handling of the properties. The mortgagees generally have met the position and co-operated with the Department. In a few cases it has been evident the settlers are attempting the impossible, and forfeiture of the leases and reoffering under the general provisions of the Land Act has been carried out in the best interest of all concerned. The Crown tenants generally have shown appreciation of the relief afforded them, and the advice of the Agriculture Department's officers has been made available in selection of seeds and manures and in deciding on a programme of work of improvement. In many cases the assistance rendered under the provisions of the Deteriorated Lands Act has given the settler a fresh will to improve and recondition the partly productive or non-productive areas of the farms.

Demonstration Farm, Whangamomona.—An area of 226 acres in the Whangamomona district is leased under special terms to Messrs. J. Gordon and Son. Operations dealing with treatment of deteriorated and run-out pastures are being carried out under the control of a committee representative of the Lands, Agriculture, and Valuation Departments. An area of 100 acres has been top-dressed with various manures during the past season; about 40 acres of scrub and fern land has been cleared, burnt, and sown with various grass mixtures. A special farm bridge has been erected, the house repaired, and about two miles of fencing renewed or repaired. The cost of material for these operations is being met out of Deteriorated Lands Account, and the money so expended is secured by way of mortgage over the property. All labour on the property is provided by the lessees.

At present a small dairy herd is being milked, and a small flock of sheep and some dry cattle are being farmed. The farm already shows much improvement both as regards appearance and carrying-capacity, and in a large measure this is due to the good work carried out by the lessees, Messrs. J. Gordon and Son. At a later stage it is intended to inaugurate field days on this property.

Lands opened for Selection.—A total area of 48,018 acres has been offered for selection during the year. The number of new tenants during the past season is 131, and the area selected 35,465 acres. It is worthy of note that seven highly improved dairy farms in the Kaupokonui and Waimate Survey Districts were disposed of on deferred-payment tenure at prices averaging £38 per acre. These latter areas were new selections, previously Native lands, but reverted to the Crown through the provisions of the Native Land Act.

Coal-mining.—A considerable development in coal-mining on Crown lands has taken place during the past twelve months. Six new applications for coal-prospecting licenses have been dealt with, and it is anticipated that coal leases will be applied for in the near future over several of these areas. The bituminous-coal deposits in Taranaki are very extensive, and every promise is given of a new and valuable industry.

Oil-boring.—One mineral prospecting warrant has been issued over Crown Lands in the Whangamomona district.

Land Board Work.—Meetings of the Board were held on forty-four days during the year, the total number of items dealt with being 1,568, inclusive of applications under the Deteriorated Lands Act. The members of the Board have assisted in every possible manner, and I desire to record my appreciation to them in this connection.

Education-endowment Reserves.—Inspections of these reserves are being carried out, and the attention of lessees drawn to any breach of the covenants of their leases, particularly in respect to the control of noxious weeds. Valuations for renewals are constantly required. An area of 48,737 acres is leased under this heading.

Revenue and Arrears.—The total Crown lands revenue received for the year was £50,839. The arrears total £21,113, and postponements £2,879.

The Freehold Tenure.—In connection with freeholding under the provisions of the West Coast Settlement Reserves Acts the sum of £9,649 has been received. Other freeholds have been purchased to the amount of £1,193. This shows a substantial increase on last year's returns for freeholds.