

WELLINGTON.

(H. W. C. MACKINTOSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The Wellington Land District, reaching as it does from the southernmost parts of the North Island to Taumarunui, naturally comprises a great variety of farming-lands, and what is true for one locality may not at all apply to another. It is necessary, therefore, in order to arrive at a considered estimate of farming-conditions, to apportion the district into separate areas in each of which conditions are found to be similar. The districts that suggest themselves are—(1) the northern, taking in the lands between Taumarunui and Taihape and westward to the Wanganui River; (2) the middle district, comprising Wanganui district and eastward and southwards to Palmerston North; (3) the Manawatu; and (4) the Wairarapa and northwards to the boundary of the Hawke's Bay Land District.

The northern district is probably the most difficult to administer, and these lands have been engaging the attention of the Department for some time past. Settlers here are faced with problems of access, transport, second growth, fern, &c., that the more fortunate farmers in settled districts do not have to contend with to a like extent. One of their chief difficulties is the wearing-out of their pastures, which have been won with great labour from the virgin forests. Top-dressing, which might have in some measure stemmed the tide of deterioration, is almost out of the question owing to the precipitous nature of the holdings and the prohibitive cost of transport of manures. The Government, recognizing the difficulties of settlers on deteriorating lands, passed the Deteriorated Lands Act in 1925, and set up Committees to inquire into conditions in these areas. Although the Committees operating in the Wellington District have not quite finished their work, concessions have been granted to settlers on their recommendations, which will enable them to go about their daily round with fresh hope. The settlers on these lands are mostly pastoralists, and they will, with the concessions granted and the rise in the price of wool during the year, have more courage to battle against the adverse conditions amidst which they practice their calling. The season just passed can be regarded as the best in this locality for about thirty years. Following the exceptionally dry summer, the fires which were prevalent, whether accidental or intentional, cleaned up a considerable area of log-strewn country, besides second growth and rubbish, which in ordinary seasons fires would not have had any effect upon. These fires have involved the settlers in some outlay in grass-seed, but the benefits derived will more than justify the expenditure. The cleaning-up in this part of the district has been so satisfactory that I am satisfied that with two more summers like the one just experienced, and with care exercised in judicious burning, the pastures should be improved to such an extent that the carrying-capacity would be almost doubled. Some dairying is carried on in the northern district, and the settlers engaged in this pursuit will also feel the benefits of the recommendations of the Deteriorated Lands Committee.

In the middle district settlers are becoming fully established, and with anything like good markets should meet with success in their farming ventures. In the early spring conditions were wet and there was a good flush of feed, but as the summer progressed dry weather set in and a long spell without rain was experienced. Pastures dried up and cows went down considerably in their milk, but where green feed was grown the yield was maintained. Early in the new year rain fell and the milk-supply improved. Sheep-farmers had a good year, the season having been a good one for fattening sheep and lambs. Markets have been good for all farm products. The monthly pay-out for butterfat has been small in some cases, but a substantial bonus is anticipated, especially in the case of cheese-factories. If prices for farm-produce are maintained for another season or two farmers should be well on their feet.

In the Manawatu district there is a considerable area, of what may be termed wet land and the abnormally dry season just experienced brought out what was best in it. On the drier areas at the beginning of the season an exceptionally good prospect was before the farming community, and a record year would have resulted but for the drought. The dry weather did not affect the man running dry stock so much. The dry-stock areas were able to be improved by burning and clearing and sowing down fern and log-strewn lands. Lambing percentages were very fair, and the wool-clip as regards weight and quality was most satisfactory.

Farmers in the Wairarapa district did not escape the drought that was general throughout the land district during the summer. The early part of the season gave abundant promise of being a record one as far as yield was concerned; but as the dry spell set in the milk went down, but not to the same extent as other parts of the district. After the rain came, however, the pastures revived, and the later portion of the season should show a decided improvement.

Those settlers who depend upon sheep for their living have had a satisfactory year. Very fair percentages of lambs were counted, wool was well grown, and prices were right. If this year's prices are maintained settlers may look forward with confidence to the future.

Speaking generally, operations must be regarded as satisfactory in spite of the dry weather experienced during the summer months, and Crown tenants have every reason to congratulate themselves on a successful year.

The ordinary revenue for the year was £232,480, an increase over last year's figures of £36,888. There is a considerable sum outstanding as arrears, but it is hoped that the amount will be materially reduced in the coming year.

The Land Board met on twelve occasions during the year, when a large amount of business was transacted, the actual number of items discussed being 1,526. I again tender my thanks to the members of the Board for the earnest manner in which they have worked with me in dealing with the many difficult cases on the agenda papers.

There has been a keen inquiry for land during the year, more especially in the latter part of it. This is no doubt due to the excellent prices that are ruling for wool and other farm-products.