The milling of flax is being carried out at Torehape, Kaihere (two), and Tahuna, and it is pleasing to record that a higher grade of hemp has been produced at both Tahuna and Torehape by the millers exercising more care in the treatment of the leaf. The growing of flax on peat areas is a subject which is receiving more attention at the present time. This is particularly important to the Department, as there are large areas of Crown land of this class which can be put to no other commercial use. It is too early yet to forecast whether the growing of flax on this class of country will be generally successful, but there are distinct signs of success on some areas, whilst on others the prospects are not too promising. In order to assist the flax-growing industry it is essential that some measure of protection from and control of fires on adjacent areas should be provided, and in my opinion statutory authority should be furnished for the formation of fire districts on Crown and also privately owned lands on which flax is naturally grown or cultivated. During the past summer no serious loss of flax by fire occurred, but the 2,000-acre block at Patetonga, on which a considerable amount of work has been carried out by the lessees, was threatened by a fire which started on the adjoining occupied land, and only after strenuous efforts by employees of the Department and the Flax Company, as well as settlers, was all danger removed.

In my last report mention was made of the poaching by stock of the heavier country in the northern portion of the plains. This occurs every year unless an unusually dry winter and spring are experienced, and as a result the grasses are practically ruined and displaced by pennyroyal and buttercup. This disability reduces the returns from the area affected, and a remedy for this state of affairs would be of great value to the prosperity of the plains. Various methods have been suggested, but no simple solution of the difficulty has been evolved. Drainage alone is not the solution, and the removal of the stock from the farms during winter has been suggested, but there are difficulties in doing this with dairy cows. Last year mention was made of the proposal to house and hand-feed the stock for some months, but no reliable data are available of this experiment, which has only been carried out on a small scale. Paspalum is becoming quite common in portions of the area, and if this grass becomes well established the poaching should be reduced, as this grass provides a solid mat, which is better able to support the weight of the cattle. Paspalum would be a benefit in crushing out and preventing the growth of tall fescue, which is making its appearance in portions of the plains where it was not previously noticed. The Agricultural Department is interested in this problem, and intended to carry out experiments with the use of the mole-plough, but these have unfortunately been postponed, although the intention is to carry them out during the next year. The solution of this problem would be not only of great value to the plains, but also to all reclaimed marine and kahikatea lands.

An important episode in the history of the plains was the handing-over, during the year, of the control of the drainage-works completed by the Department to two newly formed Drainage Boards.

An area of 13,000 acres extending along the western side of the Piako River and the foreshore of the Hauraki Gulf, from a point about one mile up-stream from Ngatea Township to the outlet of the Waitakaruru Canal, has been formed into a drainage district, known as the Hauraki West Drainage District. A portion of the Netherton Settlement has also been included in the recently constituted Netherton Drainage District.

There are now five Drainage Boards operating in the original Hauraki Plains area, all engaged on drainage improvement and maintenance, in which the Government is assisting, financially and by active construction. The Department's policy of co-operation with the drainage authorities whose operations come within the sphere of the major reclamation scheme appears to meet with general approval, and the assistance of the Department's organization is sought in many directions, including frequent requests for advice and supervisory inspections.

The area which is still liable to rates under the rating clauses of the Hauraki Plains Act, 1926, will be still further reduced during 1930, when the Elstow Drainage Board will take over the control and maintenance of works constructed by the Department in the greater part of the Awaiti basin. Generally speaking, the area liable for rates is the lower-valued portion of the plains, and the values of this portion will be reduced considerably when the county is revalued in the immediate future.

The rainfall recorded at Kerepeehi during 1928–29 was 47·30 in. The average rainfall over a period of thirteen years has been 45·75 in., as shown on the following schedule. A record of daily precipitation for the same period is attached :—

| Year. | Total Rainfall. | Wettest Month, and Fall. | Driest Month, and Fall. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1916–17 .. .. .. | 55·57 in. | Nov., 1916—6·65 in. | Jan., 1917—0·65 in. |
| 1917–18 .. .. .. | 46·41 in. | April, 1917—5·67 in. | Dec., 1917—2·18 in. |
| 1918–19 .. .. .. | 41·02 in. | Oct., 1918—7·47 in. | Feb., 1919—1·34 in. |
| 1919–20 .. .. .. | 34·85 in. | Feb., 1920—6·10 in. | Dec., 1919—0·89 in. |
| 1920–21 .. .. .. | 35·93 in. | Sept., 1920—5·10 in. | Feb., 1921—0·72 in. |
| 1921–22 .. .. .. | 46·34 in. | Feb., 1922—6·62 in. | Nov., 1921—1·34 in. |
| 1922–23 .. .. .. | 33·81 in. | Jan., 1923—4·14 in. | Mar., 1923—1·72 in. |
| 1923–24 .. .. .. | 52·42 in. | April, 1923—9·76 in. | Nov., 1923—1·81 in. |
| 1924–25 .. .. .. | 52·56 in. | April, 1924—8·55 in. | Mar., 1925—1·36 in. |
| 1925–26 .. .. .. | 40·29 in. | June, 1925—6·67 in. | April, 1925—0·84 in. |
| 1926–27 .. .. .. | 60·91 in. | May, 1926—8·86 in. | April, 1926—1·83 in. |
| 1927–28 .. .. .. | 47·35 in. | July, 1927—6·29 in. | Jan., 1928—0·01 in. |
| 1928–29 .. .. .. | 47·30 in. | May, 1928—7·52 in. | Feb., 1929—0·74 in. |