PART II.—MAORI LAND BOARD ACTIVITIES.

Statutory provision is contained in the Native Land Act, 1931, and its amendments, empowering a Maori Land Board to make advances from its Common Fund for giving farming assistance to Maoris. A Board may advance out of its account moneys for the purpose of any agricultural or pastoral business carried on by it, and may occupy and manage as a farm any portion of lands vested in it. In addition to advancing moneys on mortgage, a Board may, out of funds at its disposal, acquire and farm lands, may guarantee the accounts of Native dairy farmers, and may provide the necessary finance for the farming, improvement, or settlement of any Native freehold land. By virtue of the Board of Native Affairs Act, 1934–35, the Board of Native Affairs now exercises a substantial measure of control over the financial operations of a Maori Land Board, and it is the duty of the first-named Board to control the expenditure on all farming operations, and over the development of any land, and the management of any scheme or undertaking in connection with which any such expenditure has been made or incurred either before or after the passing of the Act.

Since coming into operation, the policy of the Board of Native Affairs has been to exercise a general measure of control over the expenditure incurred on the schemes and farming ventures undertaken by the Maori Land Boards, and for this purpose an annual budget, or estimate of expenditure, for the ensuing year is submitted, together with the trading accounts for the past year. The direct management of these farming operations is left to the discretion of the Maori Land Board concerned, and the services of field officers attached to the Department are always available for supervision purposes. With regard to advances upon mortgage to individual Natives, the securities submitted are subject to the approval of the Board of Native Affairs, and the subsequent management of these investments is generally delegated to the particular Maori Land Board concerned.

Two sheep stations and a dairying scheme are being carried on under this heading, and the following is an account of the activities for the past year :—

Anaura Station.

This station, which is held in trust for three hundred Native beneficial owners by the Tairawhiti District Maori Land Board, is situated on the East Coast approximately seven miles from Tolaga Bay, and comprises an area of 5,865 acres.

The property, which was acquired in 1929, had been farmed for many years by European lessees under lease carrying full compensation clauses. The Native owners were desirous of obtaining possesion of their lands, but the necessity of making provision for payment of compensation was a difficult one which could not be overcome by their own efforts. At the time of the purchase by the Board there was considerable competition for improved lands in this district, and it was apparent to the Native owners that their inability to pay compensation when it became due, estimated at £28,000, would result in the lapse of considerable time before possession could be regained.

Representations were made accordingly to the Board for assistance, the suggestion being that the Board (which was the registered proprietor of the freehold under Part XV of the Native Land Act, 1931) should purchase the stock and various leasehold interests and manage the farm on behalf of the owners. As the result of favourable reports and satisfactory valuations, the Board purchased the station for the sum of £40,000, £27,000 of this price being apportioned to the leasehold interest and £13,000 to the stock and plant. An overdraft of £35,000 was arranged with the Bank of New Zealand, and the Board was in a position to provide further assistance from its own funds.

Dealing with the operations of the past year it should be mentioned that Anaura Station is chiefly hill country of a sandstone and clay formation, and although originally carrying light bush and manuka scrub it has now been cleared and sown down in pasture, with the exception of a small portion consisting of a hill-top. Wide, open valleys aggregating about 400 acres of heavy scrub-flats are in the course of being developed, and during the past twelve months much of the flat country has been systematically drained with a view to getting the land in good condition for the plough. It is hoped to commence ploughing about 40 acres or 50 acres at an early date.

Development-work on the station has been the means of providing assistance for nine unemployed Maoris, and a summary of the work undertaken during the year is as follows : 800 acres of scrub-cutting, 400 chains of fencing repairs, 200 chains of draining completed, 40 acres of rushes chipped, 100 chains of new fences, and splitting of 1,500 posts and 10,000 battens.

The fencing generally is now in good order, and the maintenance-cost should be light for the next few years. The scrub country, which requires continual watching, is in fair to good order, and its condition can be maintained with a small annual outlay. The farming operations have run along smoothly throughout the year. A good season was experienced with the cattle, and no difficulty was met in wintering the full capacity. A calving of over two hundred will give a surplus of a similar number to dispose of during the ensuing year. Both sheep and cattle slightly improved in quality, lambs were fattened as anticipated, and numbers disposed of were up to the standard. The balance of surplus stock realized full market value, cull two-toothed ewes fetching £1 11s. and surplus six-year-old ewes £1 2s. Wool-prices were exceptionally good, the main clip of 179 bales being disposed of at £4,016, an average of £22 per bale.

The net profit for the year amounted to £4,566, as compared with £3,937 for the previous year. The financial position of the station is sound ; the mortgage to the Bank of New Zealand stands at £24,553, and the Tairawhiti Board's current account at the 31st March was £6,100. Permanent improvements are valued at £27,748, live-stock at £10,012, and other assets at £1,297.

The stock tallies at the 31st March were as follows : 4,923 breeding-ewes ; other sheep, 3,192 ; 1,008 head of run cattle ; and 13 dairy cows.