

PART IV.—EAST COAST NATIVE TRUST LANDS.

By virtue of section 7 of the Board of Native Affairs Act, 1934–35, the East Coast Native Trust lands and the Mangatu Trust were brought under the control of the Board in so far as the operations of the trusts relate to the expenditure or investment of any moneys or to the giving of mortgages over any property vested in the East Coast Commissioner. The Commissioner is a trustee appointed by the Governor-General by Order in Council in accordance with the provisions of Part IV of the Native Purposes Act, 1931, and is charged with the management and control of certain lands in the interests of the beneficial owners thereof, all of whom are aboriginal Natives of New Zealand. The present holder of the office is a member of the Board of Native Affairs.

The trust vested in the Commissioner is an extensive one, and comprises a total area of 223,063 acres. It is divided into two portions—the East Coast Native Trust lands, which comprise 114,402 acres, and the Mangatu No. 1 Trust, which comprises 108,661 acres. These lands are scattered from Tolaga Bay in the north to Wairoa in the south, and extend from the extreme point of the Mahia Peninsula on the east to over a hundred miles inland. In the Wairoa district several large areas lie at the headwaters of the Ruakituri and Hangaroa Rivers.

The Government value of the lands is £1,114,995, which is subject to mortgages of £224,437, but against this a reserve in Government stocks of £20,000, and sheep and cattle valued at £120,000, are held. Under the main trust and the Mangatu No. 1 Trust are 5,011 and 745 beneficial owners, to whom distributions of rent and profits were made during the year under review to the extent of £12,757 and £12,667 respectively.

Of the total area, 102,476 acres, comprising nineteen farms and stations, are farmed by the Commissioner, the remainder being let in thirty-two farms and stations, principally to Europeans on leases terminating in the majority of instances, in from five to eight years, although in some cases the leases extend up to seventeen years. The number of permanent employees on these stations totals one hundred.

The tally of stock on the stations farmed by the Commissioner as at the 30th June, 1937, was 100,549 sheep and 12,510 cattle. The number of stock carried has increased during the past three years by 17,256 sheep and 2,688 cattle, which increase includes 7,378 sheep and 1,393 cattle purchased or transferred for the purpose of stocking up three properties, the leases of which were terminated.

During the last three years an active policy of improvement has been carried out on all the stations, involving the following work: 20,005 acres of bush felling and clearing, 4,963 chains of fencing, 846 chains of drain construction, splitting of 78,670 posts and 173,350 battens, 880 chains of roads and tracks were constructed, while £15,000 worth of seed was sown on new country.

The result of these improvements is naturally shown in an increased carrying-capacity, although the full results will not be apparent for one or two years yet. As an illustration Onenui Station, situated on the extreme point of the Mahia Peninsula in an isolated position only reached by packhorse or by surf-boat through the rocks, was carrying, in 1934, 4,497 sheep and 684 head of cattle. Owing to the expense of working this place little or no profit had been obtained. With considerable difficulty implements were landed in surf-boats and ploughing was commenced, with the result that this property is now carrying 7,966 sheep and 1,040 head of cattle, and is producing some of the best early lambs in the Wairoa district. Moreover, these figures are taken at the 30th June, when the tally of stock is lowest. It is anticipated that the carrying-capacity will gradually increase to 10,000 sheep, and naturally at present the property is giving good returns.

An active policy of afforestation has been inaugurated, 250,000 trees having been planted mainly on properties farmed by the Commissioner, but some 50,000 were last year, by consent of the lessees, planted on lands under lease.

The land directly under the control of the trusts contains several large areas of native bush, and in the past various areas have been worked by sawmillers on a royalty basis. Investigations during the last two years have shown that these arrangements were very far from satisfactory, and from a financial point of view the results did not compensate for the unnecessary destruction of bush. Every area of bush has now been carefully surveyed and several of the blocks appraised by the Forestry Department. The present policy is to reserve all areas except such as are ready for milling.

In view of the Government policy in connection with the proper housing of the Maori race it is intended to establish a sawmill in a block of bush which has been appraised by the Forestry Department for the specific purpose of providing timber for the erection of Maori houses. It is confidently anticipated that such timber can be produced at a much lower rate than it can be purchased, after allowing full royalty to the block from which the timber is taken. A road is now being constructed into the area where the mill will be erected.

A table is appended to show the stock carried and the cash collections on each station.