

Public Bodies Leases.—Napier Harbour Board Leases : A petition was presented to Parliament by certain lessees of the Napier Harbour Board concerning alleged inequalities in the rentals payable under that Board's leases. The petition was referred to the Government for consideration. A departmental committee consisting of Mr. W. Stewart, Valuer-General, and Mr. A. G. Harper, Internal Affairs Department, was appointed to hold an inquiry and make a report thereon. The committee held its inquiry in Napier in the month of June, 1936, and then furnished a report in which it made several recommendations aimed at adjusting the alleged inequalities and other matters which called for adjustment. The Government approved the committee's recommendations and then referred the report to the parties to carry those recommendations into effect. The necessary action to this end is under way.

Designation of Districts.—The name of the locality known as "Waari Hamlet," in the Waitemata County, was changed to "Sunnyvale."

LEGISLATION.

Local Elections and Polls (Temporary) Amendment Act, 1936.—This Act re-enacted for a further temporary period, until the 31st December, 1937, the provision restoring to certain defaulting ratepayers the right to vote at rural local-body elections and polls.

National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum Amendment Act, 1936.—This is a "washing-up" measure consequent upon the completion of the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum building and the full functioning of the Board of Trustees.

It provides for the reconstitution of the Board of Trustees ; for the transfer of the Museum, Art Gallery, and Carillon property to the Board ; makes certain financial provisions giving the Board power to borrow on overdraft and to expend moneys in connection with the opening ceremony ; authorizes local authorities to contribute towards the funds of the Board ; makes special provision with regard to the staff ; and provides for the accumulation of the Sir Harold Beauchamp Trust Fund until it reaches £15,000.

Chatham Islands County Council Empowering Act, 1936.—This Act suspends the power of the Chatham Islands County Council to make and levy local rates in the Chatham Islands, and in lieu thereof empowers the County Council to impose import and export dues on goods entering and leaving the Chatham Islands. Subsequently, an Order in Council was passed prescribing the dues payable under the Act.

Statutes Amendment Act, 1936.—The Statutes Amendment Act, introduced by the Hon. Minister of Justice, was availed of by this Department to a certain extent in connection with the promoting of necessary legislation eligible for inclusion in that Act. Several matters affecting the Department were dealt with relating to cemeteries, counties, the housing survey, local-body members contracting with their local bodies, local elections and polls, Municipal Corporations, rating, and Town Boards.

Finance Acts.—As usual, certain legislative matters promoted by this Department were included in the Finance Acts brought down during the session.

Local Legislation Act, 1936.—The usual Local Legislation Act contained seventy-one sections affecting the activities of numerous local authorities and public bodies.

Local Acts.—Fifteen local Bills were submitted to the Department by the Local Bills Committee for examination and report. Representatives of the Department appeared before the Committee and gave evidence on several of these Bills. Thirteen of the Bills were passed into law, several being amended.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM.

A good deal of attention was devoted to the subject of local government reform during the year, and finally, towards the close of the session, the Minister of Internal Affairs introduced the Local Government (Amalgamation Schemes) Bill. This Bill was intended as the first step towards the accomplishment of effective local government reform. In framing the Bill it was recognized that the present form of local government in New Zealand was developed at a time when transport facilities were bad and when it was necessary to take into account the accessibility of the various parts of the local area to the place of administration. As a result there had grown up in a country with a population of about one and a half millions a total number of local bodies approximating seven hundred. It was felt that this large number of local bodies did not provide for the most efficient and economic form of local government. The Bill thus set out a plan for effecting a reduction in the number of local authorities, with a view to securing a reduction of expenditure and a greater measure of efficiency in local government.

The Bill provides that individual local authorities or groups of local authorities may submit amalgamation schemes for consideration ; that the Minister of Internal Affairs may require them to do so ; and that the Minister himself may prepare schemes if the local authorities fail to do so. An amalgamation scheme may provide for all or any of the following matters :—

- (a) The union of two or more adjoining districts, whether districts of a like status or constitution or not, into one district ;
- (b) The merger of any district ;
- (c) The transfer of functions from one local authority to another ;
- (d) An adjustment or alteration of boundaries of districts ;
- (e) The conversion of a district into a district of a different status or constitution ;
- (f) Any matter incidental to the foregoing ; and
- (g) Such other matters as may from time to time be declared for the purpose by the Governor-General by Order in Council.