

Ikaroa and South Island Districts.

Native Land Court.—Judge Harvey was transferred to Rotorua and appointed Judge for the Waiariki Native Land Court District on the 1st November last, and the control of the Ikaroa and South Island Districts was assumed by Judge Shephard, who, prior to his appointment to the Native Land Court Bench on the 1st October last, had for many years occupied the position of Chief Clerk to the Department.

The work of the Court in both districts has again shown a substantial increase in volume during the year under review. The Court held thirty-seven advertised sittings at Hastings, Otaki, Masterton, Greytown, and Wellington in the North Island and at Picton, Kaikoura, Kaiapoi, Temuka, Dunedin, and Invercargill in the South Island, and these occupied a total of one hundred and seventy-seven sitting-days. The Court dealt with several matters of considerable complexity involving Natives' interests in land representing fairly large values. The determination of the owners of the Palmerston North Reserves, which was necessitated in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Native Purposes Act, 1937, has occupied much of the Court's time, and many consequential applications have been heard.

Among other matters which came before the Native Appellate Court were investigations concerning the ownership of certain town sections in Westport and the Tarawera Block in Hawke's Bay.

Applications for charging orders in respect of unpaid rates on Native lands again came before the Court for consideration, but it is hoped to see some decrease in this type of application as Native owners learn to recognize their liability for payment of rates on their landed interests. One of the contributory causes of non-payment of rates by Maoris is ownership in common of the lands upon which the rates have been levied. No individual owner is agreeable to accept the liability on behalf of his co-owners, and the payment of the particular proportion of one or more of the co-owners would not save the land from the fear and effect of a charging order. If one co-owner pays the rates in respect of the whole of the land comprised in a title, under the existing law he has no protection and no right of enforcing contribution from his co-owners for this payment.

Applications for confirmation of alienations of Native lands by way of lease are still coming before the Court, and in the majority of cases the land affected has been under prior lease to the proposed lessee or his assignor. Before confirming such leases the Court in proper cases makes careful inquiry into the reasons for non-occupation of the areas by their owner or owners, whether or not the land is suitable for inclusion in a Native development scheme, or whether it is in the best interests of the people that the land should be leased rather than occupied and worked by the owners. In very many cases the plurality of ownership or the fact that the owners are resident elsewhere renders it advisable to allow the land to be leased at an adequate rental. Applications for confirmation of sale of Native land are not frequent in these districts, but when these applications come before the Court they are subject to particular scrutiny, for the reason that the Native estate has reached that point where any further diminution of it calls for serious consideration.

Maori Land Boards.—Since the function of confirmation of alienations of Native land has been transferred to the Court the work of the Boards has consisted largely of administering and controlling the proceeds of the alienation of vested or freehold Native lands on behalf of the beneficiaries or owners. Wherever it is considered expedient or advisable to do so the Court requires purchase-money, royalties, and rents to be paid to the Boards, which, in turn, distribute the moneys to the owners at stated and regular intervals. This ensures, *inter alia*, that each Maori owner receives his income from land in cash and also enables the Boards to see that covenants in leases are fulfilled and performed. In addition, this practice gives the Boards a measure of control over the manner of expenditure of the money by the Natives. The Court usually requires lessees to pay a small commission to the Boards for their distribution of rentals, &c., to the owners entitled.

At the 31st March, 1939, the assets of the Boards and their liability to beneficiaries were as follows:—

Ikaroa Board—						£	£
Cash balance	..	..	..	..	..	1,049	
Deposits with Native Trustee	..	..	..	..	..	15,699	
Mortgage and other investments	..	..	..	..	..	42,508	
New Zealand Government securities	..	..	..	..	..	1,150	
Office furniture and fittings, &c.	..	..	..	..	..	562	
Sundry debtors	..	..	..	..	..	1,599	
							62,567
Liability to beneficiaries	..	..	..	..	..		55,540
South Island Board—							
Cash balance	..	..	..	..	..	577	
On deposit with Native Trustee	..	..	..	..	..	6,403	
Mortgage and other investments	..	..	..	..	..	8,617	
Office furniture and fittings	..	..	..	..	..	237	
Sundry debtors	..	..	..	..	..	463	
							16,297
Liability to beneficiaries	..	..	..	..	..		13,382

Maori Welfare.—During the year the two principal welfare activities of the Boards comprised work in connection with the rehabilitation of the Maoris in Hawke's Bay consequent upon their material losses in the disastrous floods which occurred in that area in April last, and the provision of better housing-accommodation for the Maori population throughout the two districts.