

## WAIKATO-MANIAPOTO DISTRICT: REPORT ON NATIVE HOUSING.

Upon foundations laid last year, the Department is to-day speeding up the erection of houses for Natives in the Waikato-Maniapoto district. That there is a tremendous need for improved housing-conditions in all parts of the district is very evident, and the eagerness of Natives to avail themselves of the provisions of the Native Housing Act is shown by the hundreds of applications which have been received and which continue to be submitted. These applications are the subject of inquiry and investigation, and with the assistance of the Native Land Court difficulties arising from involved land titles are being overcome, but the necessity in many cases for partitions and surveys results in inevitable delay in providing the security required for loans.

The erection and repairing of houses has been handled almost entirely by the Public Works Department, to whom each case is referred as soon as the advance has been approved by the Board of Native Affairs and the required securities have been completed. Invariably the Board is faced with the problem of limited financial resources and large families. From time to time requests are received for such amenities as hot-water systems, electric lighting, &c., and these improvements to the standard plans are included in all cases where the Native is in the position to bear the cost.

Up to 31st March, 1939, fourteen applications involving an expenditure of £6,282 had been approved from the funds available under the Native Housing Act, and sixty-three applications totalling £17,969 had been appropriated from the Special Housing Fund created under the powers of the Native Housing Amendment Act, 1938, while a large number of requests were in the course of investigation.

At the end of the financial year under review the Waikato-Maniapoto District's share of the Special Housing Fund had been fully committed. The number of Natives whose circumstances enable them to offer the security required under the main Act is very limited, and the advances so far approved to this class are confined almost entirely to persons who are in receipt of steady incomes from their leased lands. The majority of the applicants may be classed as indigent or landless and come within the scope of the Special Fund.

It is gratifying to note that a real pride is being taken in the appearance and cleanliness of the homes, and that in practically every instance conscientious efforts are being made to keep repayments right up to date.

As at 31st March, 1939, thirty-two new houses had been erected and eight old dwellings repaired, while at that date a further six were in the course of construction. In addition, considerable progress in the provision of housing on properties under development has been achieved, particulars of which are furnished in the tables appended to this report.

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Although the actual number of houses for Natives erected in this district during the year did not reach expectations, the question of building up an organization to more effectively deal with the existing conditions and carry out the policy of the Government in the very extensive programme necessary to effect a permanent improvement in the housing conditions of Maori families in this district has been given attention. The first efforts under the reorganization will be carried into effect in the central area in co-operation with the Resident Engineer of the Public Works Department at Rotorua, which Department will attend to the actual constructional work. An arrangement has already been made to train suitable youths and young men in the carpentering trade and, as they become efficient, to allocate them to the gangs erecting the dwellings. It is the intention also to train picked youths in all the various branches of work required in house construction—plumbing, drain-laying, and wiring, &c. This, it is hoped, will help to some extent to solve the existing labour problem, and at the same time give valuable training and a means of livelihood to these boys in later years.

This Board has associated with it the local Inspector of Health, and generally is co-operating with his Department and all other organizations interested in the welfare of the Maori people. The result is that there is every indication that the houses erected will be the most suitable, considering the very limited resources of a large majority of the applicants.

The necessity of providing homes and renovating existing dwellings is a very urgent one in this area, and, although the path to the final objective is beset with numerous difficulties, every effort is being made to push the work ahead. It is realized that the building of dwellings alone is not in itself sufficient, and in order that the improvement brought about by their erection may constitute a foundation for permanent betterment in living-conditions generally, a great deal of attendant welfare work is necessary. In this respect every effort is being made to ensure that the maximum benefit is being derived by those persons who have had, or will in the near future have, new homes built for them.

Up to 31st March, 1939, the expenditure of £3,040, involving eight cases, had been approved from the funds available under the Native Housing Act, and £9,689, covering twenty-seven applicants, had been appropriated from the Special Housing Fund. An area of Crown land within the Rotorua Borough was purchased for housing purposes.

As the Native Housing Act is becoming more widely known among the people, applications are coming in from all parts of the district. From the investigation of the applications it is very evident how necessitous are the great majority of the cases. However, it is anticipated that, with judicious planning and continued efforts to keep down costs, it will be possible under the new organization to bring the benefits obtainable under the provisions of the Native Housing Act to within the reach of a large number of Maori homeseekers.