

1878.

NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC WORKS STATEMENT,

BY THE MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS, THE HON. JAMES MACANDREW,
TUESDAY, 27TH AUGUST, 1878.

SIR,—

In submitting the Annual Public Works Statement I shall endeavour to do so in as few words and as clearly as I can. The task is new to me, and I am sure the House will extend to me its indulgence.

It will, I think, be more satisfactory, and will make the subject clearer, if, instead of embodying fully in my Statement the materials with which I have been furnished by the officers of the various departments, I append, as usual, the departmental reports themselves. With this view I shall confine my Statement to a bare outline of results for the year, and to an exposition of the Public Works proposals of the Government as respects the future. In this way, honorable members will be spared having to listen to a lengthy Statement from me, and they will be enabled, at leisure, to acquire a perfect knowledge of what has been doing during the year.

Before proceeding further, it may, perhaps, be expected that reference should be made to the recent changes which have been effected in the Public Works Department.

It will be remembered that last session the working of our Railway System was very fully inquired into by a Select Committee of this House. One of the most important conclusions arrived at was, that the construction of railways is one thing, and the working of them is another, and that the two things ought to be placed under distinct management. Accordingly the Government has given practical effect to this opinion, with, I am glad to say, so far as it has gone, good results, both as regards efficiency and economy.

The new system has involved of course, to some extent, a complete re-organization of the Public Works Department, and it must necessarily take some time before the machinery can be got to work smoothly in its new groove. I am persuaded, however, that the change will be found to be a step in the right direction.

The management of Working Railways in each island has been placed under a Commissioner, who, in matters of detail, has been invested with large discretionary power, and who is directly responsible to the Government through the Minister for Public Works; this change, when it gets fairly under way, will, I believe, result in numerous improvements in the practical working and organization of our railway system.

The Committee further suggested that the experiment of leasing the railways might be tried in the case of one of the Auckland lines. This is a matter, however, which involves very grave consideration; and, so far as the Government has been able to arrive at any conclusion on the subject, we do not yet see our way to taking any action in this direction. No doubt much may be said both for and against leasing the State railways. It seems premature, however, to entertain the question until such time as the system is more completely developed, or, at