

Sections 54 and 55 relate to town-planning.

Under section 54 a local authority is authorized to withdraw or modify any of the provisions of a town-planning scheme after an award of compensation has been made. The idea is to give the local authorities power to reconsider the provisions of a scheme in the light of the compensation awards, and thus abandon any of the relative provisions if a local authority feels that it is unable to face the compensation involved or that it would be inexpedient to do so.

Section 55 authorizes any local authority to raise a loan without a poll for the purpose of meeting any claim for compensation for which the local authority is liable under any of the provisions of the Town-planning Act.

Section 44 is intended to complete the scheme of fire control visualized by the Municipal Corporations Amendment Act, 1938.

Section 44 enables a Borough Council to appoint an Inspector of Buildings for fire-control purposes, whether or not the borough is within a fire district, and gives such Inspector adequate powers of entry into buildings to see whether sufficient fire-protective facilities are provided in such a building.

Section 45 is intended to assist Borough Councils in having dangerous and deserted buildings demolished.

Section 45 provides that in those cases where the Borough Council itself takes action to demolish such a building, the moneys expended by it are to be a first charge on the land concerned.

(2) *Finance Act (No. 2), 1940.*

Section 17 authorizes and validates expenditure by local authorities in connection with visits by warships to New Zealand ports.

(3) *Local Legislation Act, 1940.*

Sixty-two applications were considered, and of these thirty-nine were included in the Bill as finally passed. As usual, the Act dealt with a wide range of local-government matters.

(4) *Local Acts.*

Six 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 these Bills. All six Bills were, after amendment, passed into law.

C. MATAKAOA COUNTY.

The term of office of the Matakaoa County Commissioner (Mr. C. H. Bull) was again extended, for a period of three years until May, 1944.

The Department maintained the usual close contact with the Commissioner in the administration of this county. Periodical reports were received from him, and these reports revealed in interesting form the progress of the county towards re-establishment. The comparatively high percentage of rate collections was continued, particularly in regard to lands held by Europeans. It is also pleasing to be able to record the fact that Native rate collections were maintained at a satisfactory level. Thanks are due to the Native Department for its assistance in bringing about this result.

The overdraft borrowing limits for the county were fixed by the Minister of Internal Affairs in accordance with section 10 of the Local Legislation Act, 1932-33.

Mr. A. G. Harper again made a tour of inspection of the county in company with the County Commissioner. Meetings were then held with the Matakaoa County Council and with a number of the settlers, and a close inspection made of the roads and other county facilities. This revealed the fact that administration is at a high standard. With the assistance given by the Main Highways Board, Public Works Department, and Employment Division, together with other concessions granted the county, a sound policy of maintenance has been pursued, and every effort is being made to prevent the roads and other facilities from deteriorating.

D. THAMES BOROUGH.

Matters relating to the Borough of Thames were again prominent, and perhaps the year was one of the most important in the history of Thames.

The principal result of the year's activities in that connection was the passing of the Thames Borough Commissioner Amendment Act, 1940. At the beginning of the year the debt of Thames in round figures was £234,000 for the borough loans, and £60,000 for the harbour loans, which were also a liability of the borough. The normal rate of interest on the borough debt averaged $4\frac{5}{8}$ per cent., and on the harbour debt $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. These rates of interest had for a number of years been reduced by temporary legislation, in the case of the borough loans to an average rate of $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., and in the case of the harbour loans to $4\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. The passing of temporary legislation granting these concessions, whilst serving a most useful purpose in lessening the immediate burden of rates on the people of Thames, was nevertheless unsatisfactory from the angle of the ultimate rehabilitation of Thames. There was a general feeling that in the interests both of the borough itself and of the debenture-holders some permanent stability should be brought about. With this object in view, discussions were held with a large number of the debenture-holders, and they were all subsequently communicated with and a proposition put up to them that they should agree to a permanent conversion of the whole of the debt of Thames at a rate of interest of 3 per cent. repayable over a maximum period of forty years. This proposition received very substantial support from the debenture-holders. In the case of the borough loans, 82.7 per cent. of the debenture-holders accepted the proposals without reserve, 2.1 per cent. withheld their acceptance but offered no objection, and 1.9 per cent. failed to make any reply whatever. Negotiations were not completed in regard to 11.6 per cent. of them, these particular ones being resident outside the Dominion. Actual objection to the proposed conversion scheme was made by only 1.7 per cent. of the debenture-holders.