

## SOIL CONSERVATION AND RIVERS CONTROL

Progress in soil conservation work during the past year has been most encouraging. The Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council has acquired several properties in major problem areas and experimental conservation work is in progress. Results of both long- and short-term experiments undertaken on these properties will permit the Council to determine the nature of assistance required to enable remedial work to be undertaken by Catchment Boards and farmers concerned. Soil conservation subsidies relating to tree-planting and gully control inaugurated during the previous year have been fully availed of by farmers, particularly in the Poverty Bay district. This type of work, unfortunately, is affected by the serious shortage of fencing-wire required for the protection from stock of areas treated. This has necessitated investigation into alternative fencing methods, including the use of aluminium wire. The depredations of opossums is also causing much concern.

One additional catchment district embracing the remainder of the Otago Province was constituted during the year, and arrangements for the first election of the new Board have been completed. Proposals for catchment districts covering Wellington, Bay of Plenty, and Waikato districts have been submitted to the Local Government Commission for action in accordance with the Local Government Commission Act, 1946. The eleven operating Catchment Boards have continued to function in a most creditable manner, and I wish to record my appreciation of their efforts to date.

In common with all projects of national importance, river-control work is still being retarded by shortages of plant, material, and man-power. Several major schemes are proceeding slowly, while investigations for new works are in progress. Mechanical plant shortage is serious, and the Soil Conservation Council has, by means of loans, enabled Catchment Boards to procure a minimum of the necessary plant in order to relieve the pressure on public-works plant, much of which has been withdrawn from river-control work for other work of a higher priority. It is essential that Catchment Boards have sufficient plant not only to undertake urgent major and minor works, but also to help stabilize plant hire rates generally which is necessary to enable works being undertaken on a more economical basis.

Numerous river works of a minor nature have been undertaken during the year, and Boards are ensuring that all such work will, as far as possible, conform to permanent overall schemes for each river concerned. This class of work has resulted in the saving of many acres of high-fertility land and in many instances has avoided the necessity for major work in the meantime.

During the year, arrangements were completed whereby the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council will assist Catchment Boards by subsidizing expenditure on maintenance on certain work. The assistance to be provided is to enable internal local authorities to undertake a higher standard of maintenance which it is hoped will considerably reduce the necessity for and cost of future capital work.

Several minor amendments to the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act were passed during last session of Parliament, the most important of which made provision for the erection of dwellings for Catchment Board employees. A number of further amendments will be necessary for the better operation of the Act, and these will be submitted at first opportunity.

## IRRIGATION AND WATER-SUPPLY

In Central Otago the irrigation season was again exceptionally dry and the use of water in some areas had to be restricted. Fortunately, there was not the usual amount of hot dry wind, and good rains fell in March. Production was therefore maintained on most irrigated areas.