

V. *Scenery-preservation Branch*, dealing with—

- (a.) The inspection, reporting on, and acquisition of areas of land suitable for scenery-preservation under the Scenery Preservation Act, 1908 ;
 (b.) Supervision and administration of scenic reserves after acquisition.

VI. *Kauri-gum Industry Branch*, dealing with—

- (a.) Supervising and advising on the kauri-gum industry, purchasing gum from the diggers, and working of kauri-gum fields by the Crown. This branch was established by the Kauri-gum Industry Amendment Act, 1914.

Every year a greater strain is thrown upon the officers of the Department in consequence of their extending duties and responsibilities, and it may be mentioned that no less than fifty Acts of the General Assembly deal with the work undertaken by the Department, and that the provisions of such Acts need to be carefully studied and known by officers. Each year there are presented to Parliament from ten to twelve reports on various phases of the work, so as to comply with statutory requirements, and a perusal of these reports will show the extent of operations and the thorough manner in which they have been carried out.

GENERAL REPORT ON SETTLEMENT.

In the interests of settlement and for general information after such an exceptionally dry season, I give a short *résumé* of the conditions that have prevailed throughout the Dominion during the past twelve months, so as to show how settlers have been affected as regards weather-conditions, and the consequent effect on grazing, cropping, and dairying operations. This information has been culled from reports by the Commissioners of Crown Lands, surveyors, rangers, foresters, inspectors, &c.

AUCKLAND.

The weather-conditions of the past season have proved exceptionally trying to farmers, especially in the northern and central portions of the district. The usual spring growth was largely checked by want of rain and by high cold winds, following which came one of the driest summers experienced for a considerable time. As a result many of the white crops were practically failures, and were fed off, not being worth harvesting. Root and fodder crops were also to a very large extent failures, and in many parts had to be prematurely fed off. The shortage of water and feed has been very severe on dairy stock, and considerably curtailed the milking season. Fortunately the serious prospects for the coming winter have been very materially lightened by warm early rains, which have brought away a good growth of pasture. The high price of grass-seeds is a serious drawback to many farmers, who have obtained good burns during the drought, but to whom the increased cost of sowing will involve a considerable financial strain. Graziers and sheep-farmers have, on the whole, experienced a favourable season, as, although the carrying-capacity of their holdings was diminished, this was largely counter-balanced by the enhanced prices obtained for stock, while the high prices and strong demand for all classes of farm-produce have to a large extent compensated the farming community for the disadvantages arising from the abnormal season.

HAWKE'S BAY.

Northern Portion of the District.

Dairying: In May, 1914, the Poverty Bay district experienced a very heavy flood, but thereafter the rainfall was below the average, the winter being unusually fine and mild. This was followed by a dry spring, and, as the summer was practically rainless, the farming community suffered from light crops and loss of pasture. Farther inland at Otoko, Rakauroa, Matawai, and Motu the drought was not felt so much, and the milk-supply all through the season compared very favourably with the previous years.

The dry season was apparently very suitable for lucerne, as it did remarkably well, and the splendid results of this fodder have been an object-lesson to the farmers who go in for dairying, and undoubtedly will result in its being very extensively grown all over the district.

Wool: Owing to the dry weather, the clip generally was light in condition and relatively lighter per fleece. Local sales were made in the early part of the season at 9d. to 9½d. per pound. Later, the competition being keener, the prices went up to 11d. per pound.

Frozen meat: Though the season was very dry, sheep and lambs fattened fairly well; the principal difficulty was want of shipping-space. The season all through has been very bad for cattle. In the early part of the season many farmers consigned, and the returns now being received show very remunerative prices—mutton, 5¾d. to 6¼d. per pound; lamb, up to 7½d. per pound; and beef, 6d. per pound.