

Lands opened for Selection.—No new estates or subdivisions of runs on Crown lands have been opened for selection during the year ended 31st March, 1923, but an area of 17,512 acres was offered consisting of scattered sections of Crown lands and settlement lands opened previously but not selected. The Teviot Settlement is still being farmed by the Crown, but it is proposed to offer a considerable area of the balance for selection at an early date. The four settlers on this settlement have fair prospects of success, and three of them are shaping well. The subdivisions of the Mount Pisa runs have not yet been offered, but fresh proposals are being made for offering so as to give possession after next shearing season.

Freehold Tenures.—A total area of 5,677 acres was made freehold, consisting of twenty-eight holders of Crown leases with a right to the freehold, two land for settlement, and the balance auction sales of Crown lands.

Land Board.—The work of the Board has been fairly heavy during the past year, but only monthly meetings were held, generally of one day's duration.

Land remaining for future Selection.—The area remaining for future selection open in the Land Guide consists of 5,572 acres. Land not yet offered: Teviot Settlement, 17,000 acres settlement land and 33,000 acres pastoral land, and the subdivisions of the Mount Pisa Run, 130,000 acres.

SOUTHLAND.

(R. S. GALBRAITH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The climatic conditions prevailing in Southland during the twelve months ended 31st March, 1923, were generally favourable for farming operations. The spring and early summer proved very satisfactory, and there was abundance of feed throughout the greater part of the district. About the end of January, however, the weather broke, and February and March were very wet and stormy and exceptionally bad for the harvest, resulting in the loss of a considerable proportion of the grain crops and also of the late grass crops, while a good deal of the grain saved will not be first grade. This unseasonable weather also detrimentally affected the milk returns, and interfered materially with the finishing-off of lambs for freezing, &c. The fescue harvest, being earlier, was completed during the good weather, and the crop was well above the average, though so far most of it has been withheld from sale, and it is still uncertain how market values may vary.

The prices ruling for most farm-products have generally been encouraging, especially for wool, lambs, and dairy-produce, and show a great increase on last year's, so that settlers as a rule are hopeful, and there seems every reason to look forward with renewed confidence. Apart from dairy stock, however, cattle show little or no improvement, and the continued slump in the prices of dry cattle is especially hard for settlers on rough bush sections which very often are only suitable for grazing this class of stock, from which little profit can now be made; nor does there yet appear to be any indication for the better.

Not much bush was cleared on holdings during the past year. Such areas as were felled were difficult to burn owing to the wet autumn, and few settlers obtained satisfactory results in this respect. Sawmilling has been particularly active during the year, and several new mills are in course of erection, while other industries—coal-mining, freezing-works, &c.—are working full-handed, and there is little or no unemployment throughout the district.

Lands opened for Selection.—During the year an area of over 23,000 acres of education-endowment land was offered as a pastoral run, and was selected, and other areas offered under various tenures totalled 11,500 acres. The demand for land has not been keen during the period under review, and the class of land available has not generally been attractive to prospective settlers, being mostly remote and difficult of access.

Freeholds.—4,103 acres, comprising twenty-six holdings of Crown leases, were converted to freehold during the past year, and the purchase of two deferred-payment lands-for-settlement sections was completed; area, 258 acres. Nine small sections were disposed of for cash or at auction, the total area being 17 acres and the amount realized £100. There was only one conversion to deferred payment during the year, but four tenants, taking advantage of recent legislation, exchanged their holdings from deferred payment back to leasehold.

Land Board Work.—The Land Board held twelve ordinary meetings during the year and three special meetings. Most of the ordinary meetings occupied two days each, a considerable part of the work being in connection with discharged soldiers' requirements. Other very important business that was given thoughtful consideration by the Board concerned applications by most of the runholders for extensions of their pastoral-run licenses, or renewals of same under recent legislation. This work entailed several inspections by the Board members, and I am pleased to be able to report that most of the important runs in Southland have now been dealt with, the result being that the licensees are more satisfied with the improved tenure, while the rentals reserved to the State are considered adequate.

Revenue and Arrears.—The gross revenue for the year from all sources was £121,339, including £51,119 being payments under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. The actual rent roll is £61,238, and arrears of rent at 31st March, exclusive of current half-year, are £7,434. Of this amount about three-fourths represents lands for settlement arrears on some sixty leases. Out of a total number of 2,747 tenants only 150 are in arrears, so that, taking into account the period of depression which the country in general has experienced, the position may be considered satisfactory.

Land remaining for Selection.—Speaking generally, the Crown land in Southland remaining for future selection consists of bush country most of which contains timber more or less suitable for milling. The settlement of this class of country has generally to await the cutting-out of the bush by sawmills, and is therefore necessarily very slow, especially so now that high prices ruling for timber, and the value of the inferior kinds, tend to the more thorough cutting-out of milling-areas and the more strict enforcement of the conditions of the licenses in that respect, and this also makes it essential to withhold areas from sale that show any possibilities of producing more timber, although previously worked by sawmills.