

APPENDIX.

REPORTS OF COMMISSIONERS OF CROWN LANDS.

NORTH AUCKLAND.

(H. J. LOWE, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

NOTWITHSTANDING the increase in price of butterfat, wool, and lambs during the past season, there has been a certain feeling of unrest among some of the soldier settlers on account of the investigations of the Revaluation Committee. This refers especially to those who are not in a sound position and who are hoping to receive substantial reductions in their mortgages. However, on the whole the progress has been fairly satisfactory, and it is to be hoped that when the determinations of the Dominion Revaluation Board are concluded those triers who have had great drawbacks to contend against will be placed in such a position that the success of their ventures in the future will be achieved. In many cases, and I may say in 90 per cent. of the soldiers' farms, where arrears have occurred it has been ascertained that the interest which should have found its way into the coffers of the Department has been spent in top-dressing and improving the farms. In those cases I maintain that it is much better to have that result than allowing the farm to go back to its original state.

The extension of the regulations making it possible to advance further on Current Account than was allowed by the original regulations has been of great financial help to the soldiers, permitting them to expend more capital on stock, manure, and improvements, and thereby making successes of those who would probably have turned out failures.

Applications under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act.

The restrictions under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act have continued, consequently the applications under several headings have declined, but the volume of work under other headings has increased. The total number of applications received was 1,042; of these 688 were recommended for the approval of the Minister, as follows: Purchase of farms, 4; erection of dwellings, 67; purchase of dwellings, 1; advances for stock, &c., 417; transfers of farms and houses, 282. The total amount recommended on Current Account was £43,740.

Considerable movement among returned soldiers has been reflected in the number of applications received for transfer of houses and farms, 253 houses being transferred and twenty-nine farms.

The number of freehold farms abandoned to date is 105, of an area of 17,430 acres. Forty-five farms have been disposed of, comprising 4,596 acres, realizing £85,246. The amount written off was £7,217, being an average of £160 per farm. The remaining sixty farms have been revalued, and are now being offered for selection under the different tenures. Discharged soldiers' leases abandoned to date total sixty-five, comprising an area of 13,022 acres; of these twenty-four have been reselected, comprising an area of 3,966 acres.

The position with regard to dwellings under the Act is satisfactory. The total sum invested is £2,457,420; and, although the arrears appear high, no loss will result, as the Crown has more than sufficient equity in the properties to cover arrears. The number of dwellings abandoned to date total thirty-four, with an outstanding liability of £25,450. Of these, thirty have been resold without loss. From those houses not disposed of rent is being obtained.

AUCKLAND.

(W. F. MARSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

General.

To the majority of the soldier settlers in this district who are engaged in dairying the past season has been somewhat of a disappointment, the unusually wet winter having brought dairy stock into a late spring in poor condition, while the dry summer experienced reduced the milk-yield in what are looked forward to as the best months of the season, the result of the whole season's working being below the average. In too many cases the settler fails to make adequate provision for winter feed to bring his cows through in the best possible condition, and, although the officers of the Department do their best to impress this point on the settlers, many of them fail to give it sufficient attention. It is to be regretted that in a proportion of cases there appears to be evidence that settlers have deliberately allowed their holdings to become temporarily depreciated in condition with a view to securing from the Revaluation Board a larger measure of relief based upon the present condition of the holding. Fortunately such cases are in the minority, especially as such action is not even calculated to ultimately benefit the settler himself. There is necessarily a feeling of uncertainty among the settlers until their cases have been dealt with; but when this has been done, and the failures weeded out, it is to be hoped that settlers will direct all their energies to making a success of their holdings and meeting their obligations.