

areas of Crown land, frequently without access, cannot commend itself. The survey and legal costs involved in arranging such partial surrenders are generally overlooked by the lessees. A disturbing matter is the increase in the number of rabbits seen in southern Taranaki. The spread into the Whangamomona County from the Ohura County has doubtless been effected through the Tangarakau Gorge, and every effort should be made to combat this added pest to the many under which Crown tenants and others in central Taranaki are labouring. An established good price for mutton and wool for a period may do more to solve the problem of deterioration than anything else. The necessity for fencing and running dry cattle is generally accepted, and the incentive to do this will be supplied through a healthy demand for grazing-country, brought about by good prices for mutton and wool.

Lands opened for Selection.—No new blocks have been opened during the year. The total area offered is 11,492 acres, comprising reselections to a great extent. The cost of roading unopened areas of Crown land is in most cases a deterrent to the opening of such areas, as the surveyed blocks available are in localities remote from existing roads. The total number of new tenants during the year is eighty-two, the area selected being 9,958 acres.

Land Board Work.—Meetings of the Board have been held on twenty-nine days during the year, the total number of items dealt with being 1,083. Mr. C. J. Ryan was re-elected a member by the Crown tenants for a further term. I desire to record my appreciation of the assistance given me by the members of the Board, whose local knowledge and experience have been of great assistance always.

Revenue and Arrears.—The total Crown Lands revenue received for the year was £100,139. The arrears total £13,122, and postponements £8,475, which includes rents postponed by Dominion Revaluation Board. Generally the position as regards collection of revenue has been similar to last year. Many tenants consider that a debt to the Crown is a matter for arrangement, and forfeitures have been resorted to in a number of cases.

The Freehold Tenure.—In connection with freeholding under the provisions of the West Coast Settlement Reserves Acts the sum of £28,504 has been received. Other freeholds have been purchased to the amount of £8,359. This shows a substantial increase on last year's returns for freeholds.

Land remaining for Selection.—These mostly comprise wooded country without access, and the placing of this land on the market will require careful consideration. The Taumatamahoe, Whakaihukawako, and Heao Blocks, near the Wanganui River, comprise papa and sandstone ridges costly to road, and no demand exists at present for this class of country. There are other small blocks in various parts of my district, but the time is not considered opportune to proceed with the necessary acquisition of roads and construction thereof in order to open these lands for selection.

Office-work.—The demands on the staff have been very great, and the work has been kept up to date through co-operation and zeal on the part of all officers.

WELLINGTON.

(T. BROOK, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The past year has, generally speaking, been quite a good one for all sections of the farming community. Climatic conditions have been very favourable, and as a consequence feed has been ample for all requirements. Dairy-produce has maintained fairly good prices throughout the season, and most factories should pay out on about the same basis as last season. In some parts of this district floods were experienced on the lower levels during the months of November and December, and some dairy-farmers had rather severe losses of feed and also suffered by damage to crops and fences. Sheep-farmers have had a very successful year, and in particular those who were fortunate enough to catch the early wool-sales. The price for fat sheep and lambs was well maintained, the demand for all classes of sheep being better than the previous year, the keen competition by exporters having its effect upon prices.

It is pleasing to note that a sharp rise has taken place in the price of fat and store cattle; and, as good lines of young stock are difficult to obtain, it looks as if prices will remain firm for some considerable time.

A fair area of wheat was grown in this district, but the grain in many returns was mostly of second quality. Turnips, particularly swedes, did not do too well this year, soft turnips being better. Owing to the blight, poor returns were realized from potato crops. Oats for chaffing were plentiful, but owing to the prices being low only the good bright stuff found a market, and then only at a price which left little margin of profit.

Land-values for land of reasonably good clean quality have been maintained during the year, and following upon the increase in the prices of cattle and sheep the demand for reasonably good farms was, towards the end of the year, much keener. It is noticed that a number of farmers who during the slump years of 1919 and 1920 started dairying have now reverted to sheep.

The gross revenue received during the year was £508,624, being an increase on last year of £37,399. Of the total receipts, the sum of £325,452 was received on account of interest and principal under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. The arrears are still heavy, and are due principally by settlers who have taken up their holdings during recent years and who are still feeling the effects of the high prices they had to pay for materials required for the development of their properties, and who have not yet got over the effect of the slump prices.

The Land Board held twelve meetings during the year, the sittings occupying thirty-nine days, and the number of cases dealt with numbered 1,800.

The total number of conversions to the freehold from various tenures was ninety-four, and the revenue received from that source amounted to £25,970.

Properties taken up during the year numbered 130, comprising an area of 7,465 acres.