

REPORT.

REVIEW OF PAST YEAR.

THE year ended 31st March, 1932, must be placed on record as a period during which the machinery for the administration of Crown lands has been subjected to a most severe trial. The readjustment in public and private finance rendered necessary by the substantial drop in the national income has shown only too plainly to town and country alike the severity of the existing depression; but it has also served as a spur to greater endeavours. Economic conditions bear with particular severity upon our primary producers, but they have made strenuous efforts to maintain and even increase production, and as a class the tenants of the Crown have responded well to the demands made upon them in this time of stress. Active steps have been taken by the Department to encourage settlers by all reasonable means, and this has naturally involved the granting of concessions to a considerable extent. The necessity of keeping settlers on the land and of maintaining production has been kept in the foreground; but at the same time steady progress has been made with land-development work and with the opening of available lands for settlement.

Weather conditions throughout the year were not particularly favourable to farming operations. Stock generally wintered fairly well; but the weather in the early spring was most unsettled, with cold temperatures and a great number of southerly winds. There was considerable mortality amongst lambs, especially in Canterbury and the Waikato; but lambing percentages in most districts were satisfactory. Pastures were as a rule slower than usual in making their spring growth. Later on, dry conditions set in over many districts, and by early February the situation, owing to a long period of low rainfall, was somewhat critical in Hawke's Bay, Poverty Bay, and Canterbury, and to a slightly less extent in the Wairarapa, Manawatu, and Marlborough. However, later in the month general rains relieved the situation, practically throughout the Dominion, and ensured an abundant growth of grass.

Selections of Crown and settlement lands on all tenures during the year totalled 406,408 acres. The tenants on the books of the Department at the 31st March numbered 37,423, occupying a total area of over 19,000,000 acres. Pastoral runs account for approximately 9,000,000 acres, while 1,879,000 acres of purchased estates are held under lease under the provisions of the Land for Settlements Act.

LEGISLATION.

The Land Laws Amendment Act, 1931, deals principally with the conferring of certain concessions to Crown tenants, and with the simplifying of procedure connected with the gazetting of documents dealing with the settlement of Crown land.

Small grazing-run leases due to expire not later than the 1st March, 1934, may be extended for any period not exceeding five years, and occupation-with-right-of purchase licenses expiring not later than 31st December, 1933, for any period up to seven years. Section 6 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1926 (conversion of certain leases and licenses to deferred-payment licenses) is amended by the deletion of the provision that a minimum deposit of 3 per cent. of the price must be paid on conversion. The position now will be that a conversion to deferred payments may be completed on payment of such smaller deposit as the Land Board may consider reasonable under the circumstances of any case. Section 8 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1926 (conversion of short-term deferred-payment licenses to licenses for periods of 34½ years) is amended to provide that—

- (a) The new license for 34½ years shall date not from the commencing date of the surrendered license, but from the date of conversion.
- (b) The purchase-money in respect of the new license shall be not the whole of the purchase-money, but the unpaid balance at the time of conversion, plus any outstanding interest.

The amendment should make it easier for the purchaser to meet his liabilities in respect of the purchase charges.

Authority is given to meet the needs of cases where it is considered expedient to permit of development advances being made in respect of improvements effected in anticipation of the granting of such assistance. Section 12 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1927, is amended to avoid anomalies and to ensure smoother working of the machinery in connection with the revaluation of lands held under deferred-payment licenses. It is provided in the amendment that where a reduction in price is warranted the old license may be surrendered and a new one granted for 34½ years, and that the price in respect of the new license shall be the reduced value of the land as determined on revaluation, provided that such reduced value is less than the amount of unpaid purchase-money outstanding at the date of the revaluation. Power is provided for the relief of tenants holding Crown lands or other lands administered by a Land Board under recently renewed leases. Where holders of such leases can prove hardship owing to the existing financial stringency such portion of their rent as exceeds the rent reserved by the original lease or license may be remitted for any period not exceeding five years. The title to river-bank and other reserves is declared not to be affected by adverse possession. With respect to this important provision, it is clear that in the public interest no person should be allowed to acquire a prescriptive right to any road, street, or river-bank reserve by reason of unauthorized occupation thereof, and the legislation conserves the rights of the Crown and of local authorities in such cases. Miscellaneous amendments of the Land Acts designed to effect economies in administration are practically all in the direction of eliminating in certain cases the statutory requirements of Warrants and Proclamations under the hand of His Excellency the Governor-General, and substituting a simple "determination" of His Excellency for the more formal and lengthy procedure of "Warrant" or "Proclamation." In other cases the publication in the *Gazette* of certain documents which are not really necessary as permanent public records is dispensed with.