

*Town Districts.*—A petition for the constitution of the Kurow Town District, in the County of Waitaki, was declined as insufficient evidence was adduced to establish the necessity for the creation of a further local-governing authority in that area. The boundaries of the Te Kauwhata Town District, in the County of Waikato, were extended. Town Board elections were held on the 21st September, 1932, in accordance with law, and an extension of the polling-hours was granted in the case of the Papatoetoe Town Board.

*Road Districts.*—The Anama Road District was merged in the County of Ashburton.

*River Districts.*—An additional area was included in the Otaki River District. River Board elections were held on the 10th January, 1933, and the results thereof were gazetted in accordance with law. Extensions of time for holding the election were granted in four cases. Members were appointed in two cases.

*Land Drainage Districts.*—Seven petitions for alterations of boundaries of drainage districts were considered. The boundaries were altered in four cases, the remaining ones being still under consideration. A Proclamation was issued fixing the control and cost of maintenance of the Mangaonua Stream, in the County of Waikato. The Ngaroto Drainage Board passed a special order subdividing its district and fixing representation for subdivisions. Several drainage board elections were held on the 7th November, 1932, and the results were gazetted in accordance with law. An extension of time was granted for holding the election of Trustees for the Freshfield Drainage District. Trustees were appointed in three cases.

*By-laws of Local Bodies.*—By-laws of three County Councils were approved in terms of section 109 of the Counties Act, 1920. Four sets of by-laws were confirmed under the By-laws Act, 1910.

*Public Bodies Leases Act.*—Two leasing authorities were declared under this Act.

*Rating Act.*—Proposals to adopt the system of rating on the improved value were carried in the Hawke's Bay County and in the Mackenzie County. The time was extended for the preparation of a valuation roll for the rating of mining property in the Grey County. Minor irregularities in connection with the Mount Eden Borough Council's rates for the year were validated.

*Urban Farm Land Rating.*—Over a number of years the vexed question of the rating of farm land in boroughs has been prominently before the Department. In 1928 a Commission which investigated the subject found that the rates payable by the occupiers of this class of land were unduly burdensome, and, with a view to affording some measure of relief, recommended to the Government the adoption of a system of classification of borough lands for rating purposes and the levying of differential rates according to the classified areas. In 1929 the Urban Farm Lands Rating Bill, designed to give effect to the recommendations of the Commission, was introduced, but was not allowed to proceed. The Municipal Conference subsequently examined the subject closely and recommended an alternative method. During the 1932 session the Urban Farm Land Rating Act, which was based on the scheme submitted by the Municipal Association, was passed and its progress through Parliament evoked considerable interest.

In the main, the Act deals with urban farm land in two categories, viz. :—

- (a) Properties of 3 acres or over :
- (b) Properties of less than 3 acres.

In the former case the Act provides that the Borough Council, upon receiving an application from the occupier of any urban farm land containing not less than 3 acres, shall, if satisfied that a *prima facie* case for relief has been made out, prepare a list, called the Farm-land List, of all such properties in the borough. The list is to be in similar form to the valuation roll for the borough, and is to contain the same particulars, with the addition of a column for the "Special rateable value." Such value will be the ordinary rateable value or such smaller amount as the Council determines in the case of each property on the list. Provision is made for due notification of the contents of the list, for lodging objections against the Council's decisions, and for the determining of objections by an Assessment Court consisting of a Magistrate and two assessors.

In the latter case the procedure is much the same ; but whereas all urban farm properties of not less than 3 acres have to be dealt with at the same time if an application is made in respect of any one of them, relief is to be granted in respect of urban farm properties under 3 acres only in those cases in which special application is made by each respective occupier, and appeal against a Council's decision is to a Magistrate alone.

In both cases the relief to be given is by assessing the borough rates of each urban farm property on a reduced value called the "Special rateable value," which value is determined by the Borough Council after taking into consideration the several factors set out in the Act. This method of giving the relief was selected for practical convenience, as it involves fewer difficulties and less interference with the ordinary machinery of the Rating Act than the other methods of assessing the rates of each property in the ordinary way and then reducing the amount so assessed, or of assessing the rates of urban farm properties at a smaller sum in the pound than those of other properties. The "Special rateable value" is to be used for borough rating purposes, but, not being the property value in the true sense, it is not to be available for any other purpose. The "Special rateable values" are to continue in force for five years (except in certain circumstances fixed in the Act), when fresh application may be made for renewals.

The Act applies to boroughs, town districts not forming part of any county, and road districts in Eden County. The preparation of various farm-land lists is in progress.

*Local Authorities Superannuation Act.*—A special resolution passed by the Auckland Harbour Board, increasing certain benefits payable under this Act, was confirmed.

*Defaulting Local Authorities.*—A somewhat unique position, arising out of the existing economic conditions, was brought about by the number of local authorities which were unable to meet their obligations and the unprecedented steps which were taken to meet the situation. The following are the principal cases concerned :—