



*THE news that Australian troops had re-occupied Nauru, the tiny phosphate island near the equator which had been in Japanese hands since August, 1942, must have made welcome reading to the New Zealand farmer. From Nauru, before the Japanese descent, came most of the fertilisers with which the Dominion's grasslands were top-dressed, and the cutting-off of supplies in 1942 created a problem which, from the point of view of the farming community, quickly assumed grave proportions.*

There is as yet little to indicate how long it will be before it will be possible to resume deliveries. The first consideration, of course, is the condition of the plant installed on the island for the extraction of phosphates, including the elaborate cantilever system for the loading of ships. The plant was heavily damaged when the island was shelled in 1941 by a German raider flying Japanese colours. Until experts have examined the undertaking and submitted their reports it will not be possible to gauge the position.

Mainly as the result of the cessation of supplies of rock phosphate from Nauru and Ocean Islands consequent upon the entry of Japan into the war, the area top-dressed in New Zealand in 1942-43 dropped by 1,179,262 acres, or 31 per cent., from the figure for 1940-41. In the three years ended

June 30, 1940, the quantity of phosphate shipped to New Zealand from the two islands totalled approximately 97,000 tons, but so serious was the position caused by the severance of the supply that it was found necessary to resort to a system of rationing of fertilisers.

The mining rights on Nauru, which is a little island three and a-half miles long and two and a-half miles wide, are vested in the British Phosphates Commission—subject to the rights of the native landowners—and the deposits, as well as those on Ocean Island, about 165 miles to the east of Nauru, were worked by the commission. Nauru is completely surrounded by a coral reef and lies in the latitude of the easterly trade winds, which blow for nine or ten months each year—a significant fact since it explains the comparative absence of rainfall, a condition necessary for the existence of phosphate deposits. The deposits do not appear to be simple guano, and some authorities consider them to be of a marine sedimentary origin, having been raised from the sea-bed and subjected to weathering.

Nauru was discovered by an American whaling ship in 1798, and was annexed by Germany in 1888, but its rich secret was not revealed until the chance examination of a geological specimen by an official of the Pacific