

The area of the Crown forest lands in this district is estimated at 1,330,600 acres. These figures may, I think, be accepted as a tolerably close approximation to accuracy. Of this area, it is estimated that fully 50,000 acres are covered with valuable kauri timber. Unlicensed timber-cutting is much less frequent now than in former years, the spread of settlement having done a great deal to check such proceedings by making the names of offenders known to this office, and thus enabling prompt measures to be taken for the suppression of such acts. Two cases of this nature occurred during the year, and were each visited with the infliction of a pecuniary penalty. The Crown forests are believed to have suffered comparatively little either from waste or fire during the past twelve months, and, although several reports reached me of bush fires during the summer months, in no instance, on inquiry, did it appear that Crown property had been injuriously affected.

Rabbit Pest.—This is a nuisance which may be almost said to have no existence in this district. One or two localities might be mentioned in which they have appeared in large numbers, but in no case have I heard of their presence constituting a serious evil.

Land Act.—The only suggestions, in connection with the working of the Land Act, that I have been requested by the Board to bring under your notice are the following:—

1. By section 46 the sale of any smaller area than twenty acres is prohibited. In this district there are a number of small and widely-scattered settlements (rural land)—the lands in which have been divided into ten-acre sections, and the consequence is that the prohibition as above is found to operate very disadvantageously. Numerous applications, which in the present state of the law cannot be dealt with, are obliged to be held over, thus occasioning much disappointment to intending purchasers. An amendment of the Act in this respect is therefore considered to be very necessary.

2. The second suggestion is one to which your attention has been previously invited. It has for its object the introduction of a clause in the Act to prevent selectors under the home-stead system being permitted to make more than one selection. For the reason given for the introduction of a restrictive clause of this nature permit me to refer you to the concluding part of my report of last year.

D. A. TOLE,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

TARANAKI.

REPORT of the COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS for the YEAR ended 30th JUNE, 1879.

1.—*Lands absolutely Disposed of.*

THE sales effected during the year 1878-79 show a considerable falling-off as compared with the transactions of the preceding year. This is attributable partly to the small area of land surveyed and open for sale, nearly all the surveyors having been engaged on the Waimate surveys; and partly, during the latter part of the period, to the unsettled state of Native affairs in this district. The effect of the uncertainty as to the attitude of the Maoris began to be felt in March last, and culminated at the end of May. The land sales, which had averaged about 4,000 acres per quarter for the first three quarters of the financial year, fell to 1,200 acres in the quarter ended 30th June, only some 140 acres being sold in the month of June. The total area of land alienated during the financial year, including land sold on terms of deferred payment, is 12,827 acres. The consideration for which it was sold was £25,296, including scrip to the value of £634 11s 6d. The amount of cash received on account of land sales during the twelve months was about £21,350. Besides this, a further sum of £2,085 has been received as second, third, or fourth instalments on land taken up under the deferred-payment system in previous years.

2. *Land selected under Settlement Clauses.*

Thirty-five applications have been made to take up Crown lands on terms of deferred payment during the year, of which thirty-four have been approved; the area selected by the applicants being about 3,405 acres, or an average of 100 acres per selection. Besides these, fifty-three persons have selected land on Mr. Fookes's special-settlement block of 5,000 acres, known as Midhurst; making, in all, eighty-seven selectors during the year. There are now 288 persons holding 26,810 acres on deferred payments in this provincial district, giving an average of 93 acres per selector. That the system has proved a success is shown by the fact that only one selector has forfeited by reason of non-fulfilment of conditions since the inauguration of deferred payments in this province in March, 1875; and still more satisfactory evidence of the thorough success of the system, and of the *bona fides* of the selectors, is afforded in the reports of the Ranger on the improvements made by each holder on his selection. By these it is shown that the improvements in the shape of clearing, cultivation, building, &c., exceed, on an average, by about 50 per cent. the areas or values required by the provisions of the Act. When it is remembered that nearly the whole of the lands taken up on terms of deferred payments in this district are covered with dense forest, these figures may be considered highly satisfactory. The steps taken during the present year (1878-79) to open the bush roads have proved highly beneficial to all the landholders in the forest districts, but more especially to those holding lands on terms of deferred payment. It has enabled many of these to occupy their land and fulfil the conditions