

NELSON.

The number of selectors during the past year of settlement lands have been 109, showing a decrease from the previous year. Although the area now open for selection amounts to 312,747 acres, it is reduced to second-class timbered and rough hillsides, fit only for grassing, and a considerable area of it consists of poor birch lands. Each year the lands which fringe the settlements in the various valleys are being taken up by the old residents extending their holdings, and placing their sons upon them, and many thousands of acres are too hilly to allow of residence. This remark applies generally to the district extending from Collingwood to Nelson. Very little land is now available in the Sounds. The above observations apply also to the Karamea district, where it is also noticeable that few applications for land are made by new-comers settling there. From the mountainous character of the district its development is taking place more on the lines of mining than agricultural; but each year all the small areas at all available for cultivation near mining centres on the West Coast will be taken up.

About three hundred and fifty applications for land in that part have been made to the Midland Railway Company during the existence of their contract, which are yet in abeyance. It is probable that owing to the delay which has taken place a number will lapse, but there are still many inquiries made respecting them, and it is hoped that the reservation will be lifted this session, so that the applications can be dealt with.

During the year previous the occupation-with-right-of-purchase tenure seemed to be preferred, but during the past year the balance of transactions has been in favour of the lease in perpetuity.

The Mining Districts Land Occupation Act has given facility for settlement within the Buller Coal Reserve, and, when the Midland reservation over the west coast districts is removed, will no doubt be largely taken advantage of.

Hanmer Springs.—A few rural allotments have been sold during the year.

Village-homestead Special Settlement, Mokihinui.—This is situated upon an endowment, the only settlement of the kind in the district, and has been a very successful one, containing about twenty-one settlers, making, with families, fifty-seven souls. The value of improvements made now represents a sum of £1,428. The District Surveyor reports: "The settlement shows steady improvement during the year. The bush has now been nearly all felled on the sections, and in many cases the settlers have made neat homes."

Under the Nelson and Westland Coalfields Act, and amendments, 113 leases have been prepared and issued, and the whole will be completed about June next. A great difficulty has been experienced in getting in the arrears of rent due on old leases before the new ones were issued, and there is still an amount of £430 owing.

The improvement conditions under "The Land Act, 1892," attached to the several tenures are being honestly carried out in the district. A few cases have occurred in which tenants have been behindhand on inspection, but these cases arose rather from a misapprehension as to the nature of the improvements than wilful neglect. The number of inspections now to be made amount to 158, and at present are undertaken by the several staff surveyors, in addition to their other duties, as there is no ranger in the district.

Lands for Future Disposal.—There is no first-class land left in the district. What is remaining now is only timbered hillside land, fit for grass after being cleared. There are also no blocks of first-class agricultural land which would be available in the district for purchase under the Land for Settlements Act.

The output of coal, and royalty received from mines held under Land Acts previous to "The Coal-mines Act, 1891," is as follows, viz. :—

Mines.	Output.	Royalty, 6d. per Ton.	Less Dead Rent.	Royalty received.
	Tons.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
Buller Coalfields Reserve— Westport Coal Company ...	183,744	4,593 12 3	620 0 0	3,793 12 3

The question of dealing with the large areas of unoccupied high back country in the Amuri has been a very difficult one.

The passing of the Pastoral Tenants' Relief Act last session facilitated arrangements for these areas to be included in the consolidated leases of the adjoining runs, the large additional acreage to be held rent free for the cost of rabbiting.

This arrangement has been recommended by the Land Board, and included in the proposals of relief to the applicants under that Act, forwarded for the approval of the Minister.

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Commissioner of Crown Lands.