

SESS. II.—1897.
NEW ZEALAND.

“ LAND FOR SETTLEMENTS ACT, 1894 ”

(REPORT ON).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly in compliance with Section 39 of “ The Land for Settlements Act, 1894.”

The LAND PURCHASE INSPECTOR to the Hon. the MINISTER OF LANDS.

SIR,—

Department of Land for Settlements, Wellington, 26th July, 1897.

I have the honour to report on the transactions under “ The Land for Settlements Act, 1894,” for the twelve months ending the 31st March, 1897.

There were twenty meetings of the Board held during the year for business in the following land districts, viz.—Auckland, 1; Hawke's Bay, 3; Wellington, 3; Nelson, 1; Marlborough, 1; Westland, 1; Canterbury, 7; Otago, 3.

One hundred and forty-eight estates, of a total area of 681,243 acres, were offered during the year. Of that area, about one-third was declined or not recommended, as being unsuitable for close settlement; 75,561 acres were withdrawn shortly after being offered; 300,000 acres are still under consideration; and thirty-one estates, comprising an aggregate area of 71,600 acres, were recommended for purchase at prices fixed by the Board and approved by the Government. Offers to purchase were accordingly made to the owners of these estates, with the result that seventeen accepted, representing a total area of 51,536 acres, at a cost of £251,571.

The actual outlay in the twelve months in the purchase of land was £300,159, for fifteen estates, of a total area of 61,333 acres. The negotiations for the greater part of this land had been well-nigh completed the previous year, although the actual close of the various purchases was made in the year under review.

The total purchases completed up to the 31st March, 1897, since the commencement of the land-purchase system are thirty-eight estates, of a total area of 118,553 acres, costing £520,541. If to that be added seven estates, of an area of 19,902 acres, agreed to be purchased for £103,554 at the above date, the total will be forty-five estates, of an area of 138,455 acres, costing in purchase-money £624,125. The cost of roading, surveying, and administration is £24,111 additional.

It is satisfactory to state that these large transactions have all been negotiated in the ordinary course of buying and selling, without having recourse to the compulsory powers of the Act, with the single exception of the acquisition of the Ardgowan Estate, of 4,241 acres. It has, however, been decided to acquire the Hatuma or Woburn Estate, near Waipukurau, comprising about 27,000 acres, under the compulsory provisions of the Act. Negotiations for a part and then for the whole of the estate having both failed on the question of price, it has become necessary to take steps to refer the matter to the Compensation Court for decision. This is proving a very tedious business, because of the owner being non-resident in the colony.

During the year the classification of the Crown lands held under pastoral lease in the Marlborough Land District was undertaken by the Surveyor-General, the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the district, and myself. We dealt with twenty-nine runs, covering about 867,000 acres. In the early occupation of this country, and before almost any of the present occupiers came into possession, their predecessors availed themselves of the opportunity of acquiring the freehold of the flats, low-lying slopes, and other key-points, so as, by the purchase of a comparatively small area, to virtually secure the command of a much larger area of Crown lands. It therefore became necessary for the future beneficial occupation of these lands to review the position, recast and adjust many boundaries, and provide suitable access by exchange of lands. This latter was done in seven cases, whereby 29,880 acres of freehold lands were relinquished for 54,500 acres of Crown lands, to the mutual advantage of both; in the one case in the consolidation of properties, and in the other of securing better access and setting free 67,000 acres of land suitable for farms and small grazing-runs. There still remains a good deal of scope for further exchanges, and, partly with