

It is imperative that the works which at present are in a partially completed condition on such exceptionally important lines as the Thames-Paeroa, the Eketahuna-Woodville, the North Island Main Trunk, the Midland, and the Otago Central Railways shall be brought to completion and made remunerative without further delay, and additional provision is also necessary for some other minor lines. The great increase in the traffic on our railways has necessitated a large increase in the rolling-stock, and the improvement and extension of the station-works and accommodation on our opened railways generally. So great has the demand become that special financial provision must be made to meet it. The House will therefore be asked to provide further means for urgent and necessary railway-works, including additions to open lines, permanent-way materials, and rolling-stock.

A considerable number of other charges are borne by the Public Works Fund, in addition to those for which special provision was made in 1896. The following table shows the items, and the amount of expenditure on each, during last financial year:—

	£
Public Works, Departmental ... ..	14,892
Main Roads, Miscellaneous Roads and Bridges, and Local Bodies ...	15,636
Telegraph Extension ... ..	36,791
Public Buildings ... ..	70,579
Lighthouses, Harbour Works, and Harbour Defences ...	11,600
Contingent Defence ... ..	10,554
Rates on Native Lands ... ..	332
<b>Total ... ..</b>	<b>£160,384</b>

The following table shows that the expenditure on ordinary public works, railways, roads, and buildings, &c., is very reasonable as compared with similar expenditure in the other colonies:—

EXPENDITURE ON PUBLIC WORKS, out of REVENUE and LOAN, in the several Australasian Colonies.

Name of Colony.	Population on 31st Dec., 1896.	Year.	Out of Revenue.	Out of Loan.	Total.
			£	£	£
New South Wales ...	1,297,640	1896-97	763,000	868,000	1,631,000
Victoria ...	1,174,888	1895-96	...	308,396	308,396
South Australia ...	355,286*	1895-96	77,560	443,000	520,560
Western Australia ...	137,946	1896-97	805,479	1,519,995	2,325,474
Tasmania ...	166,113	1896	...	82,700	82,700
New Zealand ..	714,162	1896-97	45,370	601,343	646,713

\* Not including Northern Territory—population, 4,934

The requirements of the current year will probably be fully equal to the expenditure during last year, and suitable provision will be required to meet it. For this purpose it is proposed to transfer from revenue, in aid of the Public Works Fund, the sum of, say, £300,000.

#### NATIVE LAND PURCHASES.

During the past financial year the area acquired was 335,000 acres.

The Native Land Court now sitting at Otorohanga will, during the next two months, define the interests of the Crown in about a hundred and fifty blocks in the King-country, the purchase of which has been in progress for the last two years. This will open up for immediate settlement an area of 150,000 to 200,000 acres of territory, over the greater portion of which the Queen's writ practically did not run prior to the Ballance Government assuming office. The same Court will decide the ownership of Rangitoto-Tuhua Block, of 600,000 acres, which is the only portion of the King-country not already adjudicated upon by the Native Land Court. The old Native customs and usages in respect to their holdings will then virtually be at an end all over the colony, as the lands will thereafter be held by the Native owners under European title. The prospect of the abolition of the Native Land Court at an early date will not cause much