

NELSON.

During the year the selections under ordinary settlement conditions, together with those of miscellaneous leases and licenses, have been 128 in number, comprising 16,916 acres, which is slightly in advance of the last two years. 15,782 acres 1 rood 14 perches of this have been taken up under the optional clauses of "The Land Act, 1892," with an average holding of 164 acres. In addition to the foregoing, thirty-seven occupation licenses, embracing 25,032 acres, under section 116, and two, containing 91,560 acres, under section 219, of "The Land Act, 1892," mostly within the Midland Railway Reservation, have been granted. As was pointed out in last year's report, it only needs the removal of this restriction, which affects the greater part of the district, for settlement to make rapid strides. As it is now, there is general complaint and discontent, both amongst the large number of squatters who have occupied and improved small patches of land in different parts without any right or title, and the very many who are waiting and anxious to take up land on ordinary settlement conditions. Four pastoral runs in the Amuri district, with a total area of 124,832 acres, were also disposed of, and the final settlement of the outstanding cases of five pastoral runs (released under the Pastoral Tenants Relief Act of 1894), embracing 549,377 acres, which is more particularly referred to later on, has been effected during the year, and the new licenses issued. Taking into account that new settlement is barred over three-fourths of the district by the Midland Railway Reservation, and that a large portion of the remainder is included within mining districts, the amount selected on settlement conditions during the year may be considered satisfactory. The total number of Crown tenants of all classes of land in the district at the present time is 1,660, who hold 1,145,826 acres 2 roods 2 perches, yielding a yearly rental of £17,204 7s. 9d.

Lands sold for Cash.—The 2,780 acres 2 roods 22 perches appearing in the returns is made up of fifteen selections under the optional system, with an average of 93 acres; five purchases under the Nelson Leasing Act, averaging 277 acres.

Deferred Payment.—One hundred and thirty-three tenants have this year acquired their freeholds, but the number still on the books is large, being 640, who hold 66,919 acres 3 roods 27 perches. On investigation of these cases, it would appear that freeholds will be made at the rate of one hundred per annum for the next three years, but in the ordinary course it will be twelve years hence before the last one is off the books. Only one selector out of the large number now in occupation is in arrear with his rent, and that to the insignificant amount of 18s. 8d. This is no doubt very largely due to the penalties which are conditions of the Nelson deferred-payment leases—viz., 10 per cent. fine if six months overdue, and an absolute and irrevocable forfeiture of the land if rent is not paid within twelve months of the due date. Exchanges during the year to lease in perpetuity were made of two leaseholds; in all, 339 acres.

Perpetual Leases.—The total area held under this tenure is 11,251 acres 2 roods 39 perches, by forty-one tenants. There appears to be no great desire on the part of the lessees here, as there is in some other parts of the colony, to turn them into freeholds, for there are only two instances of its having been done since the initiation of system.

Occupation with Right of Purchase.—Twenty-two selections have been made, of 4,412 acres 3 roods 16 perches, which increases the number of tenants at the present time to ninety-eight, with a total area of 18,446 acres 1 rood 16 perches.

Lease in Perpetuity.—The holdings under this tenure have been increased by twenty-four new selections and four exchanges from other tenures, making the total now held ninety-nine, with an area of 25,376 acres and 36 perches—almost precisely similar in number to the last-mentioned tenure, but embracing about 50 per cent. more area.

Mining District Land Occupation Act.—Selections under this tenure have been restricted to a stretch of country along the coast between Westport and Mokihinui, and within the Westport Harbour Endowment Block. At the present time thirty leases have been issued, with an average holding of 11 acres, but fourteen other applications for unsurveyed areas, with an aggregate area of 870 acres, have been provisionally approved by the Land Board. The obvious intention of the Act was to afford opportunity for miners and others to acquire small pieces of land within mining districts for the permanent home of themselves or families, on a twenty-one years' lease, with protection for improvements at the end of the term, in place of the heretofore precarious occupation license under the Mines Act, in which case the occupier was liable to be called upon to give up the land on short notice, without any right to compensation for any improvements that may have been made. It has so far been successful, for in many cases the applicants have already cleared the land and built comfortable houses; but it is to be regretted that there have not been wanting signs of an attempt on the part of one or two persons to obtain the land for speculative purposes, and with no intention of making it their home. The Land Board has recognised this, and intends dealing with these cases if later developments prove them not to have been made in good faith.

Village - homestead Special Settlement.—The Mokihinui Settlement is the only one in this district, and now consists of twenty holdings, of about 5 acres each, one section having been forfeited during the year. Good progress has been made since the last report. The value of improvements has increased at the rate of £1 per acre, and now stands at £1,279. Nine of the lessees reside with their families on their holdings, and six other sections are occupied by intending settlers. The transfers to these latter have been delayed from various causes on their part, but at the time of writing nearly all are effected. The resident settlers, with their families, number seventy-four, as against fifty-one last year.

Pastoral Licenses.—The following are the particulars of the licenses now held:—Twenty-three under twenty-one years' lease—778,483 acres; two under section 219 of "The Land Act, 1892"—91,560 acres; eighty-one under section 116 of "The Land Act, 1892"—119,012 acres: total licenses, 106—989,055 acres. Of the foregoing, fourteen, with an area of 222,178 acres, have been selected during the year, and final arrangements have been come to, and titles issued, for five consolidated runs under the Pastoral Tenants Relief Act of 1894, with a total area of 549,377 acres, which