

1940.

NEW ZEALAND.

PREPARATION OF EMERGENCY PRECAUTIONS SCHEMES

STATEMENT BY THE HON. W. E. PARRY, MINISTER OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.

INTRODUCTION.

FOR some time past the Government have recognized the necessity for a Dominion-wide organization for the control in any locality of all essential services when these have been suspended or dislocated as the result of any natural disaster or by enemy action. The first necessity in such a case is the provision and distribution of food and other supplies, of public services such as water, gas, and electricity, the maintenance of medical and health services, of communications, of transport, and of some financial system. The second task is the gradual restoration of the normal activities of the community.

Within comparatively recent times New Zealand has been subject to two such disasters on a major scale, the Murchison and Hawke's Bay earthquakes. It is to be hoped that similar visitations may not come upon New Zealand in the future, but nevertheless experience has shown that we must be prepared for them. Other disasters of a lesser nature arising out of flood or fire may at any time cause a temporary suspension of normal activities in a locality. In addition, during a period of hostilities such as we are engaged in at the present time, it is absolutely vital to have adequate provision for meeting the civilian needs in any emergency situation arising in any locality as a result of enemy action. The events in Europe during recent months, illustrating the modern concepts of warfare by certain peoples, have made this clearly evident.

PROVISIONAL EMERGENCY PRECAUTIONS SCHEME.

Having in mind factors such as I have mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs, the Government set up a Committee to prepare a provisional emergency precautions scheme to be used as a basis for framing schemes for all localities, where necessary, throughout the Dominion. The scheme prepared by this Committee was, in turn, circulated to certain selected local authorities for their comments and criticisms. Among other local authorities to whom it was forwarded were those situated in the Hawke's Bay earthquake area, and in this respect it is noteworthy to record the opinion expressed by one of those local authorities—namely, the Hastings Borough Council—as follows :—

“The Council states that, in the light of its experience in the 1931 earthquake, in its opinion the proposed scheme is very complete, and accordingly has no suggestions to make.”

I may add that other local authorities in the same area expressed similar opinions regarding the provisional scheme.

REVISED EMERGENCY PRECAUTIONS SCHEME.

The provisional scheme was revised in the light of all the comments and criticisms received, and was then printed in complete form. As soon as this had been done, copies were sent to all the local authorities having primary control over territorial areas—namely, the City and Borough Councils, Town Boards, and County Councils. Copies were also sent to all members of Parliament.

PREPARATION OF LOCAL EMERGENCY PRECAUTIONS SCHEMES.

Local authorities were asked to study the scheme and, in their particular localities, to set up an organization capable of taking control of the situation in the event of a calamity or an emergency situation of the type mentioned occurring in that locality. The assistance of the Department of Internal Affairs was promised to local authorities in the preparation of their emergency precautions schemes, and this offer has been availed of to a large extent.

In the result I am happy to be able to say that there is every evidence that local authorities are facing up to their responsibilities in this direction and are forming, or have formed, adequate organizations to cope with whatever local emergency conditions may arise.