

PART VI.—EAST COAST NATIVE TRUST LANDS

The creation of the East Coast Native Trust Estate dates back to events which occurred nearly sixty years ago, and arose out of well-intentioned attempts to utilize for settlement large areas of Maori land, based upon the principle of the Maoris supplying the land and European shareholders of a limited company supplying the capital necessary to render such lands available for settlement, with the hope, that never eventuated, of profit to both pakeha and Maori. More than one company went to the wall in the course of time, leaving what was left of the Maori land heavily mortgaged and in the hands of the trustees. With the object of salvaging what was left, the East Coast Native Trust Lands Act, 1902, was passed and the Trust lands became vested in a Board, while the mortgagee, a trading bank, was restrained from realizing its security before 1st August, 1904, which time was voluntarily extended until 1906. The Board consisted of three persons and was appointed to administer the Trust, while it later became a body corporate under the name of "The East Coast Native Trust Lands Board" with perpetual succession and a common seal. By sales of land and farm produce and by reborrowing the balance needed the Board was successful in liquidating the debt to the bank, and in 1906 legislation was passed reciting that the principal aim of the 1902 Act had been attained in paying off the bank, abolishing the Board set up, and vesting the Trust lands in a single trustee known as the East Coast Commissioner. About the same time extended power was given to the Commissioner which included authorities for the farming of Trust lands and the setting-aside of villages. From time to time various farming projects have been set on foot, so that to-day there are forty-nine stations in the estate.

In 1921 the affairs of the Trust came more under the control of officers of the Native Department with the appointment of a late Judge of the Native Land Court as Commissioner and the then Registrar of the Native Land Court at Gisborne as his agent.

Pursuant to section 7 of the Board of Native Affairs Act, 1934-35, the East Coast Trust lands and the Mangatu Trust were brought under the control of the Board of Native Affairs as far as the operations of the Trusts relate to the expenditure or investment of any moneys or to the giving of mortgages over any property vested in the East Coast Commissioner are concerned. The Commissioner has his own officers and staff, no Government finance being involved, as the Trust is entirely self-contained on a system of internal finance between debtor and creditor blocks among the components of the estates, which, on the whole, are making good progress towards the time when the lands may be handed back to the Maori beneficiaries fully developed and free of debt.

The total area of land vested in the Commissioner is 224,842 acres. These lands are distributed through the Wairoa, Cook, Waikohu, and Uawa Counties—from Wairoa to Tolaga Bay and inland about eighty miles. The Trust is divided into two portions—the East Coast Native Trust, comprising 115,933 acres (plus some small adjoining areas totalling 1,073 acres of Native lands which are leased by the Commissioner and farmed in conjunction with the East Coast Trust stations), of which 69,904 acres are divided into fourteen stations and are farmed directly by the Commissioner, and the Mangatu Trust, embracing 85,046 acres, divided into fourteen stations. Each of the stations is in charge of a resident manager who is under the direct personal supervision of the Commissioner. The remaining lands comprise 48,647 acres which are leased in twenty-one farms and stations principally to Europeans and 22,318 acres of undeveloped land, mostly bush.