

(6) *Fire Districts*

The Royal Commission which inquired into the disastrous fire at the premises of Messrs. J. Ballantyne and Co., Ltd., Christchurch, on the 18th November, 1947, continued hearing evidence until the beginning of July, 1948, having held sittings over a total period of more than six months. The Commission reported to the Governor-General on the 19th August, 1948, the result of their findings, and this report was later presented to both Houses of Parliament and published for general information.

As a result of the Commission's report, action was initiated by the Department in respect of its recommendations, and negotiations are in progress with a view to their implementation. Legislation was provided with respect to the adoption by local authorities of those parts of the model Code of Building By-laws having relation to fire protection and fire-prevention and means of escape.

Prior to the report of the Royal Commission a Bill had been drafted covering the reorganization of the Fire Service. In view of a recommendation of the Royal Commission relating to the future control of the Service, the legislation was held over for further consideration by Government and negotiation with the various interests concerned.

As a result of one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission, a Technical Committee was set up to advise on a proposed scheme of training for fire brigadesmen. The Committee held several meetings during the year but has not yet furnished its report.

During the year steps were taken to make new appointments in respect of eighteen extraordinary vacancies on Fire Boards which occurred through resignations and various other reasons. Of these new appointments, two were in respect of Government members, five were insurance-company representatives, and eleven were elected by contributory local authorities.

Application was made by the Te Kuiti and Eastbourne Borough Councils for the constitution of fire districts, and a provisional scheme for the constitution of the Te Kuiti Fire District has been issued by the Local Government Commission. An extension of borrowing-powers was granted to the Hamilton and Nelson Fire Boards, both in respect of new building proposals. Loan authorities were issued to several Boards, and consents were also given to a number of agreements for fire protection outside fire districts.

The usual list of fire-insurance companies carrying on fire-insurance business in New Zealand was published, and by notification in the *Gazette* the date was fixed for furnishing returns to Fire Boards by fire-insurance companies in respect of premium income.

The estimates of expenditure of all Boards were reviewed and approved in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Brigades Act, 1926.

As in previous years, the annual report of the Inspector of Fire Brigades (H 12) will be published as a separate report.

(7) *Local Elections and Polls*

The legislation relating to local-body elections continues to be a matter of interest to local-body organizations, particularly in view of the local-body elections to be held towards the end of 1950. The New Zealand Counties Association set up a special committee to report on the effect of recent legislation upon election procedures and to suggest improvements designed to simplify the conduct of local elections. The committee has made certain recommendations to this end, and the Association has asked that the Department should convene a conference of all interested parties to discuss the report and any other relevant suggestions. In particular, it is suggested that consideration should be given to the unification in one Act of all provisions dealing with local-body elections, which now appear in numerous local-government Acts. A conference has now been called for 16th August, 1949, to discuss the foregoing matter.