

grants to needy Boards from the proceeds of a levy on rabbit-skins produced and sold in New Zealand, in addition to the Government subsidy on rates levied and collected has facilitated the establishment of rabbit districts in these low-production areas.

On the recommendation of the Rabbit Destruction Council a 10-per-cent. levy on the market value of rabbit-skins operated from 16th June, 1948. For the period ended 31st March, 1949, the sum of £36,536 was collected and credited to a special deposit account in Treasury. Of this sum, £29,458 has been paid out to Rabbit Boards by way of grants on the recommendation of the Council. In addition, further grants were made from the Consolidated Fund totalling £21,690. Subsidies paid to Boards on rates collected amounted to £136,303. This makes a grand total of £187,451 paid to Boards to assist them in their campaign for the elimination of the rabbit.

The Council has been encouraging the amalgamation of small contiguous rabbit districts, and indications are that considerable progress in this direction is being made. One amalgamation concerning three districts has been completed during the year. These amalgamations are desirable, as they provide greater efficiency in rabbit-control measures and reduce administration costs.

In terms of section 21 (1) of the 1947 amending Act, the Rabbit Destruction Council recommended that only three Boards be authorized to continue conducting an inspectorial policy.

Inspectors of Stock have continued to play an important part in rabbit-district formation, and their initiating action in many cases has been instrumental in additional districts being formed. They have co-operated fully with the Rabbit Destruction Council, and the value of this assistance has been freely acknowledged by the Council.

With the assistance of the Wheat Controller, better-quality pollard was made available during the year to those (including the Department) who manufacture phosphorized pollard. As a result it has been possible to manufacture a satisfactory mixture. Strychnine and rabbit-traps have continued in good supply.

There has been a marked increase in the rabbit population in areas outside Board control. The winter in all districts was particularly mild and breeding was practically continuous. As a result of the steady fall in skin prices beginning in August and the effect of the exchange adjustment, free-lance rabbiters working on the basis of "skins-in" ceased operating much earlier than usual and little or no work has been done by land occupiers in the interim. Unless these areas are brought under Board control, no permanent improvement in the position can be expected. The occupiers are now appreciating the real value of Board control and the constitution of new rabbit districts is expected. Labour and accommodation problems have confronted a number of Boards, but generally splendid work has been accomplished by Boards and the pest is under firm control.

NOXIOUS WEEDS

Again little work has been done by land occupiers to clear their lands of noxious weeds. Although chlorate weedicides have been in short supply, various hormones which are effective on a wide variety of weeds have been available. Labour has been a limiting factor in weed control in some districts. Generally local authorities administering the Act have continued to do good work, particularly with ragwort. Grants have been made to enable weeds to be attended to on Crown and Maori lands.

It was expected that the Noxious Weeds Act, 1928, would be amended by incorporating the principal recommendations made by the Special Noxious Weeds Committee, but this was not found possible. The new proposals when brought into effect should materially assist in bringing about an improvement in the noxious-weeds position on farm lands through the agency of County Councils.