

We consider the Land Act, 1948, effects a much needed simplification of the system of Crown tenures. The general position as it remains under this Act is satisfactory, but we have the following recommendations to make arising out of the representations of the High Country Committee.

The following four points were made in the presentation of its evidence by the High Country Committee. The Economist Secretary to the Commission summarized them in a question to Mr. Wardell of the High Country Committee, at Omarama :—

Mr. Woods.—If these four points you mention were attended to—the regrouping of runs with a view to the proper apportioning of seasonal country ; the safeguarding to the tenant of the value of his improvements ; a workable plan to encourage good husbandry ; and the setting-up of a tribunal to protect the rights of the farmer—do you think this high country will come back slowly over perhaps twenty years without any special efforts ?

Mr. Wardell.—I do. We know instances where the lease is falling due and the runholder has deliberately stocked that run in order to reduce the cover—reduce its appearance—so that when the run is being revalued he can get it back at a reasonable rental. Once you can show the farmer that good husbandry will be rewarded, I think we can go a long way towards bringing back our country ; but at the same time we must have a certain amount of regrouping to enable that good husbandry to be exercised. If we can get rid of the rabbits, and have a system of regrouping and reward to the man who exercises good husbandry and suitable punishment for the man who hammers and neglects his country, we can go a long way. That, to my mind, is the line we should take rather than spend these millions of pounds through Catchment Boards.

We believe these four points are reasonable, and in our recommendations below we have tried to give effect to them.

2. ALTERATIONS TO TENURE CONDITIONS

(i) CLASSIFICATION

Under the Act pastoral licences are not automatically to be converted into pastoral leases, but only if they are considered to be economic units and, presumably, only if they are free from major depletion problems. On the other hand, it appears that small-grazing-run leases will become renewable leases.

It would appear that this is an inequitable situation for the pastoral-licence holder. It does not appear that it will succeed in effecting the desired objects of the Minister of Lands. We agree, and the evidence before us has proved, that many runs are uneconomic, and that boundaries will have to be adjusted to make economic units. However, there are as many small grazing runs in this category as there are pastoral licences, possibly more, in some districts. In addition, the problems of depletion are as great on many small grazing-runs, if not worse in some cases, as they are on pastoral runs. We are of the opinion, therefore, that withholding leases from the pastoral-licence holders is not achieving the required objects, and is creating an unfair situation as the licence-holder will be left in an insecure position.

We recommend, therefore, that all pastoral-licence holders should be given pastoral leases immediately if they desire to convert their licences, or on the expiry of their licence.

(ii) REGROUPING OF UNECONOMIC UNITS

The question of uneconomic subdivisions is an important one. The evidence of the High Country Committee was that regrouping was necessary, but that it should be done voluntarily. We agree that regrouping is necessary, but we consider that power will have to be given the Crown to effect such