

It has acted in an advisory capacity in running the Council's demonstration and experimental high-country station—Tara Hills, near Omarama—and has organized fire control and demonstration plots, and is having conservation surveys made of portions of its district.

A conservation survey has been completed of the proposed Marlborough Sounds Conservation District since the original meeting with the settlers, with the object of formulating proposals to bring into being conservation use of the forest and farm lands in this deteriorated area.

CATCHMENT DISTRICTS

The Council regrets that owing to circumstances beyond its control no new catchment districts were constituted during the year under review.

In the previous year the Local Government Commission held public inquiries on the proposed constitution of Wellington, Bay of Plenty, and Waikato districts. Provisional schemes were issued by the Commission in respect to Wellington and Bay of Plenty districts, and further inquiry was held as a result of objections relating to the Wellington district. The decision on this matter has not yet been promulgated. A further inquiry will also probably be necessary to determine objections in respect to the Bay of Plenty district.

Additional reports are being prepared on the Auckland and North Auckland districts to enable the Local Government Commission to consider these areas in conjunction with the Waikato proposal when the inquiry is resumed.

The Council was given to understand that further action by the Local Government Commission depended upon clarification of Government policy, and made repeated representations to the previous Government for a decision. As the position is most unsatisfactory, the Council has brought the matter to the notice of the present Government, which is at present reviewing the legislation. Lack of confirmation by the previous Government of its policy under the Act has given rise to a feeling of frustration both to the Council and Catchment Boards, which is inimical to progress in soil conservation and rivers control.

CATCHMENT BOARDS

Catchment Boards have carried out their functions in a most satisfactory manner during the year. With the exception of the Otago Board, all Boards have now been functioning long enough to have a full appreciation of the problems of their districts and generally appear to have gained the confidence of the majority of the ratepayers. The Council has been generally impressed with the calibre and enthusiasm of Chairmen and members of Catchment Boards, and feels that the combination of practical farmers and business men with departmental technical officers gives well-balanced Boards. The Council has given careful consideration to the question of administrative costs, and has indicated to Catchment Boards that these costs must be kept as low as possible consistent with efficiency. At the same time, the Council appreciates the desirability and necessity of Boards employing fully qualified and experienced technical and administrative staff at adequate salaries, and appreciates that administrative costs for new Boards will necessarily be high for a number of years, due to the tremendous amount of survey, investigation, and planning to be carried out in the early years, and relatively modest expenditure due to the time lag in getting major projects approved and under way. The Council has been favourably impressed with the thoroughness with which a number of major projects have been investigated and planned by Catchment Board staff during the years—a tribute to the efficiency of the staff and the value of specialization. The lack of trained conservators is handicapping Boards in expanding this most important aspect of their work.