

Most of the powers previously vested in the Minister of Internal Affairs are now assumed by the Fire Service Council. In terms of the Act, the Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs may attend meetings of the Council and an effective liaison is maintained in this way.

The Act set up thirty-four new fire districts and seventy-nine secondary fire districts, and by subsequent Order in Council six new fire districts were created and one secondary fire district was reclassified as a fire district.

During the year action was taken to fill twenty-one extraordinary vacancies on Fire Boards. Of these new appointments three were in respect of Government members, twelve were insurance representatives, and six were elected by contributory local authorities. Action was also taken in respect of the appointment of members of the Fire Committees of the Urban Fire Authorities for the newly constituted fire districts and secondary fire districts.

Prior to the passing of the new legislation extension of borrowing-powers was granted to the North Shore Fire Board in respect of new building proposals, loan authorities were issued to several Boards, and several agreements for fire protection of property outside fire districts were approved.

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 by fire-insurance companies in respect of premium income.

(7) *Local Elections and Polls*

It was mentioned in the last annual report that a Conference had been called for the 16th August, 1949, to discuss the unification in one Act of all provisions dealing with local-body elections. The Conference was duly held on this date and was attended by representatives of the Municipal Association of New Zealand, the New Zealand Counties Association, the New Zealand Institute of Town Clerks, the New Zealand Institute of County Clerks, the Law Drafting Office, and the Electoral Office, as well as by officers of the Department. The Conference reached agreement without difficulty upon the desirability of unifying in one Act all provisions dealing with local-body elections, and decided that a comprehensive system of committees would be the most satisfactory method of carrying out the detailed work of unification. The functions of the various committees were determined as follows :—

- (a) *General Committee*.—Comprising representatives present at the Conference. To consider and approve all final proposals of Working Committees.
- (b) *Steering Committee*.—Consisting of six members appointed at the Conference. To determine the ultimate objective in regard to the unification of local-government electoral law and to determine the order of reference for the various Working Committees.
- (c) *Working Committees*.—
 - (i) Procedure and conduct of elections.
 - (ii) Qualification and disqualification of electors and members.
 - (iii) Preparation and form of rolls.
 - (iv) Postal and absentee voting.

These committees consist of representatives nominated by the various organizations represented at the Conference.

Since the Conference, detailed investigations have been made into the possibility of unifying local-government electoral law, and a meeting of the Steering Committee has recently been held. This Committee decided that owing to the difficulties involved, particularly in relation to *ad hoc* authorities, complete unification was not immediately practicable, and that the matter should be confined at this stage to a consolidation of the existing law common to all local authorities, plus such amendments as may be