

The union of the counties in the groups proposed by us should not result in increased costs to the ratepayers. On the contrary, as the result of the elimination of the present duplication of offices, workshops, stores, garages, transport, staff, and so on, savings will be effected. Fifteen of the seventeen counties at present maintain separate offices and administrative staffs. The other two employ part-time county clerks who provide their own staff and office accommodation and equipment. The total salaries paid to fifty-one employees, comprising office staff and others, engineers, and inspectors, but not including consulting engineers' fees, was £18,038 for the year ended 31st March, 1949. These figures include also the employees of the Southbridge Town Board and the Waimakariri-Ashley Water-supply Board. Even assuming that the same number of employees will be necessary to administer the four new local authorities, although that is a question of some doubt, the cost of other administrative expenses will most certainly be reduced. The maintenance of a number of separate offices with separate office equipment, telephones, books, and stationery will not be necessary, while the expense of conducting nineteen separate elections to elect 136 representatives will be reduced as the result of there being only four Councils to elect. The travelling-expenses of representatives will also be reduced.

Apart from reduced administrative expenses, increased efficiency should result consequent on the grouping of office staff and their specialization in particular duties. In three of the groups the county clerk - engineers at present employed in a dual capacity will be enabled to direct the whole of their attention to engineering duties. In regard to the Banks Peninsula group, the collective savings as the result of the maintenance of one office, together with other savings as previously mentioned, and the discontinuance of the services of the part-time clerk of the Mount Herbert County Council at an annual fee of £300, should provide more than sufficient funds for the employment of a resident engineer.

The ability of the grouped counties to employ labour-saving road machinery should result in a higher standard of road construction and maintenance at no greater long-term cost and with more services to the ratepayers. For instance, evidence was tendered by one qualified technical witness to the effect that in his opinion, if his Council had special equipment to carry out certain works instead of having to undertake them by contract, a saving of 25 per cent. would be effected.

Evidence submitted referred to the desirability of the employment by local authorities of a resident engineer. With this we concurred. The three engineers employed by local authorities stressed the need for the employment of a full-time engineer, while the District Engineer of the Ministry of Works made pointed reference to the fact that only one of the counties employed a full-time registered engineer. He stated that counties should have sufficient rating potential to support a balanced executive staff, and referred to the fact that when a local authority has no qualified technical staff, difficulties arise with his Department when discussions take place on technical details. He also maintained that even the employment of a foreman who knew the district thoroughly was not satisfactory, as the responsibility for engineering work should not rest with an unqualified man.

In this connection it should be pointed out that under existing legislation, local authorities must employ qualified engineers when undertaking certain works.

The ability of local authorities to attract qualified technical officers to their staffs is, in our opinion, essential to their successful operation, but it is apparent that if they are to retain the services of administrators and technicians of the highest calibre the areas they administer must, in many instances, be widened.

In reaching our decisions, regard was had, as far as possible, to the representations made to us by the majority of the Councils represented. After a thorough sifting of the evidence which was presented to us at the inquiry and as the result of our own exhaustive investigations, we are of the opinion that most of the difficulties with which