

Miscellaneous Leases and Licenses.—Fifty-two licenses were issued during the year—twenty-three under section 116 of the Land Act, twenty-two timber licenses, and seven for flax-cutting. There are now 495 of these holdings, 210 being Westport Harbour Board Endowment lands, comprising leases of the principal part of the Town of Westport. The revenue of these holdings, including royalty on coal, amounted to £14,585 15s. 7d. for the past year.

Village Settlements.—There is only one village settlement in this district, on the Westport Harbour Board's endowment. The settlement is situated near the State coal-mine, at Seddonville, most of the settlers working in the mine. The settlement was formed in 1892, and the area originally taken up was 105 acres, of which 100 acres is now occupied by fifteen residents, numbering in all eighty souls. About 80 acres of bush has been felled, and is now in grass, used for grazing cows and rearing stock. Improvements effected: Value of cultivation, £305; houses and buildings, £776: total, £1,081. £70 has been advanced for erection of houses, of which £30 has been repaid.

Coal-mines.—The output of coal from the Westport Coal Company's mines at Coalbrookdale and Millerton is rapidly increasing year by year, the total output for the past year amounting to 511,086 tons, on which royalties amounting to £11,419 were collected by this office. The company anticipates a much larger output during the current year, as large shipments to Hongkong and other places outside the colony are expected.

Milling-timber.—An approximate estimate of rimu and white-pine timber remaining in this district suitable for milling purposes is as follows: Rimu, 1,420,000,000 superficial feet; white-pine, 845,000,000 superficial feet.

Progress and Condition of Settlers.—During the year 171 holdings, comprising 21,317 acres, were inspected. The value of improvements required by the Act was £6,285, and improvements to the value of £10,277 have been effected. The number of defaulters reported was forty-six—twenty for non-compliance with improvement conditions, and twenty-six for non-residence. These cases have been dealt with at the discretion of the Board. It might be mentioned that there are no improvement conditions attached to the 257 deferred-payment leases now held under Nelson leasing Acts, so no inspections were required for these holdings.

The area at present held by Crown tenants in this district is principally hilly country, and used for the purpose of sheep and cattle raising, the small flats and lower slopes being cultivated to some extent to provide winter feed for stock. It may be fairly assumed that a considerable area of the best of the flat bush land to be shortly thrown open for settlement in the Central Buller, Tadmor, and Reefton districts will be found suitable for dairy-farming as soon as the bush is cleared.

The progress and condition of the 1,313 Crown tenants throughout the district is on the whole distinctly satisfactory, the rents being paid promptly and without complaint, and the arrears of rent are trifling.

Revenue.—The total revenue for the year from all sources, including endowments and coal and timber royalties, amounted to £21,785 10s. 8d., an increase of £681 13s. 8d. on the previous year.

Arrears.—The arrears amount to only £162 18s. 5d., and of this amount £139 7s. 3d. is due on Westport Harbour Board leases, the total amount of arrears on settlement holdings being only £23 11s. 2d., a very small sum indeed considering there are over 1,300 Crown tenants in this district, and showing a very much better result in this respect than obtained in any previous year.

Land for Future Settlement.—About 157,000 acres of bush land in this district is now under survey, and will be thrown open for selection very shortly. Of this area, about 86,400 acres is situated on the west coast, between Karamea and Brighton; 14,000 acres near the Inangahua Junction; 25,000 acres on the Buller, Matiri, and Owen Rivers, between Murchison and Hope Junction; and also some 10,000 acres in the valleys of the Tadmor and Rainy Rivers. A considerable amount of this area comprises very fair undulating bush country with small extent of flats on river-sides, and it has a frontage of over twenty miles on the main (West Coast) coach-road in the Central Buller and Reefton districts, and should be well adapted for dairy-farming. A good proportion of land in other blocks, especially in the Tadmor Valley and the Karamea and Brighton districts, is of very fair quality, and well suited for sheep and cattle raising. There is now a keen demand for land for settlement in this district, and I assume that a considerable area of the land above referred to will be selected during the current year.

W. G. MURRAY,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.