

SESSION II.
1906.
NEW ZEALAND.

EAST COAST NATIVE TRUST LANDS BOARD

(REPORT, BALANCE-SHEET, AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS OF THE).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly in pursuance of Section 13 of "The East Coast Native Trust Lands Act, 1902."

REPORT BY THE EAST COAST NATIVE TRUST LANDS BOARD.

SIR,—

Gisborne, 25th August, 1906.

The Board has the honour to submit the following report of its transactions during the past year, together with statements of its accounts to date.

In its last report the Board stated that the chief purposes for which it had been appointed had been fulfilled, but that the following matters still remained to be dealt with—namely, the adjustment of accounts as between the various interests in the estate, the settlement of large outstanding claims against the Trustees, and probably further realisation in connection therewith. The claims referred to have been settled. The question of adjusting the equities as between the beneficiaries, the Board considers, can only be satisfactorily dealt with by the Validation Court, as all matters in connection with the final settlement must be referred to that body, and it is within the knowledge of the Board that the course suggested would be the only one that would be approved of by the beneficiaries. The clauses in the Maori Lands Claims Adjustment and Laws Amendment Bill of 1905 empowering the Validation Court to make such adjustment were well calculated to facilitate a settlement on an equitable basis, and with the least possible expense and litigation; and the Board desires to express its regret that these clauses, as also that dealing with the proposed alterations in the constitution of the Board, did not pass. The Board earnestly hopes that the whole of the clauses will become law this session.

During the past year only one property has been disposed of—namely, parts of Sections 3 and 6 of Maraetaha No. 2, which were acquired by the Gisborne Borough Council for the purpose of a waterworks reserve. The more accessible of the Trust lands not yet dealt with, as those remaining in Tahora No. 2, are intended to be offered for lease as soon as arrangements for roading can be made. To open up the northern portion of the block, the Board is about to form two and a half miles of dray-road to connect with the nearest surveyed road, which is, however, merely a track, and the Board's lessees will form a mile of this track (to Williams's) and make it into a dray-road. Crown tenants in the neighbourhood purpose taking up the roading from this point, and will contribute towards widening out the present track and making it into a dray-road as far as Wharekopae. They are applying to the Government for assistance, and in view of the urgent need for the proposed work and the great advantage it will be to all settlers in that part of the district the Board hopes the Government will see its way to grant a substantial amount towards the cost. Unless the road is widened the large expenditure now being incurred by the Board and its lessees will be in vain. Settlement on all the lands sold and leased by the Board has been extremely satisfactory, and on this block is progressing vigorously and successfully. Large areas have already been cleared, and there is every prospect that the whole of the northern part of the block will by next season be in profitable working.

This applies in even a greater degree to the Board's leaseholds in Mangapoike, on which very large sums are being spent in improvements, and within a very short time the whole of the block will be in profitable occupation. Here, as in Tahora, the drawback is the want of roading, to remedy which the settlers are prepared to spend a considerable sum, and as the road will be the main road between Gisborne and Wairoa, the Board would respectfully urge that this also is a case which should commend itself to the Government as one worthy of prompt assistance.

The success of the Board's operations is largely due to the strong position it has always held in being able to give valid titles. Frivolous and vexatious actions have been threatened, which, whatever the ultimate result, would, if carried to an issue, have cost the Board considerable sums. None of the cases, however, were brought into Court.

The statements of accounts show the receipt of the further concession promised by the bank in the event of prompt payment of the debt, that temporary mortgages to the extent of £5,000 have been paid off, and that the item "Claims on the Trustees" in connection with the earlier management of the Trust estate no longer appears as a liability, all ascertained claims having been liqui-