

REPORT.

SIR,—

Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 1st June, 1918.

I have the honour to submit herewith the report on the operations of the Department of Lands and Survey for the year ended 31st March, 1918.

I have, &c.,

T. N. BRODRICK, Under-Secretary.

The Hon. D. H. Guthrie, Minister of Lands.

REPORT.

As all suitable Crown land is being utilized for the settlement of discharged soldiers, very little ordinary Crown land was placed in the market during the past year, and the bulk of the operations of the Department with regard to ordinary land-settlement relate to the occupation by selectors of lands selected in previous years. Every effort has been and is being made to open for settlement all available land by entrusting to private surveyors any surveys that the depleted survey staff is unable to undertake with sufficient expedition. Native lands acquired by the Native Land Purchase Board and proclaimed Crown lands are dealt with at the earliest opportunity, as are also estates acquired under the Land for Settlements Act; and the Commissioners of Crown Lands and Land Boards give careful attention to the subdivision and disposal of the lands in the best manner possible.

CONDITIONS OF SETTLEMENT.

The weather conditions have on the whole been favourable, although unsettled weather has in some districts slightly retarded the progress of settlement. There is no doubt a prosperous year has been experienced by most well-established farmers, as will be seen by a reference to the detailed reports submitted by the various Commissioners of Crown Lands in Appendix I. High prices have ruled for all classes of stock and produce, and the raising and fattening of cattle has been very extensively practised. The dairying industry is steadily progressing, whilst the fruit industry, although in the Nelson district it was not so successful as in former years, has on the whole expanded and assists the steady progress of the Dominion.

Crops have suffered in some districts owing to unsettled weather, but generally a fairly good season has been experienced.

Owing to the high wages demanded, the continued shortage of labour, and the excessive cost of grass-seed, fencing, and other materials, there has been a falling-off in the areas of unimproved lands brought into productivity. Though farming operations have been much hampered by the conditions referred to, on the whole the settlers have worked commendably and utilized their holdings to the fullest capacity attainable. In many districts farms have had to be left owing to the owners joining the Expeditionary Force. In some cases these farms have been used for grazing only; in others they have been worked by neighbours or relatives to the best of their ability; whilst a proportion in the bush districts have unfortunately retrograded, but it is hoped that such retrogression is only temporary and will soon be overcome when normal conditions prevail once more.

LEGISLATION.

The following is a brief summary of the legislation passed during last year's session of Parliament affecting the operations of the Department:—

Land Laws Amendment Act.—This short Act consists mainly of what may be termed “machinery” sections, embodying improvements that have been found in the course of experience to be necessary. Of the remaining provisions section 6 provides for the appointment of a Controller of Land Revenue, whose function will be to take over and perform all the duties of Receivers of Land Revenue except the actual receipt of moneys. All moneys which under the present system are payable by the Receivers of Land Revenue into various special accounts or to local authorities or persons will under the new system be paid into the Public Account by the Receivers, and without further appropriation will be paid by the Minister of Finance to the local authority, body, or person certified by the Controller to be entitled to receive the same. Section 7 provides for a modified method of allocating the moneys in the National Endowment Account and available for the purposes of education, and section 8 prohibits the payment to the New Plymouth Harbour Board of “fourths” derived from the sale or other disposal of any portion of the West Coast settlement reserves.

Finance Act.—Section 81 of this Act provides for an increase in the amount that can be borrowed for the purposes of the Rangitaiki Land Drainage Act from £100,000 to £140,000, and section 82 provides for an increase from £100,000 to £500,000 in respect of the amount that may be borrowed