

for the purposes of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Acts. An appropriation of £20,000 for the formation of roads to give access to lands disposed of to discharged soldiers is provided for in section 25 of the Appropriation Act, 1917.

Reserves, &c., Disposal Act, 1917.—This Act, which authorizes special dealings with reserves, &c., contains 129 clauses, relating in the majority of cases to matters of purely local interest.

Discharged Soldiers Settlement Amendment Act.—This amended the Act of 1915 in several respects, which are set out in the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Report.

BUSH-FIRES.

Bush-fires occurred in the Maruia District (Nelson) in the early part of the year, and assistance to settlers towards regrassing their holdings was given by the Government; whilst in the latter part of the year extensive fires occurred principally in the district adjacent to Raetihi (Wellington), in which some sixty houses in the township with their contents were destroyed. The area of grass burned is estimated at almost 20,000 acres, and the resowing of this will involve an outlay of some £35,000. Action was immediately taken by the Government to protect the farmers against a possible increase in the price of grass-seed, and assistance was given to them in the purchase of seed to the extent of almost £30,000 by paying their accounts and arranging for repayments to be distributed over a term of two years. Some £14,000 was generously subscribed by the public for relief purposes, and this amount was subsidized by the Government to the extent of £10,000. The administration of these moneys was entrusted to the Waimarino Fire Relief Association, an association incorporated for the purpose. The loss suffered by farmers in buildings, fencing, and stock was heavy, and for the purpose of assisting them to reinstate their improvements and restock their lands some £45,000 was allotted by the Government for loan to them on easy terms. It is anticipated that with this assistance the production of the district will be maintained, and that the farmers will quickly recover from their losses.

LANDS OFFERED FOR SELECTION.

The lands offered for selection under the various tenures of the Land Act, Land for Settlements Act, and Education Reserves Act, comprised a total area of 271,325 acres. An area of 3,377 acres was opened on the optional system. The area opened on renewable lease was 11,173 acres, of which 6,823 acres was settlement land (the lessees of which have a right to acquire the freehold), the balance, 4,350 acres, being national-endowment land. Under pastoral license an area of 218,670 acres was offered, and the area offered as small grazing-runs was 13,840 acres.

It will be noticed that less land has been offered for selection by the general public than in former years. This is due to the fact that practically all suitable holdings are being set aside for selection by discharged soldiers under ordinary tenures, as provided by section 3 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915, or under the special tenures prescribed by section 4 of that Act.

Altogether 354 holdings, comprising 70,882 acres of Crown, settlement, national-endowment, and Cheviot Estate lands were set apart for selection by discharged soldiers. A considerable number of these holdings have been selected by discharged men. Those remaining are available for selection or for allotment by Land Boards in their discretion. These lands are dealt with fully in the report on the settlement of discharged soldiers under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915.

LANDS TO BE OPENED.

Lands in view for opening comprise a total area of 343,700 acres, including about 1,000 acres of town, village, and suburban lands. The rural land will be practically all opened for discharged soldiers, and the area available for soldier settlement is likely to be further increased by the purchase of private estates by the Land Purchase Board for subdivision.

LANDS SELECTED.

The total selections during the year under all tenures covered a gross area of 895,655 acres by 1,487 selectors. These figures include, however, 75 cash sales of small town and suburban sections aggregating 429 acres.

The selections made by discharged soldiers are also included in the figures quoted, but as these last-mentioned lands are dealt with in a separate report prepared and laid before Parliament in accordance with the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915, there is no necessity to repeat the information in this report. The usual table giving separate figures under each tenure appears in the appendix as No. 3.

FREEHOLDS ACQUIRED.

During the year the following lands were purchased outright for cash :—

	Number.	Area. Acres.	Price. £
Town lands	29	14	731
Suburban lands	46	415	4,847
Rural lands	105	4,267½	7,360
	180	4,696½	12,938

The leasehold and deferred-payment holdings converted to freeholds during the year covered an area of 114,412 acres, in 584 holdings, the total purchase price being £174,357.

The holdings converted to freehold under the Land Laws Amendment Acts of 1912, 1913, and 1914, and included in the gross total given before, comprised an area of 47,378 acres, in 290 holdings, the purchase price being £104,329. This now brings the total freeholds acquired under these enactments to 426,470 acres, in 2,237 holdings; purchase price, £752,610.