

APPENDIX.

REPORTS OF COMMISSIONERS OF CROWN LANDS.

AUCKLAND.

(H. M. SKEET, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

THREE new settlements purchased under the Land for Settlements Act have been offered for selection by discharged soldiers during the year—namely, the Streamlands Settlement, of 1,467 acres, near Warkworth, of which 1,287 acres is now occupied; the Tapapa Settlement, of 1,185 acres, near Hinuera, of which the whole was immediately taken up; and Te Miro Settlement, of 11,789 acres, near Cambridge, out of which 8,604 acres was offered for selection and 4,720 acres taken up. In addition to these an area of 25,165 acres of ordinary Crown land was offered, 6,658 acres of which was selected.

As in the previous year, although there is a large number of prospective soldier tenants on our books, all of whom are supplied with particulars of lands offered, the actual number of applicants is limited in comparison. The actual number of selections during the year was ninety-one, comprising 15,880 acres, and the total area held by discharged soldiers at the end of the period was 27,935 acres, occupied by 164 selectors; while ninety-five sections, of a total area of 30,335 acres, were still available for immediate selection. A number of these sections are, however, only suitable for men able to undertake a certain amount of pioneering work.

Advances made during the year for buildings and other improvements and the purchase of stock and implements totalled £32,161, bringing the amount of outstanding advances at the 31st March (less repayments) up to £36,496, in addition to which further advances of £15,991 had been authorized but not paid over.

The progress made by the soldier settlers has been generally satisfactory, and in the majority of cases they are taking a keen interest in their holdings, and give every promise of proving permanent and successful settlers. In the Reynolds Settlement, near Cambridge, experience showed that a portion of the block is not yet suitable for occupation in small holdings by soldiers, and the selectors have therefore been allowed to surrender their leases, and are being transferred to other lands which will give an immediate return. The other holders on this block are, however, doing well. The settlers on the Pakarau Settlement, near Morrinsville, and the Taniwha Settlement, near Waerenga, are doing good work, although the former have met with difficulties owing to the need for renewal of some of the pastures and provision of water-supply, for which funds have been made available. Of the three settlements established during the year, the Tapapa Settlement, near Hinuera, has given the best immediate result; the Streamlands Settlement, near Warkworth, will take longer to bring in; and Te Miro Settlement, near Cambridge, was only just being settled at the close of the year. The early settlers at Mahoenui are making fair progress, as are the few scattered holders.

During the year the Land Board made a personal visit of inspection to the Reynolds, Pakarau, Tapapa, and Taniwha Settlements, and interviewed a number of the settlers, being well pleased with the evidences of progress. As practical farmers who have themselves experienced the difficulties of starting farming under less advantageous conditions of settlement than now prevail, the members of the Board could not, however, help noticing a tendency to purchase expensive and unnecessary implements, which had been neither authorized nor paid for out of advances by the Department, the equipment being in some cases more suitable to a property of much greater scope. The erroneous assumption that such had been purchased out of advances has led to a certain amount of ill-informed criticism, which is helpful neither to the settlers themselves nor the Department. The general policy in these matters is, so far as possible, within reasonable limits, to allow the settler a free hand, and let him be guided by the practice and advice of more experienced settlers in the locality.

A number of applications under the provisions of the Amendment Act of 1917, enabling the purchase of freehold and other properties for individual soldiers, have been received and are under investigation.

HAWKE'S BAY.

(W. F. MARSH, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The past year has witnessed the opening of the Watea, Marakeke, Mangaorapa, Porangahau, and Awa-o-totara Blocks, all of which except the latter were wholly settled, and, with previous experience in the matter of examination to guide the Land Board, by a very good class of settler.

Awa-o-totara is a somewhat diversified block, the result being that those sections only which promised an easier and earlier return with the least work met with any demand, and the balance of about one-half were turned down, inquirers frankly stating their preference for chances with the better lands in the more southern part of the district. The sections still open are quite capable of development by the right man, but it is unlikely that serious eyes will be turned towards them until the supply of more acceptable lands is exhausted.

On the blocks settled during the previous year considerable improvements have been effected, and there is every probability that a large proportion of the holders will come safely through