

*Road Districts.*

As a result of special legislation passed enabling road districts to be formed in Waiheke Island, which is not included in any county, two road districts, Orapiu and Ostend, were formed in that island, and the necessary arrangements made for the election of a Board for each district. A petition presented for the constitution of a road district at Taupo, in the East Taupo County, was held over pending the report of the Commission which was appointed to inquire into various matters affecting the counties in that district and surrounding districts. The Moa Road District, which formed part of the Taranaki County and carried on fairly extensive operations, went out of existence and became a part of the new Inglewood County. The Point Chevalier Road District was included in the City of Auckland, and a poll taken on a proposal to include the West Tamaki Road District in that city was defeated. The boundaries of the Marua Road District were altered, the Newcastle Road District was merged in the County of Waipa, and the Kirikiriroa Road District was merged in the County of Waikato.

The question of Road Board control has now reached the stage when it must be carefully considered whether or not the system should be abolished. Road Boards are rapidly dying out and becoming merged in their respective counties. The system has served a very good purpose, but it has now, I think, except in certain special cases, fulfilled its object, and generally speaking it can safely be said that the continuation of road districts simply perpetuates an obsolete form of local government which tends towards parochialism, and provides a duplication of control which is not in the best interests of either counties or ratepayers. Statistics taken for some years past show an annual decrease in the number of road districts, there being only 82 in existence at the close of the year 1920, as compared with 231 at the close of the year 1900. The question depends very largely upon effective county control, but I venture to suggest that the continuance of road districts is in some cases simply serving the purpose of retarding the general progress of the county in which such districts are situated.

Power was given in the Counties Act, 1920, to County Councils to merge road districts in the county in cases where the total capital value of all road districts in the county is less than two-fifths of the total capital value of the whole of the county; and, whilst this provision did not take effect until after the end of the year, I think it is only right to state that so far advantage has been taken of this provision by certain County Councils, and several road districts have been merged under this authority.

*River Districts.*

The Kaituna and Palmerston North River Districts were constituted, and arrangements made for the first election and first meeting of the Board. The Palmerston North River District was subdivided. The boundaries of the Kahutara and Waikato River Districts were altered, and an alteration of boundaries of the Poverty Bay River District was under consideration at the close of the year. A petition presented for the alteration of boundaries of the Mangawara River District was not granted. Certain of the powers of a Drainage Board were conferred on the Mangawara River Board, but, despite this, there still exist several drainage districts in the Mangawara River District. The question of whether this is desirable has recently been engaging the attention of the Department. A petition presented for the amalgamation of the Lower Wairau and Spring Creek River Districts was not granted, as a much larger scheme of amalgamation seemed desirable. The proceedings in connection with a rate levied by the Makarewa-Hedgehope River District were validated. The Geraldine County Council was declared to be the River Board of the South Orari and Upper Orari River Districts. Members were appointed to the Boards of several river districts.

The constitution of the Palmerston North River District involved the abolition of the Palmerston North-Kairanga River District, and this culminated action commenced by the Department several years ago, involving the appointment of several Commissions of inquiry.

The control of the Wairau River and its tributaries was again brought under notice, and petitions were presented from the river and drainage districts praying for the amalgamation of these districts and the formation of one united district. Whilst the completion of matters connected with this does not come within the present year, it is perhaps not out of place to mention here that one united district has now been formed, called the "Wairau River District," controlling the whole of the Wairau River. This also is important, inasmuch as it completes matters which were commenced several years ago, and were only temporarily suspended when the Wairau River Bill, introduced in 1917, was dropped.

With the object of controlling the Rangitata River, the Geraldine County Council was given special authority in the Reserves and Other Lands Disposal and Public Bodies Empowering Act, 1920, to exercise the powers of a River Board within its county.

The Taieri River Trust District was constituted by means of the Taieri River Improvement Act, 1920, and action immediately taken to appoint a returning officer and make arrangements for the first election of the trust.

*Land-drainage Districts.*

The Raupare, Waitomo Valley, and Wakapuaka Drainage Districts were constituted. The Pukekohe Drainage District was abolished. The boundaries of the Makerua and Woodlands Drainage Districts were altered. The boundaries of the Dunedin Drainage and Sewerage District were altered. Trustees were appointed for several districts. Arrangements were made for the first election and the first meeting of the Kimihia, Waipa, and Whakaronga Drainage Districts, and for each new district, with the exception of the Raupare Drainage District. In this case, despite persistent demands by the Department to obtain information enabling the arrangements to be made, no infor-