

Urewera, 3,320 acres; Tahora, 8,000 acres. Most of these blocks are bush-clad, and it is possible that in some cases further forest reserves will have to be cut out. Except in the case of the Tuparoa Consolidation and Paraeroa, the prices will be low, possibly averaging £1 10s. an acre. A large area of forfeited bush leaseholds on the Opotiki side will also require to be dealt with later on when the report previously referred to is received. A very considerable amount of road-formation will be necessary in the case of the Tahora Blocks, and it is open to question whether the quality of the land justifies the large expenditure necessary if such roading is to be carried out. The total area to be opened next year is approximately 30,000 acres. In addition to this area about 21,750 acres are at present open for selection.

Amongst the blocks which will be available for disposal subsequent to 1924 are Waipaoa No. 5, 11,600 acres; Poroporo, 4,380 acres; Tangihanga, 4,460 acres; Oamaru 1c, 4,810 acres; part of Urewera, 30,000 acres; and Tapuwaeroa, 2,400 acres: a total of 57,650 acres. A further area of 30,000 acres in the Urewera country will probably be set aside for forest reserves.

HAWKE'S BAY.

(J. D. THOMSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Matters in connection with farming activities and land-settlement in Hawke's Bay may be generally reported as satisfactory. The prices for wool and dairy-produce have been the cause of much jubilation among producers, and an improvement in the financial position of the farming community is evident. There have been certain factors to militate against the improvement, principally climatic conditions, which, of course, are for the most part local. The splendid prices obtained for wool were in many cases offset by the fact that the drought and extreme heat of summer, following a very wet winter, affected crops and pastures of southern Hawke's Bay to such an extent that frequently stock had to be sold at very low prices, the farmer not being able to carry them; and those with plenty of feed naturally reaped a substantial benefit. Then the disastrous floods in the districts immediately surrounding Napier on the 11th March resulted in heavy losses in the areas affected. Dairy-produce was affected by the dry spell, but with the warm rains in March came an increase in the milk-yield. The milk cheques, however, were substantially lowered by the reduced output in the hot summer months. Orchards also suffered to a certain extent, and the output of fruit has not meant any fortunes to orchardists in the district during the year.

Apart from the aforesaid advance in prices and the effect of the weather on farmers, there is little of note to report. Transfers are not very frequent, and certain among these have had the effect of placing holdings in the previous owners' hands. Taken all round, however, land transactions have been quiet and steady, and there is a tendency to settle down and farm a property rather than to make a deal. Fortunately in this district there are few cases of farms being abandoned, although hanging on has meant considerable hardship in many cases. But with the improvement in prices has also come an improvement in prospects, and the farming community generally are on the way to complete recovery from the effects of the disastrous slump of the past three years.

Freeholds acquired.—During the year seven licensees, holding under occupation with right of purchase, exercised their right to purchase the freehold of the lands held by them. The area thus made freehold was 3,480 acres, and the price realized was £5,660. No doubt as the Crown tenants recover gradually from the effects of the recent slump they will take fuller advantage of their rights to make their farms freehold.

The Recent Flood.—The central farming portion of the Hawke's Bay Land District has been doubly unfortunate this season as regards weather and climatic conditions. Cold, bleak, wet weather marked the early months of spring, followed by an unusually dry summer and early autumn; then the break-up of the drought was immediately followed by a most disastrous flood, bringing desolation and heavy losses in stock to a number of hardworking settlers—Crown tenants on the Pakuratahi, Tangoio, and Beattie Settlements suffering equally with the private owners in the Esk Valley, Pakowhai, Moteo, Taradale, and Meeanee. The privately owned property, however, being mostly on the flat, received a thick coating of a good mud deposit, which will very shortly act as a most excellent top-dressing, and though the immediate loss in feed is severe, the ultimate gain will more than compensate the present ordinary losses.

On the hilly sheep-country numerous slips occurred carrying away boundary and interior fences, and unfortunately the small areas of flat land were smothered with sand, gravel, boulders, and debris, and will take years to make up. However, it is cheering to note that the settlers have set to with a will to do all that is humanly possible to restore their holdings to their former reproductive state.

Land Board Work.—Twelve meetings of the Land Board have been held in Napier during the year, and the total number of items dealt with was 556. This is not so great an amount of work as in the last few years; but of course the subdivision of the Hawke's Bay Land District has affected the business to a certain extent, and applications for soldiers' advances and postponements have greatly decreased.

Mr. J. A. Kerr has been appointed to the Board *vice* the late Mr. L. McKay, and Mr. H. H. Dewes *vice* Mr. A. J. Cameron, who is a resident of Gisborne. I should like to express my appreciation of the interest and enthusiasm shown by members of the Board, and the assistance rendered by them in the consideration of the many perplexing problems that have to be faced at the present time.

Revenue and Arrears.—The total revenue for the year was £256,569, of which £104,355 was received for the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Advances Account.