

LEGISLATION.

The following is a brief summary of the legislation affecting the operations of this Department, which was passed during the session of 1925 :-

Land for Settlements Act, 1925.—For a long time the necessity for a consolidation of the law relating to the acquisition and disposal of settlement land has been keenly felt. This new Act is a compilation of the Land for Settlements Act, 1908, and its numerous amendments.

Land Laws Amendment Act, 1925. This Act authorizes the extension for a term not exceeding seven years of any occupation-with-right-of-purchase license due to expire not later than 31st December, 1927, so as to afford the licensees more favourable opportunities for financing the purchase of their holdings.

Provision is made for the disposal of flax in special cases by private treaty, for the granting of flax leases on Hauraki Plains, for the same terms as on ordinary Crown lands, and for the extension for a term not exceeding ten years of leases of grazing-farms in the Cheviot Estate.

Hutt Valley Settlement Act, 1925. This Act provides the machinery for disposing in a special manner of certain lands in the Hutt Valley which have been acquired by the Crown in connection with the deviation of railway from Petone to Waterloo Road. Provision is made in this Act for a new mode on deferred-payments license, extending over a period of 34½ years, under which payment of the price of land and the interest thereon is calculated on an amortization basis.

Deteriorated Lands Act, 1925.—This Act sets up the machinery whereby occupiers of deteriorated lands or of bush-sick land brought under its operation by Proclamation can apply for relief thereunder in the way of reduction of capital values and of rents, postponement and remission of rents, advances for purchase of fencing-material, lime, manures, &c.

Public Reserves and Domains Amendment Act, 1925.—Section 2 of this Act authorizes the Minister of Lands to increase the charges for admission to any recreation-ground or public domain; section 3 empowers the Governor-General to authorize application of moneys derived from any domain for the purposes of any other domain; section 4 authorizes the Governor-General to amalgamate two or more domains when deemed expedient. Among other provisions, power is given to apportion the cost of improvement and maintenance of public domains amongst the local authorities interested.

Kauri-gum Control Act, 1925.—This Act provides for the setting-up of a Board for the purpose of controlling the trade in and the export of kauri-gum, and authorizes the imposition of a levy on all kauri-gum exported to such amount as may be fixed by the Governor-General in Council.

Reserves and other Lands Disposal and Public Bodies Empowering Act, 1925.—Part I of this Act contains sixty clauses, containing special legislation with respect to Crown lands, reserves, &c.

LANDS FOR SELECTION.

During the year 347,716 acres were selected under all tenures. The number of selections was 1,390, and the average holding ran about 250 acres. The demand for virgin country of the quality now mostly available still continues to be restricted, although there is a good demand for first-class dairying and sheep country.

A fairly large area was opened for selection, chiefly in scattered sections. The most noteworthy block offered comprised the subdivisions of the Wilden Run, Otago District. The run was cut into four holdings, ranging in area from 6,200 to 15,000 acres, with annual rentals of from £160 to £380, according to carrying-capacity and ease of working the runs. All the holdings were selected, and despite some adverse criticism, on the ground that the block as a whole would carry more sheep, there seems to be no reason why the selectors should not be successful. Two small estates, one in Auckland and the other in Marlborough, were acquired and settled during the year.

The following table shows the selections during the last five years :—

				Selections under all Tenures.	
				Number.	Area.
Year ending 31st March, 1922	..	..	..	1,710	310,076
„ 1923	..	..	..	1,426	481,649
„ 1924	..	..	..	2,088	593,771
„ 1925	..	..	..	1,327	463,946
„ 1926	..	..	..	1,390	347,716
Totals for five years				7,941	2,197,158

The lands remaining in the hands of the Department for future disposal are somewhat limited in extent, and, as a rule, somewhat unattractive in quality. New Zealand does not possess the huge areas of unoccupied land that exist in some of her sister Dominions. Nevertheless the remaining areas form an asset that is exceedingly valuable, even though most of them are non-productive at the present time. Pressure is often brought to bear for the opening-up of large areas of undeveloped lands, but under present conditions there is no doubt that the proper course is to make haste slowly. The science of farming must improve as time goes on and new methods of handling certain classes of land be thoroughly tried and tested. In the meantime it would appear an extremely doubtful policy to rapidly open up large areas that cannot be brought into profitable occupation without a large capital expenditure and the provision of cheap manures, &c., especially when it is remembered that under present conditions high working-costs are seriously retarding necessary improvements on occupied land. For some years to come it will probably be found that settlement will consist of the natural subdivision of occupied lands that should be rendered possible by improved methods and lower working-costs, together with a slow and gradual occupation of inferior lands, rather than of a rapid and somewhat problematical settlement of blocks that are at present unoccupied through reasons of disabilities of access and quality.