

During the period under review the Land Board held thirteen meetings, the sittings occupying in all thirty-eight days. A large amount of business was transacted, mainly dealing with soldier settlement, the number of cases dealt with being 1,609.

Forty-eight settlers elected to acquire the freehold of their holdings, the area being 8,194 acres, and the price paid £18,865.

There was very little inquiry for land in the remoter parts of the district, but in the more accessible portions the inquiry was fairly lively. The area taken up during the year under all tenures was 19,011 acres by 204 selectors.

NELSON.

(A. F. WATERS, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Selections of Crown lands during the past year show a decided falling-off as compared with the selections during the previous twelve months. A total area of 32,782 acres, comprising 126 holdings, was selected, fifty-three of these selections being small village allotments. An area of 66,212 acres is open for selection in the Crown Lands Guide. During the year only five tenants acquired the freehold of their properties, as against sixteen for the previous twelve-monthly period.

The Dairying Industry.—The conditions generally have been unfavourable during the year. In the early part of the season wet and cold conditions were experienced, which had a decided effect on the dairying industry, and a reduced output of butter will be shown by most of the factories operating in this district.

Sheep-farming.—Owing to exceptionally cold and wet conditions prevailing in the spring a heavy mortality amongst ewes and lambs was experienced, and farmers in the high country suffered severely, as also did sheep-farmers generally throughout the district. The wool-clips in most cases were much lighter than usual, and prices also declined.

Statutory Inspections of Leasholds.—The Field Inspectors' reports show that in most cases the requirements regarding residence and improvements have been complied with.

Hop and Fruit Industry.—The past season has been unfavourable from the hop-growers point of view, and both quantity and quality will no doubt show a decline. Small-fruits also showed a lighter setting than usual; but pip-fruits, particularly apples, show remarkably heavy crops. The apple-market is not at all satisfactory, and poor prices generally are obtained for local sales. Heavy overhead charges in the upkeep of an orchard combined with low prices makes the industry a precarious one.

Timber Industry.—The principal mills are operated in the west coast, with several smaller mills cutting in the Waimea, Takaka, and Collingwood districts. There are fourteen mills operating in the Buller County, while two mills are in course of erection. Approximately 2,000,000 superficial feet of timber and 1,650 railway-sleepers was cut from Crown lands during the year in this county. The demand for timber, however, is not good, and difficulty has been experienced by the mills in disposing of their output.

Land Board.—During the year twelve ordinary meetings and one special meeting of the Board were held. Mr. G. McMahon was reappointed a member by His Excellency the Governor-General. I desire to record my thanks to the members of the Board for cordial co-operation in all matters placed before them for decision.

Revenue.—The revenue received during the year totalled £65,028, of this amount £21,900 was from ordinary Crown tenants, the balance being receipts on account of discharged soldier settlements. These figures show an increase on the previous year of £2,351, principally made up of discharged soldiers settlement receipts.

The amount of arrears by ordinary Crown tenants at 31st March was £10,226, showing an increase of £117 over the previous year, which was principally due to the fact that several settlers, including discharged soldiers, did not get their wool-returns until after the close of the financial year.

Crown Tenants.—Several Crown tenants obtained concessions by being granted exemption or postponement of the payment of their rents. Several settlers in Maruia Valley were granted exemption from rent for a period of ten years, a concession granted on account of the rapid reversion of their land to fern and second growth.

Deteriorated Lands Act.—It is apparent to many that conditions as serious as those obtaining in the King-country exist in many of the backblock areas of the Nelson District, and in some localities it seems that settlers will be compelled to abandon their holdings owing to the reversion to fern and second growth. In reply to representations the Hon. Minister of Lands has signified his intention of making a personal tour of the areas in question to decide if they should be brought under the provisions of the Deteriorated Lands Act, 1925.

MARLBOROUGH.

(J. STEVENSON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

The climatic conditions for the year ending on the 31st March last may be classified as showing two extremes—the winter being somewhat prolonged by an exceptionally wet, cold spring, followed by a drought through the summer, consequently the weather was not up to the usual Marlborough standard. Nevertheless the season for all classes of farming must be considered a fair average one, for though crops are lighter this year than normal, prices for produce are well above average.