

1926.

NEW ZEALAND

DEPARTMENT OF LANDS AND SURVEY.

PUBLIC DOMAINS OF NEW ZEALAND

(ANNUAL REPORT ON).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

SIR,—

Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, 28th June, 1926.

I have the honour to report on the public domains of the Dominion for the year ended 31st March, 1926.

Fourteen new domains, totalling 216 acres, were brought under the provisions of Part II of the Public Reserves and Domains Act, 1908, during the year. Boards have been appointed to control eleven of the new areas, and appointments will be made in due course for the other three. Additions totalling some 383 acres were also made to fourteen existing domains. The total number of domains administered under Part II of the Act now numbers 660, comprising a total area of approximately 69,380 acres. The various Commissioners of Crown Lands administer forty-five of these domains, 234 are controlled by local authorities acting as Domain Boards, while the remainder are under the care of local Boards appointed from time to time.

Some interesting amendments and additions to the law governing domains were made by the Public Reserves and Domains Amendment Act, 1925. Section 2 of that enactment provides that on the recommendation of a Domain Board the Minister may authorize an increase in the maximum admission charge of 1s. allowed under the principal Act to any amount not exceeding 2s. per head. No increase has been made in the number of days in any one year on which admission charges may be made. This still stands at ten days in any year, with a condition that charges may be made by special permission in each case on additional days not exceeding five in number. Provision is made by section 2 for the payment to the Domain Board of such proportion of the increased charge as may be fixed by the Minister, such money to be expended on the improvement of the particular domain concerned. Under section 3 the Governor-General may by Order in Council direct that any moneys received in respect of any public domain may be expended in the improvement, &c., of any other specified domain. No Order in Council is to be issued without the written consent of the Domain Board concerned. This provision will meet the needs of cases where a domain has to its credit more funds than could be profitably expended on its improvement, and which could be better employed in improving some other domain not so well endowed. In the past special legislation has had to be provided in each case of this nature. Section 4 provides that the Governor-General may by Order in Council direct that any two or more public domains shall be united to form one domain. For ease and simplicity of management it is sometimes advisable to amalgamate domains in the same locality, and the statutory provision now made in that regard should prove very useful in appropriate cases. Formerly special legislation has had to be supplied in each case of this nature.

An exceptionally interesting portion of the amending Act provides a basis for solution of the problem that often arises of the upkeep of public domains that are extensively used by residents of more than one district. The idea underlying the legislation is that in cases where a public domain is generally used by the inhabitants of the district of more than one local authority the cost of management, improvement, and maintenance should be borne by the several local authorities in appropriate proportions.

Minor provisions of the Act provide for the ending of the financial year of Domain Boards on the 31st March, to conform with the general custom, and for the remaining in office of members of Boards until the appointment of their successors.

As usual, a number of matters affecting public domains were dealt with in the Reserves and other Lands Disposal and Public Bodies Empowering Act. Authority was granted for the expenditure on the Mount Roskill Domain of certain funds standing to the credit of the Hillsborough Square

Domain. The latter domain will not be required for recreation for some years, and in the meantime some of its funds can profitably be employed in certain improvements required on the former. The Otahuhu Borough Council was empowered to expend funds derived from portion of the Otahuhu Domain under its control on certain other land acquired by the Council for recreation purposes. Further provision was made in connection with the payment of compensation and expenses involved in the taking of an area at Hamilton Lake for recreation. A railway quarry and a quarry acquired by the Gisborne Borough Council were declared public domains, subject, however, to the reservation of the right to remove stone at any time. A portion of the Eketahuna Domain which was unsuitable for recreation was set apart for a public cemetery. An unused cemetery reserve is being added to the domain in its place. The Ashhurst Domain Board was authorized to contribute towards the erection of a cottage on the Ashhurst Public Cemetery. The cottage will be occupied by the caretaker of the Domain, who also carries out the duties of sexton. Authority was granted the Levin Borough Council to expend on the Levin Park Domain certain funds derived by it in its capacity as the Levin Domain Board. Provision was made for the extension for a short period of the term of appointment of the Christchurch Domain Board. The area of Reserve 3231 (portion of the Ashley Gorge Domain), as published in the instruments of reservation, &c., was found to be considerably short of the actual area within the boundaries as originally defined. These boundaries have been considerably altered as the result of recent surveys, and under all the circumstances it was found necessary to redefine the boundaries of the domain. An area of 2 roods 7·6 perches of the Christchurch Domain was vested, subject to certain conditions, in the City Corporation as a site for a public art gallery. Section 66 of the Reserves and other Lands Disposal and Public Bodies Empowering Act, 1920, authorized the Mount Somers Domain Board to contribute £700 towards the erection of a War Memorial Hall on the domain. Permission has now been granted to increase the contribution to £800, which will allow of the liquidation of the existing debt. The Board has in hand ample funds which are not required for expenditure on the domain in other ways. The reservation over the Ohiwa Domain, Opotiki district, was cancelled and the land declared available for disposal under the Land Act. This area was useless for recreation purposes.

By section 21 (7) of the Ashley River Improvement Act, 1925, the Ashley River Trust constituted under that Act was appointed as the Ashley Domain Board in succession to the Sefton-Ashley Drainage Board, which body previously held the appointment.

A local Act affecting a public domain was the Rawhiti Domain Act, 1925. This Act provided that leases under the Public Bodies' Leases Act might be granted over a small portion of the Rawhiti Domain, New Brighton, the revenue derived therefrom to be expended on the improvement or extension of the domain.

Orders in Council were issued appointing thirty Boards to control domains for further terms. Over eighty vacancies on some sixty-two Domain Boards were filled by the appointment of suitable persons nominated by the residents of the particular districts concerned. A large volume of correspondence was dealt with, not only in connection with appointments, &c., but also with regard to general inquiries on matters of administration, applications for subsidies, leasing of domain areas, charges for admission, &c.

The improvement referred to in last year's report in the matter of furnishing the annual reports required under section 45 of the Act has been maintained. Most of the Boards now appear to recognize that these should be furnished promptly and be filled in as completely as possible.

From time to time applications are received for permission to sell public domains, and with the proceeds to purchase other areas. Where a domain is not used by the public by reason of unsuitable situation or physical features, &c., there is generally no objection to its sale provided another and more suitable area can be obtained at a reasonable figure. Some applications, however, would if granted involve the sale of fairly large areas quite suitable for general recreation purposes, and in place thereof the purchase of very much smaller areas for sports-grounds pure and simple. The Department is prepared to encourage the use of public domains for sports and organized games in every legitimate way, but it cannot recommend the sale of areas that are a pleasure and delight to all sections of the community in order to provide almost solely for the requirements of one or more particular sections.

I have, &c.,

J. B. THOMPSON, Under-Secretary.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands.

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