

181. There is a separate branch of both the Stamp Duties Office and the Land and Deeds Registry Office in each of the four main centres, and also the Head Office in Wellington. In the following provincial centres there is a combined office, with one controlling officer for the Stamp Duties Branch and the Land and Deeds Registration Branch, although the work of each branch is largely carried on by individual staffs. The towns to which we refer are—

Gisborne.	New Plymouth.	Nelson.	Invercargill.
Napier.	Blenheim.	Hokitika.	

182. It will be seen that the public throughout New Zealand is well served by branch offices. **We are informed that in each of the States of the Commonwealth of Australia there is only one Land Transfer Office and one Stamp Duties Office situated in each capital. If one such office suffices for the needs of each Australian State, it seems clear that four offices (one at each main centre) should amply cover the requirements of the Dominion.** We recommend, therefore, that the district offices in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin be retained, and that the following branch offices be closed :—

Gisborne.	New Plymouth.	Nelson.	Invercargill.
Napier.	Blenheim.	Hokitika.	

183. We wish, however, to make an exception for the time being in the case of Napier. It is necessary to reconstruct the Land Transfer Registers for that district and this necessarily involves a considerable amount of research work, which can best be carried out in the district. The Napier office must therefore be kept open until the work of reconstruction has been completed.

184. The adoption of this recommendation will involve some expenditure in respect of increased accommodation in the four centres. The present fireproof accommodation would probably be insufficient for the increased requirements of the main offices and additional steel shelving would be required, but the capital cost of these additions would be quickly covered by the savings in administrative charges. It is estimated that a saving of some £6,000 per annum would accrue from the closing of the offices recommended, while office accommodation would be made available in the towns in which the offices were closed. This in turn might enable the Government either to derive revenue from the leasing of the offices or to save rental which is at present being paid for accommodation in privately-owned buildings. In framing our estimates we have made no allowance in respect of this.

185. Objections will of course be raised to the closing of offices as suggested, but, as a saving of at least £6,000 per annum would accrue, this should far outweigh purely local considerations. We believe that ultimately the saving should be greater than £6,000 per annum.

186. There is one further matter to which attention should be drawn. The Land and Deeds Office and the Stamp Duties Office in Christchurch are situated in the old Provincial Chambers, and about three years ago some thousands of pounds were spent in reconditioning and enlarging the strong-room accommodation in the buildings. It is understood that the present fireproof accommodation is sufficient for a considerable number of years. The District Office of the Lands and Survey Department is also accommodated in this building, and there is no serious complaint of lack of accommodation. There is no expenditure for rent incurred by either of the Departments. There has been a proposal that the State Fire Insurance Office should erect a block of offices in Christchurch, and that special accommodation should therein be provided for both the Land and Deeds and Stamp Duties offices and the Lands and Survey offices. This would involve an annual cash payment by way of rent of several thousand pounds, and in view of the adequacy of the present accommodation we are strongly of opinion this rent commitment should not be incurred.

Savings in votes, Stamp Duties, and Land and Deeds Registry, £6,000.

NATIVE AFFAIRS.

187. We have considered it desirable to deal with the administration of Native affairs as one subject, for the reason that, although the activities are not confined to one special Department, there is a degree of overlapping between the Departments and organizations concerned. Native affairs are at present departmentally controlled as follow :—

(1) *Native Trust Office.*

188. Comprising the administration of Native funds and reserves, estates of minors, &c.

(2) *Native Department.*

189. Comprising—(a) *Native Land Courts.*—Investigation of Native titles, partitions, exchanges, successions, adoptions, appointment of trustees, &c.; the Appellate Court being the final judicial authority.

(b) *Native Land Purchase Branch.*—Purchase of Native land by the Crown under the direction of the Native Land Purchase Board.

(c) *General.*—Head Office control and branch offices; general administration of the Native Land Act, co-ordination of Board and Court work, control of farm development work, granting of relief to indigent Natives, Native unemployment, &c.