

REPORT.

REVIEW OF PAST YEAR.

CLIMATIC conditions in most districts during the past year were generally favourable for farming operations. There were some severe spells of bad weather in certain localities, but the winter generally was a fairly good one, and stock came through in very fair condition. The rainfall was not so evenly distributed throughout the seasons as could be desired, but taken all round the year was an excellent one from the purely production point of view. Lambing percentages were very good, the dairying industry again returned increased yields, and some heavy crops of grain were harvested in the agricultural districts. Unfortunately, produce and stock prices remained at low levels, and many farmers had a particularly hard struggle to maintain their position on the land. Crown settlers in general, however, are in good heart and are making commendable efforts to keep their properties in order and to meet their obligations to the best of their ability.

Receipts from rental and other payments have been fairly well maintained, the total amount collected during the past year being only slightly less than for the previous year. Numbers of the Department's tenants have, of course, been unable to meet their rent in full, and it has been necessary to assist them in accordance with the individual circumstances. So long as these circumstances are beyond the tenant's control the first consideration has been to keep him on his farm and to maintain his property as well as can reasonably be expected, while at the same time requiring him to carefully budget his expenditure and to contribute to the State a fair share of the revenue produced from the farm.

Selections of Crown and settlement lands on all tenures during the year totalled 280,518 acres. This subject is dealt with more fully at a later stage of this report. At the 31st March the tenants on the books of the Department numbered 37,714, occupying a total area of slightly over 19,000,000 acres. Pastoral runs account for nearly 9,000,000 acres, while 1,880,000 acres of purchased estates are held under lease under the provisions of the Land for Settlements Act.

LEGISLATION.

The Land Laws Amendment Act, 1932, provides power for the granting of relief to certain tenants of the Crown who were previously ineligible to apply for such relief, and also contains machinery provisions designed to improve the working of the Land Acts. The principal provisions are briefly as follows :—

The Lands Development Board may make advances for live-stock to occupiers of undeveloped Crown and settlement land. Rents payable in respect of leases of domains or public reserves vested in the Crown may be reduced in cases of hardship. The provisions of sections 124 and 125 of the Land Act, 1924 (relating to postponement, remission, or capitalization of rent), are extended to cover the case of leases and licenses granted for the growing, cutting, or removal of flax. Existing provisions making it compulsory to add accumulated postponed rents to valuations of land reduced pursuant to legal authority are modified so as to enable satisfactory revaluation adjustments to be made in certain cases. Flax leases granted under the principal Act may be surrendered in exchange for leases having a longer term and giving adequate protection for improvements. Power is provided for the establishment of fire districts for the protection of flax and peat lands. With the object of affording facilities whereby owners of rural private lands may dispose of portions of their holdings in excess of what they can profitably occupy, provision is made whereby intending purchasers of such lands may be assisted by advances up to 90 per cent. of the approved purchase price, together with, if necessary, advances for development purposes. Special provision is made for dealing with the reclamation of tidal and foreshore lands.

The Reserves and other Lands Disposal Act, 1932, and the Reserves and other Lands Disposal Act, 1932-33, contain nineteen and twelve sections respectively dealing with Crown lands, reserves, &c. Included in the latter Act are sections temporarily extending the benefits of certain provisions of the Land Act and the Land for Settlements Act dealing with the granting of remissions and postponements of rent, and temporarily suspending the operations of Land Act provisions with respect to the revaluation of rural, Crown, and settlement land.

The Finance Act, 1932, abolishes the Hauraki Plains Settlement Account, the Hunter Soldiers Assistance Trust Account, the Hutt Valley Lands Settlement Account, the Rangitaiki Land Drainage Account, and the Swamp Land Drainage Account.

LAND-DEVELOPMENT.

During the year excellent progress has been made in the development by the Department of various blocks of Crown Lands and in the provision of loans to Crown tenants occupying undeveloped or partially developed land to assist with improvements and stock.

In statements appended hereto figures are given to illustrate the extent of operations as at 31st March, 1933. It will be observed that, with the exception of the Pongakawa Block, no new development schemes have been inaugurated, the Lands Development Board having concentrated upon the developing of the areas on which work had been already commenced.

The success that has been attained in the development of pumice lands comprised in the Ngakuru Block and the Onepu Block has been most encouraging. Although the development of the Ngakuru Block has been almost completed the land has not yet been offered to the public for permanent selection. The Lands Development Board has decided to thoroughly test out the