

*Aotea District.*

*Native Land Court.*—During the past year the Court held some sixteen sittings at Wanganui, New Plymouth, Hawera, Taumarunui, and Tokaanu. The Court also adjourned to other centres to deal with special matters. The volume of business transacted was well maintained, and although there was a slight reduction in the actual number of orders made during 1938–39 this was more than compensated by the magnitude of some of the matters which came up for consideration. Among the important cases upon which the Court was engaged was a claim by the Whanganui Natives to the bed of the Whanganui River. This case had not been brought to a conclusion at the end of the year under review. The Judge of the district was called upon to attend Appellate Court sittings and special inquiries in other districts on several occasions. There were 5,584 cases advertised for hearing, and of this total 2,143 cases were considered. Fees totalling £813 14s. 8d. were collected.

The number of partitions made was twenty-two, affecting 5,369 acres, a reduction on last year's figures. Included among the number were several combined or consolidated partitions in terms of section 146 of the Native Land Act, 1931. The Natives appear to be appreciating the advantages of consolidating their interests into one block by means of partitions of this nature, and an increasing number of applications under this section is being received. Apart from orders of the nature above described, there is no formal consolidation work being undertaken.

As is usual, succession orders comprise the bulk of the orders made by the Court. The total number of these orders made was 531, a small increase on that for the previous year.

The number of rate-charging orders made during the year totalled 109, approximately the same number as in previous years. The orders made were in respect of Taranaki and Wanganui lands, there being a complete absence of applications affecting lands in the Taumarunui and Tokaanu areas. Applications for the appointment of a Receiver for the purpose of enforcing charges for rates unpaid are rare, and no orders were made in the past year.

The Court made miscellaneous orders in some 192 cases covering many aspects of its jurisdiction in regard to Natives and Native land. The majority of these cases concerned the laying-off of roads, the assessment of compensation for lands under the Public Works Act, 1928, inquiries under section 38 of the Native Land Act, 1931 (and also in respect of petitions), as directed by the Chief Judge, orders of adoption, appointment of trustees, and various orders in respect of the estates of deceased Natives. The Court also conducted numerous inquiries in respect of applications lodged under the Native Housing Act, 1935.

Applications for confirmation of alienations of Native land, especially leases, continue to increase, and the number of confirmations granted by the Court during the past year was fully maintained. It is pleasing to state that there were very few sales of Native land confirmed by the Court. Sales are confirmed only under special circumstances, but in the event of a sale being completed the Court usually requires the purchase-money to be paid to the Maori Land Board under section 281 of the Native Land Act, 1931. In all cases where the purchase-money is substantial the Court ensures that it is applied for the benefit of the Native vendor to such purposes as the erection or repair of houses and the purchase of furniture.

*Maori Land Board.*—The activities of the Maori Land Board in relation to the leasing of vacant sections vested in it under the Native Land and Native Township Acts and the renewal of leases continue to be important phases of the Board's duties. In the past year the Board, with the consent of the Board of Native Affairs, has advanced moneys, repayable out of rents, at a low rate of interest to various Native applicants for the purpose of erecting or purchasing houses.

During the last year a great increase was shown in the financial activities of the Board both as to receipts and expenditure as well as in the number of transactions recorded. The total receipts for the year, excluding withdrawals from the Board's Deposit Account with the Native Trustee, were £109,404, an increase of £20,440 over the preceding year. Payments for the year totalled £115,231, as against £97,197 for 1937–38. The total number of payments for the year was 12,442, as against 8,831 in 1937–38 and 5,640 in 1936–37. The number of blocks, including Board and West Coast Settlement Reserves, for which the Board collects rent is 565, and the annual income derived therefrom is approximately £49,700.

The assets of the Board are as follows :—

	£
Cash balances .. .. .	3,528
Deposits with Native Trustee .. .. .	50,417
Mortgages and charges .. .. .	85,529
Office premises, furniture, &c. .. .. .	15,296
Sundry debtors (excluding trust) .. .. .	1,377
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	£156,147
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Specific reserves and Reserve Funds total £59,210, while the total liability to Native beneficiaries is £92,884.

*Native Housing.*—The living-conditions of many Natives in the district have been considerably improved by the operation of the Native Housing Act, and activities under this heading have been maintained during the year. This phase of district operations is the subject of more detailed reference in the report of the Board of Native Affairs.