



THE PHOTOGRAPHS on this page (stills taken by the Public Works Department film unit) illustrate typical New Zealand erosion problems. The top photograph shows wind-eroded land at Waiwhare, near Hastings. Below it is to be seen some of the good soil of Poverty Bay, now forming useless mud-flats at the Waipaoa River mouth. The bottom photograph shows the damage done to farmland by boulders spilled over it during heavy floods.

FILMING THE FIGHT AGAINST EROSION

P.W.D. makes Documentaries in Technicolour

PREOCCUPATION and rapid progress are apt to cause the townsman in New Zealand to dismiss rather casually news of an abandoned farming area. It is merely an accepted condition of some of our third-class land. It is uneconomic to farm it, so why worry? But there is a branch of the Public Works Department that does worry—very considerably.

This department, usually associated with bulldozers, wheelbarrows, tunnels, pipe lines and blue prints, has several branches of specialists. One, dealing solely with soil conservation and rivers control, is extending its work over a wide area. A representative of *The Listener* discovered that by sitting in a theatre in the P.W.D. building in Wellington, and interviewing officers of the branch, while watching colour films of erosion and its remedies in the Poverty and Hawke's Bay districts.

Flood menace, bridges washed away, and damaged highways first brought soil erosion to official notice, one staff man explained. Catchment boards were set up in both islands, supervising an aggregate area of 42,000 square miles with a capital value of £262,000,000 and a population of 603,000—or 42 per cent of the Dominion total. In time there will probably be 20 to 24 Boards covering most of the country, but action has been taken first where it was most urgent, and in every case this has been brought about by the co-operation of local authorities.

Each district, we were told, includes the whole of one or more river valleys, and the boundary goes right to the watershed, to give the Board full control from the hilltop to the sea. These Boards have the widest powers to carry out their duties. They are mostly of 15 members, of which ten are elected and five are Government nominees. Six Boards were elected two years ago and four are one year old.

Law in Retirement

Soil conservation is an entirely new activity. Its object is to preserve land fertility, and to prevent the richness of the land being lost. It is also to prevent the pouring of soil and rock into rivers.

Erosion has been caused by unwise long-term clearing of land, we were told, and we shall have to wait a long time before there is any noticeable improvement. But a number of projects for conservation have been started and investigations are being made about the purchases of some properties of hill country, with the idea of closing them up and "retiring" them from farming.

The Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council has begun extensive trials in Poverty Bay to test which grasses are most suitable for grassing both new and old slips. Investigations are also being made into the possibility of establishing two research stations—one on hill country in the North Island and one in the high country of the South Island. These will be used for trying out various methods of conserving soil. In very severely slipped country in Poverty Bay a working party is to carry out experiments in gully control.

On the staff side, the council is calling applications for the three Soil Conservators and arrangements are being made to train returned servicemen by assisting studies at Lincoln College. The North Canterbury Board has appointed its own conservator and the South Canterbury Board has appointed a pastoral liaison officer.

Erosion in Technicolour

So much for the administrative side. The council's film unit has been operating for two years with a staff of three. Good movies in colour are taken by members of the staff and are shown to gatherings of farmers. The unit will visit the South Island in August, starting with North Canterbury.

The films show pictures of actual cases of erosion, contrasted with flourishing farm lands. They show, too, the causes of erosion, whether they are overstocking of land or burning. It is emphasised that permanent control is in the upper lands, where vegetation holds the soil and keeps the debris out of rivers. Control schemes near the mouths of rivers are said to be useless if the trouble is not treated at the source.

Two of the films on circuit are "Molesworth" and "Poverty Bay." Others—
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