

Advisory committees foster sound land use

In the past, Maori land development has met with varying success. Throughout New Zealand, viable commercial enterprises have developed into economically sound and productive ventures, paying handsome dividends not only to the owners but to the country as a whole.

Elsewhere, progress has been hampered by a lack of finance and expertise in land management with the result that land use has been short term and temporary while other potentially viable projects have been abandoned or put off.

One of the more common grievances voiced by Maori land owners over the years has been the formidable and sometimes unending task of dealing with officialdom in order to get financial or legal assistance.

BRIDGING GAPS

The job of bridging the gaps, not only between officialdom and the public, but also between the successful and not-so-successful developers is now the job of the Maori Land Advisory Committees which were established in 1974.

These committees are made up of about five representatives of the Maori landowners and three ex officio members from the Department of Maori Affairs, the Valuation Department and the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the different land districts.

The committees are delegated responsibilities from the Maori Land Board to consider and approve rural loans and regularly inspect new properties and interview prospective applicants. The Board is now moving to assist Maori people venturing into small business and the committees are considering these proposals at local level and recommending to the Board.

The Board has delegated many "machinery" functions to the committees in an effort to enable decision making and participation to be carried out at a local level rather than by a centralised body.

The committees are also involved in promoting sound use of Maori land particularly where it is idle or undeveloped. The emphasis has been on encouraging title improvement and collective development initiatives. This means the committees meet with groups of owners to talk about what can be done with the land and by what means.

The committees are asked to receive all "takes" in regard to Maori land matters and to assist where possible in sorting out land grievances.



South Island Land Advisory committee members looking out over Lake Hawea from the lookout on the Wanaka-Haast Highway.

- On the south-east coast of Otago, at Tautuku, is about 3500ha of undeveloped coastal Maori land. It is one of the few areas of coastal native bush left in this part of Otago and is coveted for its scenic reserve potential.

- At least 220 kilometres directly north-west of Tautuku Bay, on the shores of Lake Hawea, is about 670ha of land that was originally set aside by the Crown as a Maori landless lands grant. The grant consisted largely of steep bracken and tussock covered broken hills graduating to some easier flat to rolling country on the lake shore, part of which included a 40ha fishing reserve. Because of a problem with successors in title to the original grantees, the bulk of the land reverted to the Crown. Some of the land was used for roading and flooding for a hydro scheme in Lake Hawea. Some was sold to an adjoining owner and the bulk was absorbed into the adjoining high country runs after various legislative moves stopped the original grant.

The land is now the subject of a Ngaitahu Trust Board petition to Parliament for its return to the descendants of the original titleholders.

- Just 200 kilometres south of Hokitika, Westland, near the Karangarua River, is 120ha of mostly undeveloped Maori land, consisting of recently cut-over bush, kahikatea

swamp and semi-wet flats. About 100ha is suitable for farming and has the potential to support about 15,000 livestock.

- On the south-west coast of Southland, at Te Wae Wae Bay and Hedgehope are two large undeveloped Maori land blocks, totalling almost 20,000ha. In 1979, the Murihiku Trust was set up to foster corporate development of these blocks.

These and other localities throughout Otago, Southland and Westland were on the itinerary of a recent four day tour by the South Island Maori Land Advisory Committee.

The purpose of the tour, which covered about 1800km, was to consider rural loan applications, to review some of the Maori Land Board's existing propositions and to inspect areas of Maori land with potential for development.

The tour party consisted of committee chairman, Mr Maurice Pohio, a retired farmer from Christchurch; committee members, Mr Jack Stewart, a sheep and cattle farmer from Wyndham, Southland; Mr Alfred Preece, sheep and cattle farmer from Owega on the Chatham Islands, and Mr Mugwi MacDonald, a town supply dairy farmer at Spring Creek near Blenheim. Mr Pohio is also a shareholder and board member of the Mawhera Incorporation, deputy chairman of the Ngaitahu Trust Board