MAORI LAND DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES, 1945 - 1974
WITH TWO CASE STUDIES FROM THE HOKIANGA

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of Maori land development schemes during the period 1945 to 1974, and contains two case studies from the Hokianga. Apirana Ngata introduced the schemes to New Zealand's legislature in 1929, giving the state direct legal and financial responsibility for assisting Maori people to develop and farm Maori land. The thesis briefly outlines the historical background to the schemes, and their social objectives. It details the development scheme legislation and policy, including its practical implementation and administrative structure. The two case studies reveal the complexities of the schemes at a local operational level, and shifts in the department's policies and approach since the 1930s.

Title improvement policies have been integral to the operation of the schemes. The government has consistently viewed multiple ownership of Maori land as an impediment to bringing Maori land into full production, and the schemes relied on various devices for improving Maori land title to facilitate secure tenure arrangements for Maori farmers (including sole ownership) and to allow land development to occur. These various devices include consolidation, conversion and amalgamation. Ultimately though, the prolonged emphasis on title improvement was unwarranted. The legislation made ample provision for development to occur regardless of the number of owners or the state of the title.

During their first twenty years, the schemes provided subsistence level farming. They supported many Maori communities through depression and war, provided modern conveniences in modern homes, and reasonable incomes for families. Maori farmers and land owners responded variously to the schemes. Some were completely comfortable with the schemes, others struggled. But ultimately, the large-scale corporately run schemes would have the best chance of surviving as long term propositions. The smaller farms would eventually bow to the pressure of the demands of changing overseas markets.
In the post-war years, the Department of Maori Affairs increasingly bureaucratised and formalised its land development programme, and pressed ahead with reforming Maori land titles. In the process, the department became responsible for ensuring the long term success of the schemes, and protecting the interests of the parties involved, including itself, the public, and the owners and occupiers of the schemes. The overall effect of the department’s policies was to create a protected environment in which the department assisted Maori farmers into the modern farming industry, while protecting them from the cruelty of the modern economy.

This thesis looks at how these things occurred by reconstructing the policy and legislation that created and maintained the schemes, discussing some of the key issues and difficulties that arose, and drawing on the experiences of the two schemes that are the subjects of the case studies in chapter five. A great shift in policy occurred as government struggled to balance its socio-economic responsibilities to Maori people and its economic responsibilities to the nation. Ultimately, schemes that began as a response to local development needs in Maori communities, emerged in the 1970s as primarily concerned with maximising the production potential of Maori land, for the benefit of the national economy.
Nga mihi

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Aroha Harris
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Abbreviations

AJHR Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives
BMA Board of Maori Affairs
CFRT Crown Forestry Rental Trust
consol consolidation
conversn conversion
devpt development
eg for example
NA National Archives
n.d. no date
no. number
NZG New Zealand Gazette
NZOY New Zealand Official Yearbook
NZPD New Zealand Parliamentary Debates
p/pp page/pages
pt part
succn succession
succr successor
vol volume
Wgtn Wellington