

No. 13.

No. 13.

Mr. Mee.

22nd Feb., 1869.

Mr. Isaiah Mee, being duly sworn, examined :—

I am a miner settled for four years on the Tuapeka Flat, adjoining Mr. Smith's Run. I keep an acre of ground under my Miners' Right. I have about 27 head of cattle. The Run is so near to where the miners are camped along the creek, that we cannot run our cattle. These miners follow mining and cattle keeping, because the ground is getting too poor for us to depend on mining alone. The houses are thick along the creek. Many of the miners have cattle, some more and some less. I don't know how many acres our cattle run on, but I know that they have hardly sufficient land now, and that in the winter they'll have nothing to eat. It would assist us very much if the Government would throw open those two Runs, and let us have feed for our cattle. It would encourage us to stop in the district. We do not want to stir out of the district, but we must have some inducements to stop there. Block No. 4 (between Tuapeka Creek and Waitahuna), is closed on petition of the miners settled there, because much of it is auriferous. There is no pasture land near enough to our houses for our cattle to run on. I suppose there are 40 or 50 miners living along there who have cattle. I don't know how many miners in all there are. Nominally there may be 500, besides wives and families. Almost all are married men and settled down, who do not rove about or lift their swag at all, living upon an acre of ground, and some, combining cattle, keeping with mining; and I am confident many more would invest their money in cattle if the land were thrown open and they could get grass for them. We have stopped at the present buying cattle—because there is no feed for them. We have no fat cattle at present to sell for want of grass—not three fat beasts in our part of the district. I am certain that the miners would cultivate more land if they could get it.

No. 14.

No. 14.

Mr. Brown.

22nd Feb., 1869.

Mr. Brown, M.P.C., for the Goldfields, being duly sworn, examined :—

So much evidence has been given, that it leaves me few points to remark upon. Taking the Tuapeka District as containing 95,000 acres, which I believe is correct, there are over 20,000 acres under occupation of application for agricultural purposes. I should say there are at least some 15,000 acres that are occupied as residence areas by miners, or are being, or have been mined, and are consequently useless for either pastoral or agricultural purposes. We have on the remainder some 4,000 head of cattle, which, at 12 acres to each head of cattle, would occupy 48,000 acres. There are also licenses granted for about 30,000 sheep to about 14 sheep-owners who are virtually engaged in pastoral pursuits. Besides these, the miners themselves run, under their Miners' Rights, some 500 head of cattle. This will show that the Agricultural Reserve is more than sufficiently occupied already. Blocks Nos. 1, 2, and 3, on this Reserve, immediately adjoining the Township of Lawrence, comprise about 10,000 acres of land. Out of this amount, only about 750 acres are open for selection. This is all within a few miles of the town. Upon the 20,000 acres alluded to above, there are about 300 settlers, exclusive of their families. The Reserves of 5,000 acres each, on the Runs 106, 123, and 137, are totally inadequate to the requirements of the district. I would recommend that the Leases over those three Runs should be cancelled, and that suitable selections should be at once made for agricultural occupation; and that the pieces best suited for agriculture should be selected at once, and surveyed prior to their being dealt with; care being taken that auriferous land be in the first place reserved from occupation. There is one matter that has not been mentioned: I mean the question of the Compensation of Agricultural Lessees whose leased lands are found to be auriferous, and consequently are taken away from them. I think they should be compensated by the Government in the same manner as runholders are, as the danger of being turned out is a great impediment to settlement. The miner, too, is deterred from prospecting near the leased lands, lest he should have to pay the compensation. A very large proportion—fully one-half of the agricultural settlers—either are, or have been miners; and there is doubtless a large number of that class disposed to settle with their families. The Block of 3,000 acres recently proclaimed for occupation, is nearly all auriferous, and the miners object to its being taken up for agricultural settlement. I would recommend that a better title should be given to the occupiers of what are called "Resident Areas" on the Reserves. The holders of Miners' Rights, who have these areas, should have the same privilege of purchasing as Agricultural Lessees have.

Hon. Mr. Donnett.] Before concluding your evidence, will you inform the Commissioners whether you have any complaint to make of mal-administration of the Land Laws in this Province?—I have no complaint myself to make. I am aware of one that has been made by Messrs. Higgins, White, Reid and Agner, and Taunton, as to applications made in 1866 for Agricultural Leases in Waitahuna West, which, as they cannot be present, and they have repeatedly brought it before me, I will now mention for them. Their complaint is, that they are not put in possession of the land. The applications were heard in the Warden's Court, and recommended by the Warden. They afterwards Memorialised the Provincial Council, and the evidence taken by the Provincial Council will be found in "Appendix to Votes and Proceedings" (Session 24, 1868, page xv.), with the Report at page 27, among "Reports of Select Committees." The report was to the effect, that the Leases should be granted immediately. This has never yet been done. I wish the Commissioners would read the evidence taken by the Council, and include their view of the matter in their Report. I would recommend that all Agricultural Blocks should be surveyed beforehand, so that the pretexts for demanding the deposit for survey would be obviated. The deposit of £10 for every 50 acres—especially where they grant four Blocks of 50 acres, and insist upon the four deposits—is excessive, and greatly hinders settlement. The applicant is moreover generally kept out of the money for 2 years. As a resident freeholder in the Tapanui district, I feel it incumbent upon me to bring one more fact under the Commissioners notice. I allude to the practice of throwing open small blocks of land under the covenants. In that district, these blocks do not exceed 8,000 acres. One has been already surveyed and nearly all sold. Another of these is now under survey on Run 163, in allotments of from