

No. 18.

Mr. Wm. Archibald Murray.—

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[This evidence is as taken on oath, but was afterwards corrected and forwarded to the Commissioners, in writing, by Mr. Murray.]

- 1.—Has not a portion of Run-land been lately declared into a Hundred?—Yes.
- 2.—How much?—About 12,000 acres near Tokomairiro.
- 3.—Will this be sufficient for the wants of the surrounding district?—For the present.
- 4.—What was the effect of making the former portion of Messrs. Maitland and Pillan's run into a Hundred?—To transfer it from unprofitable occupation by the Crown into freehold estates.
- 5.—Has any of it been bought and settled or cultivated by Agricultural settlers?—Yes; nearly all has been bought, and a very large extent of land in the Waitahuna Hundred has been, and is being cultivated.
- 6.—At what price was this land sold?—Chiefly at 21s. per acre; but some of it much higher. The Land Office will best supply such information.
- 7.—Do you think the land on these Runs about to be surveyed and sold will fall into the hands of persons who will cultivate much of it, or into the hands of intending sheep-farmers?—I think it will chiefly be bought by persons who will keep sheep and cattle, and cultivate more or less according to prospect of profit therefrom.
- 8.—Is the present leasing system under the Goldfields Act satisfactory? If not, what are its defects?—It is too complicated and costly, and the areas are too small for profitable occupation. There is too much difficulty in obtaining a title, and too much uncertainty and circumlocution involved. It spoils and destroys the country for profitable occupation, and seduces, by fictitious inducements, industrious working men from legitimate and useful labor, though actually upon such costly and illiberal terms as will reduce them to a position little better than that of State paupers.
- 9.—Would you suggest to sell or lease the land instead?—Sell, on certain conditions.
- 10.—What would be the effect if other Runs, such as No. 123 and 137, were taken from the Goldfields and declared into a Hundred? Would this land be bought and settled by agricultural farmers or merely cattle-holders?—Same reply as to No. 7, but by more small holders in proportion, and at higher prices.
- 11.—When Hundreds have been formerly declared of lands previously in Runs, has the effect been to cause an influx of settlers and to promote agriculture in any considerable degree?—Certainly.
- 12.—What has been the effect of selling land in Hundreds at 10s. per acre?—To ruin many colonists, and evince a policy of bad faith and repudiation on the part of Government, most discreditable to our law-makers and injurious to public credit and the welfare of the Colony, by leading men to pay 20s. or more for land on the faith that the remainder would be left them as commonage until it realised the same upset price; and then after obtaining these settlers' money on such pretences reducing the price to 10s. per acre. Had such, or even a greater reduction in price been specified when the land was opened for selection, I would have strongly approved of selling the refuse land at lower prices.
- 13.—Why did the same persons first demand that the land should be so sold (at 10s.) and afterwards that the sales at this price should be discontinued?—I do not know the motives of the persons here alluded to.
- 14.—What has been the effect of selecting and selling the best Blocks throughout the Country, on the runholder, where he has not bought the Block himself, or on the lessees of agricultural areas?—To render the Country unprofitable for present occupation and by picking the eyes out of it—spoil it for future survey and settlement.
- 15.—In your opinion can agriculture be carried on at a profit on a small scale, or on what is termed the cottier farm system, without being combined with cattle and sheep farming? If the farmer (cattle farming), what extent of land should be given in addition to that required for agriculture?—Near large towns, Yes: distant from such, or the centres of population, No. Land for Town Commons should be reserved, and would be, as in Australia, of considerable benefit, and could ultimately become public Parks and Municipal estates as population became dense. Permanent occupation of land on the commonage principle I do not consider advantageous in other situations.
- 16.—Would there be a paying market for the produce of small farms in these districts, supposing the neighboring Goldfields to be exhausted and population greatly diminished?—Unless something else turned up, No; for all would be producers where there would be no consumers.
- 17.—Have many of the actual gold-diggers settled on such farms under the Agricultural Lease system or otherwise, so as to become what may be termed *bonâ fide* settlers?—Yes; considering the difficulties and the obstacles in the way of settlement against which they had to contend.
- 18.—Do any of the occupants of land, now Hundred land or Commonage, run such numbers of sheep upon them—say, amounting to thousands—as to produce 100 bales of wool annually?—Many persons depasture large numbers of sheep on such lands: but these numbers are rateably apportioned to the extent of freehold land held by those persons.
- 19.—Are the assessments due by law in these Hundreds duly paid up?—On the Goldfields; yes. On these Hundreds, I believe, they will be generally paid up when demanded.