

## No. 24.

No. 24.

*Mr. Mackay.*

24th Feb. 1869.

Mr. George Mackay, being duly sworn, examined :—

I keep a store at Roxburgh. I have been both miner and agricultural farmer. I am not now engaged in either. I am Postmaster in the place. The great evil of the block system under the covenants is, that the runholder is entitled to the right of pasturage over the unsold portion of the land in the block. These isolated blocks are altogether too small, and in order to make agriculture remunerative on the Goldfields, it is absolutely necessary that grazing of stock should be combined with it—something approaching to the system of Hundreds. In order to this, large portions of the run should be taken irrespective of these blocks. With respect to this district, I should say that about 70,000 acres are required for agriculture, combined with pasture. I am fully satisfied that there are persons desirous of settling who would beneficially occupy this amount of land. I have been a resident now in this district for six years, and I have known during that time persons who have been compelled to leave with (in the aggregate) several thousands of pounds of capital through not being able to get land, having from £300 to £1000 each. These men would certainly have become small farmers. On the other hand, if facilities for acquiring land had been given in this district from the time it was first open, I consider the population would have been double what it now is. My opinion is that the flats along the banks of the river should be surveyed for agricultural purposes, and a certain proportion of the slopes of the ranges on each side should be thrown open for pasturage. On this (west) side, that would take up the most valuable portion of the Runs, but on the other side it would not be so, because there is equally good country at the back of the slopes required. I am fully aware of the fact that the Provincial Government object to taking Runs in this way, on account of the large amounts of compensation that would be required by the runholder; but, under the covenants they have entered into with the runholder, I consider they are in duty bound—under a moral obligation—to pay a fair amount of compensation. Alluding to the block of land thrown open for pasture by Provincial Order in Council, dated 10th instant, I consider that it is almost valueless to the residents of this district, as, for a certain portion of the year—the winter months—it is covered with snow. A great part of it is a steep and rocky slope towards the Pomahaka river. The gullies are very deep, where the snow would accumulate. There is another obstacle, that you have to cross Mount Benger to get at it. The easiest access for this district would be southward, round the base of Mount Benger, which would be a distance of about 25 miles. I daresay many of the residents will, however, be driven by necessity to apply for pasture licenses on it for this reason—that the runholders have given them notice to clear the greater part of their stock off their Run. There are not more than 500 miners actually engaged in mining—the whole population being about 900.

## No. 25.

No. 25.

*Mr. M'Lachlan.*

24th Feb. 1869.

Mr. George M'Lachlan being duly sworn, examined :—

I keep a dairy at Roxburgh, and farm about three acres. I have about 70 head of cattle. They are running on Run No. 199, under engagement for 30 head with Messrs. Cargill and Anderson, the remainder to be removed as soon as I could, I being liable to be turned off at any time. I have now received notice to remove all but seven head, from the runholder. I have an interest in mining, which occupies me in winter, when the claim can be worked. The reason why I have so many cattle is, that four years ago, I, at the suggestion of Mr. Anderson, entered into an engagement to supply the township with dairy produce, his object being to render unnecessary the keeping of cattle by the miners. The miners have, however, kept cattle notwithstanding. The arrangement between us therefore does not affect the object in view. Owing to this engagement, I omitted to avail myself of the opportunity of taking up land in the Moa Flat Block when it was thrown open. I applied some time since for a lease of 6000 acres in the block thrown open on the 10th inst., it being then supposed to be unoccupied country—my object being to fatten store bullocks for four or five months during the year, it being very rough and lying so very high that for the rest of the year it would be quite useless and dangerous from the snow drifts, which I have seen 30 feet deep on the lowest lying part of the block. Possibly it might be in consequence of my having made this application that the Provincial Government now consider it land fit to offer to the settlers for pasture. I believe that my application for a lease was refused in consequence of objections made by the runholders adjoining, the land applied for being so surrounded by Runs that I should have been obliged to drive my cattle through them to get at the block. I perfectly agree with Mr. McKay as to the inaccessibility and the distance to go if stock had to be driven to or from the block in question; but there is a short way of four or five miles in summer. But it would be risky to drive cattle that way. I don't intend to apply for any portion of the 20,000 acre block unless I cannot either make satisfactory arrangements for the depasturing of my cattle or sell them without absolute sacrifice. I would sell them at £2 a head under their real value rather than take up the 20,000 acre block. As to the land at the back and about the 1000 acre block at present thrown open on the east side of the Molyneux, I would consider that it is all perfectly useless for agricultural purposes. None of it has been applied for. Immediately outside that block, on the east side extending to the north boundary of Run 199, there are good patches for farming, a portion of which I would at once take up. I believe about 1000 to 1500 acres would be immediately taken up with the pasturage adjoining. Some would take it even without the pasturage. I think that from Higg's Accommodation House to Patrick's Hotel is the best land in the Mount Benger District. It having been reported that 2500 acres of this land were about to be thrown open, it was rushed at once and pegged off by many of the settlers. Even supposing that flat was open for selection, it would not, I think, give more than 10 to 20 acres per man. The system of taking special blocks in Run Leases, without the right to depasture