that had the Superintendent caused the particulars in which the Board of Wardens had exceeded their powers to have been pointed out to them, they could have made the necessary alterations in the regulations, so as to have permitted the requisite approval of that particular one, which would have put an end to or in a great degree diminished the abuse in question.

Your Commissioners are of opinion that in all cases of Boards of Wardens appointed to manage such reserves within gold fields, the Chairman of the Board should be elected from among their number by themselves; but that assessments should be fixed by law or regulations, and collected by officers not under the control of the Boards.

IV.—Agricultural Leases.

The alleged grievances connected with the system of agricultural leasing are—

1. The limitation of the area to be leased to each applicant to 50 acres.
2. The delay in deciding on applications and issuing leases.
3. The heavy deposits required for survey, &c., on each application.
4. That expenses for survey have in some cases been charged and taken twice over by the Government.

Limitation of area.

1. There is sufficient evidence from various quarters, and a variety of witnesses, to leave no doubt that agricultural farming on a small scale cannot be carried on unless grazing land for a few cattle be obtainable by the farmer, in addition to that he cultivates. The area of 50 acres allowed by the Gold Fields Act is not enough to allow of this. The least amount an industrious man has a chance of succeeding with, according to the most reliable authorities, is about 200 acres: the part not broken up serving for the keep of cattle, and the portion sufficiently cropped or exhausted being laid down in grass, and increasing as successive portions of the natural pasturage are broken up and brought into cultivation. The evidence of Mr. Ashcroft, Member of the Provincial Council for the district of Oamaru, which gives the experience of small farmers in that district, famous as it is for its splendid soil, is very pertinent to this subject; and the Provincial Government of Otago seem to have arrived at the same conclusion, for either in breach, evasion, or very questionable construction of the law, they have adopted the plan of allowing the same individual to put in applications for and take up four blocks of the size (50 acres) the Act allows. Of course the Act never intended this. But your Commissioners consider that although this construction of the law, and consequent administration of it, can scarcely be justified, it would be advisable that the law itself should be amended, and the maximum in an agricultural lease be expressly raised to 200 acres.

In proof of the great impetus given to settlement by the increase of the blocks allowed to be leased, may be cited the fact that at Tuapeka, when the Act of 1866 increased that amount from ten acres to fifty, the number of applications increased from 20 in 1865 to no less than 262 in 1866. The surveyor, Mr. Nicholson, could assign no other reason for this than the increase of the blocks.

Mode of requiring improvements.

Although the Provincial Government have adopted the practice of giving two leases to one person if required, they still apply to each application the regulation requiring that before a second or succeeding block can be given, proof must be produced that a certain amount of improvement has been made on the preceding one. Consequently, they refuse the additional blocks, although the applicant may have made triple the amount of improvement required on the first block, because the second is unimproved. This does not seem judicious, as the former applicant is thereby put to the necessity of beginning separate and detached cultivations, at obviously much greater expense to himself in fencing, &c., without any corresponding advantage to the public or other occupants of the blocks.

Evidence, No. 10.

Delay in issue of leases.

2. That great delay occurs in the issue of leases seems to be a fact, however to be accounted for. Mr. Vincent Pyke, the Warden for Dunstan Gold Fields District, says "it is very great," and that leases applied for and granted in 1863 or 1864 have only within this month of February been received in the local office, and the lessees refuse to take them up now, because the rents specified therein are calculated in so unintelligible a manner." It is no doubt the case that in some cases applicants do not allow for the fact that land they apply for

Evidence, No. 38.