

65. Do you think that it is advisable to give the Waste Lands Board power to sell such blocks of land?—Yes. I do not see that it is objectionable. The most of these purely pastoral lands are of an inferior quality, with a term of ten years to run, and the rents received from them is a mere trifle compared with the amount received for the purchase.

66. *Mr. Luckie.*] The interest on the purchase price, you mean?—Yes, precisely.

67. *The Chairman.*] What is the total amount of pastoral rents?—£68,000 at present. That is an approximate estimate.

68. Do you think that it is good policy to deprive the public estate of £68,000?—I do, if we can save a great deal more in interest.

69. In your dealings with pastoral tenants do you not find a great desire manifested on their part to purchase long narrow strips of land, in order that they may secure the back country belonging to their runs?—I do. That is only natural. The pastoral tenants, as men of business, endeavour to make the best bargain for themselves. It is for those who are dealing on behalf of the Province to see that they are not allowed to obtain land in such a way as to prevent the profitable occupation of the unsold lands.

70. Do you not think that it is to the interest of the Province and the Colony at large to prevent sales of land in such a form?—I do not admit that this land has been sold in such a form. I think it is to the interest of the Province to make the best bargain it can in order to dispose of the purely pastoral lands and retain those lands which are fit for agricultural settlement, so that they may be sold on a system of deferred payments, with conditions of occupation and improvement, instead of allowing the best agricultural lands to be sold and pass into the hands of large purchasers, as in the case of the Crookston.

71. Do you not think that this purchase by Cargill and Anderson of a long narrow slip was made to secure the back country?—I do not admit that they purchased a long narrow slip, and I wish to understand what is meant by the term "secure."

72. *The Chairman.*] Taking up the valleys and frontages to rivers, so as to prevent settlement from taking place or roads being made.—I wish to answer the question as put by the Chairman. My reply is, that it is impossible that Messrs. Cargill and Anderson can secure the back country in the manner mentioned, because, as regards roads, it is a part of the condition of every sale of unsurveyed land that the Government reserves as many roads through it as may be considered necessary to reach the back country in all directions, where a road can be made or is likely to be required, and the Surveyor has instructions to that effect. As regards valleys, I am not aware that this particular block contains anything that could be called valleys—in the report before me they are termed "rock-bound gorges;" and, judging from the map, there are very few streams. The back country in this case is secured to the pastoral tenant for at least ten or twelve years by his lease. The same officer reported on the block sold to Mr. Clarke. I do not know that the sale of that block was strongly opposed by the inhabitants of the Province. It was very strongly opposed by the people of Roxburgh. I do not think it was similarly opposed by the people of Lawrence; but I am not aware. The suspension of the lease was consented to by the Otago and Southland Investment Company. They were consenting parties, being mixed up in some way with the title of the run.

73. *Mr. Luckie.*] You say the Roxburgh people opposed the sale. On what grounds?—I do not know, unless it be that they objected to any land being sold in their neighbourhood. I am not able to say that Cargill and Anderson relinquished their lease in the expectation of getting the land in fee. I should think they had that expectation. They applied to purchase.

74. Would not the consent to a suspension or commutation of the lease be a precedent to that intention to purchase?—It might.

75. Practically speaking, then, they obtained the land without competition?—If any other application had been lodged the same day before 4 o'clock, it would have been necessary to submit the land to competition.

76. What opportunity was then given to the people for getting information of what had been done?—I think it was on Monday that Cargill and Anderson gave their consent to the surrender. A meeting of the Waste Lands Board was held, and that consent was minuted. On Wednesday the matter came up again before the Board, when it was resolved to consider the application next day. If any other application had been received before 4 o'clock on that day, it would have been dealt with on the same footing. The whole business was transacted at the open meetings of the Board, and the proceedings were reported in the newspapers.

77. Such a course, so far as competition was concerned, was practically next to valueless?—Certainly there was very little probability of competition under the circumstances. I do not believe there would have been competition for this block of land in any case. In support of that opinion, I may instance the fact that very superior land, after being open for competition, was sold at the upset price in the district closely adjoining.

78. Do you think that it is wise to denude the Province of land in this fashion?—It depends on the quality of the land.

79. Do you think that it is wise to prevent competition, for in effect that is the course adopted?—Oh, no. I do not think it is wise to prevent competition; but, according to our Land Act, the land cannot be put up to auction unless two applications are lodged for the same land on the same day.

80. Is it wise to denude the Province of land in that fashion?—All the circumstances must be taken into account. If the land is free from occupation, and can be offered for sale, by all means let it be submitted to competition; but when it is of a purely pastoral character, and held under a lease for a term of ten or twelve years, and it is let at a merely nominal rental, I think it is better to sell at 20s. per acre, even without competition.

81. There is evidence before the Committee to show that the gold fields question crops up. Do not certain water races taken from the river pass through this property?—All water races, either already constructed, or marked off at the time of the survey, are reserved. I have to say further, in regard to the purchasers of this block, that I have received a letter from one of them, saying that they

*Mr. Reid.*

7th August, 1872.