

1874.

NEW ZEALAND.

GOLD MINING LEGISLATION,

(PAPERS REFERRING TO).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by command of His Excellency.

REPORT OF THE OTAGO MINING CONFERENCE, 1874.

TO THE HONORABLE THE PREMIER AND THE
HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE COLONIAL EXECUTIVE,—

The second Conference of Delegates elected by the gold miners of the province met at Clyde in the month of March, 1874, for the purpose of obtaining the collective experience of practical miners from different gold mining localities, for the better guidance of those engaged in framing a new Gold Fields Bill.

Questions of a very serious nature, not apparently hitherto provided for by previous legislation, having arisen during the last year, owing to the progress of settlement on the Otago Gold Fields, it is especially necessary that the careful consideration of your Government should be given to these insufficiencies, that, in your wisdom, such measures may become law which—while effectually protecting and rendering clear the position of the gold miner—may, at the same time, be beneficial rather than injurious to the land owners and those engaged in the cultivation of the soil.

The Conference, intending this report to be read together with that of 1872, have not thought it necessary to enter anew upon subjects already fully dealt with. That report was submitted, and, after careful consideration, was approved.

The Executive of the Otago Central Mining Association have the honor to forward, for your information, the following report of the opinions expressed by resolutions, after mature consideration and careful debate, at the Clyde Conference now closed :—

OCCUPATION OF CROWN LANDS.

The right to occupy Crown lands for gold mining purposes was necessarily considered the foundation of all gold fields legislation. The Conference, while engaged in the consideration of the law as at present in force, had still to regret that, in spite of the recommendations of the Conference of 1872 and the Otago Commission of 1871, the defects complained of are still without remedy.

The miner's right, considered as a source of revenue and element of title, often is the cause of great hardship to owners of mining property. Considering the high export duty charged on gold, and that where no duty is charged—as in Victoria—the price of such right is only 5s., it appears unreasonable that so high a charge as £1 should be exacted. It is not, however, only the mere pecuniary burden of being compelled to take out and punctually renew a miner's right which weighs upon the miner, but the fact that neglect to do so involves the loss to him of his property and rights. This is a view of the question which has already forced itself upon the consideration of Parliament, and by section 5 of "The Gold Fields Act Amendment Act, 1869," an attempt was made to provide a remedy. The Conference recommends that the matter should be the subject of careful consideration, and that provision should be made for protecting the revenue (should it be considered necessary henceforth to raise revenue in this way) by the imposition of moderate penalties not involving such grave forfeitures. They are also of opinion that miners' rights should be made available for the occupation of Crown lands throughout the colony, without regard to the province in which they may have been originally issued; that miners' rights should be issued for terms of years, and consolidated miners' rights for the use of public and private companies. It appears most unreasonable that valuable mining property should be forfeited, owing to some defect in the proof of title through miners' rights and their renewals—a