

1875.

NEW ZEALAND.

PIAKO SWAMP SALE COMMITTEE.

(REPORT, MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS, AND EVIDENCE OF.)

Report brought up 15th October, 1875.

ORDERS OF REFERENCE.

(Extracts from the Journals of the House of Representatives.)

WEDNESDAY, THE 1ST DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 1875.

Ordered, That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the sale of the Piako-Waikato Swamp to Mr. Thomas Russell and others. Five to be a quorum, and report to be brought up in a fortnight. The Committee to consist of the following members:—Mr. Bryce, Mr. Cuthbertson, Sir G. Grey, Major Jackson, Mr. Hunter, Mr. Macandrew, Mr. Ormond, Captain Kenny, and the Mover.—(*Hon. Sir D. McLean.*)

TUESDAY, THE 28TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 1875.

Ordered, That the number of the Piako-Waikato Swamp Committee be increased to eleven, and that the names of Mr. Sheehan and Mr. Rolleston be added thereto.—(*Hon. Sir D. McLean.*)

THURSDAY, THE 14TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 1875.

Ordered, That the petition of John Crosby be referred to the Piako-Waikato Swamp Sale Committee.—(*Mr. T. Kelly.*)

REPORT.

1. THE Committee appointed to inquire into the sale, or proposed sale, of the Piako Swamp to Mr. Thomas Russell, have taken the evidence thereon of the following witnesses—viz., the Hon. Dr. Pollen, Hon. Sir Donald McLean, Mr. Murray, M.H.R., Mr. Sheehan, M.H.R., Major Heaphy, V.C., and Mr. O'Meara.

The opinion of Mr. C. B. Izard has been taken on the legal aspect of the transactions, and the official papers and correspondence connected with the case have been considered by the Committee.

2. I am directed to report that the land in question consists of a block of 80,000 acres, and is known indifferently as the Piako-Waikato or Great Swamp. It lies between Hamilton, on the Waikato River, and the head waters of the Piako River.

3. The Piako Swamp is a low-lying swamp, a considerable portion of which is overflowed by the flood waters of the Waikato River, which has the additional effect of backing up the local water of other and higher portions of the swamp. It could only be drained by a comprehensive and expensive system of drainage, and the quality of the soil must be considered as indifferent.

4. Under the regulations of 1867 this block of land, or portions of it, could have been selected at the price of 5s. an acre, and it remained open and unapplied for until 1871, when the conditions of sale were altered.

5. In 1873 a proposal was made to the Government by Mr. Thomas Russell for the purchase of the block at 5s. per acre, less 2s. 6d. per acre to be expended in the construction of a road, twenty-five miles in length, across the swamp. The payment of the purchase-money was to be made in two years from the date of the agreement. This proposal was accepted by the Government, and an agreement was made embodying substantially the terms of the proposal.

6. That the road (the construction of which formed part of the agreement, and which is now in course of construction, considerable progress having been made) will, when completed, be one of great public utility, affording access to land beyond the swamp, and connecting the Waikato district with the head of the navigation of the Piako and the Thames.