

1877.

NEW ZEALAND.

KARAMEA SPECIAL SETTLERS

(REPORT BY MR. A. MACKAY ON THE PETITION OF).

Laid on the Table 12th November, and ordered to be printed.

No. 1.

MR. A. MACKAY to the UNDER SECRETARY for IMMIGRATION.

SIR,—

Government Buildings, Wellington, 20th October, 1877.

In pursuance with a request contained in a memorandum by the Hon. the Minister for Immigration, that I should proceed to the Karamea Special Settlement to inquire into and report generally as to the accuracy or otherwise of certain charges made by the settlers in a memorial to the House of Representatives, dated 17th August last, against Mr. E. J. O'Connor, the Government Agent there, and also to report generally as to the progress and prospects of the settlement, I was directed by the Hon. the Native Minister to carry out the intention at the earliest possible opportunity. I accordingly proceeded there, and caused notices to be circulated amongst the settlers on my arrival, informing them that an inquiry would be held touching the aforesaid allegation, and appointed the 20th September to hear and receive evidence.

The inquiry lasted four days, and the utmost latitude was given to every one to state his case at length, without reference to the rules of evidence. Of the 46 persons notified to attend the inquiry 37 attended, and were examined. On investigation it was found that, of the 39 persons who signed the memorial, 15 were composed of persons not classed as special settlers and persons who did not belong to the settlement. The number of special settlers who signed the memorial was 27, and 19 did not sign.

The evidence of those who were examined will be found attached in Appendix B; and, after giving the matter full consideration, I beg to report that the allegations contained in the memorial are altogether unsupported.

The evidence taken impresses me with the conviction that the charges against Mr. O'Connor have been created by a feeling of distrust on the part of the memorialists against him, combined with a feeling of jealousy and suspicion against each other, and that this combination of causes has led them to magnify suspicion into certainties, and to form conclusions in many instances altogether unwarrantable.

In considering the whole question, it has to be borne in mind that numerous disadvantages have had to be encountered in founding a settlement in an inaccessible district like the Karamea, with a people entirely devoid of colonial experience; and that the measures that had to be enforced to cause them to take an active share in the duties required of them, combined with the mistaken attitude said to have been assumed towards them by Mr. O'Connor, has probably excited popular feeling against him; otherwise it is difficult to realize why such a strong feeling should exist against one who has done them many individual acts of kindness, and who has evidently striven his utmost, as far as laid in his power, to make the settlement a success.

Very little progress has been made at the settlement up to the present time. The chief cause of this is attributable to the want of suitable land to locate the settlers on, and the difficulties attendant on settling a bush country in an inaccessible district without any facilities for getting on the land. One of the chief obstacles to the advancement of the settlement has been caused through all the best land having been alienated to private purchasers in 1867, not one of whom has settled on it or made any attempt to utilize it. The land alluded to is situated mostly on the north bank of the Karamea River, and near to the port; and had it been available for occupation, fewer difficulties would have had to have been encountered in locating the settlers at the outset. Owing to this land being unavailable for settlement, the Provincial Government were compelled to proclaim a block of 4,000 acres on the south bank, under the provisions of "The Nelson Special Settlements Act, 1872." It was upon this land that the first families who landed at Karamea at the latter end of November, 1874, were located. The selection proved to be a very unfortunate one, owing to the unsuitable character of the soil, and the settlers, after two years' fruitless labour, have been compelled to abandon it with all their improvements, and commence afresh on a block of land farther up the river. This compulsory abandonment of their first holdings, after just succeeding in making themselves comfortable, tended to dishearten them on making a second attempt; but fortunately the land where they are now located is much better adapted for agricultural operations, and has already yielded on the small patches that have been