

79. Would not the tendency of local influence be to throw the land into the hands of the settlers actually located there, rather than to induce fresh population?—I think it is likely.

80. *Mr. Macandrew.*] Do you think it would be any improvement if the number of members was increased?—No; I think the number, so far as I have found, is quite enough.

81. *Mr. Hurst.*] Do you think, instead of there being one Land Board for a district like Otago, it might not be an advantage to have one or two others?—No; my view would just go in the opposite direction. I should rather think both Otago and Southland could be managed by one Board. The district is now so interspersed with railways, and facilities for travelling are so great, that the members of the Boards are personally acquainted with nearly the whole of the country. I know that our own Board is exceedingly popular in Otago. I think our Board is recognised to be thoroughly honest, and as having the interests of the settlers at heart.

82. Your observations relate to Land Boards: you have no knowledge of the working of them in any other parts of the colony?—I have a thorough knowledge of the Boards of Otago for twenty years.

83. *Mr. J. Green.*] I presume you have had considerable experience of the working of the Otago Land Board?—I have been appearing almost every meeting for twenty years.

84. Then is it your opinion that the functions of that Board are devolved unnecessarily upon the rangers?—No; I should think not: not what I conceived to be the proper functions of the Board. The Board employs rangers to report upon facts connected with cases coming before them; but the Board is always prepared to decide independently on the evidence brought before it.

85. *Mr. J. Buchanan.*] The usual course is to refer to the ranger for report?—And, in my opinion, very properly.

86. You think very properly: that is, for information upon matters of detail?—Yes.

87. *Mr. Driver.*] They often decide opposite to the recommendations of the ranger?—Very frequently.

88. *Mr. Pearson.*] There is no feeling in the Board in favour of large landowners?—Certainly not; quite the other way.

89. *Mr. J. Green.*] From your experience of the Board, do you think the decisions of the Otago Board are actuated by the political influence of the members of the present Board, or is there any pressure brought to bear on that Board by the Government?—It is rather a difficult question to answer. I have my own opinion about it. I do not think that there is any undue influence exercised by the Government on the Board. I think the Board is prepared to defer to the views of the Government, but I would not be inclined to say improperly in any way.

90. *Mr. J. B. Whyte.*] The result is satisfactory?—Yes.

91. *Mr. Macandrew.*] Do you think the waste lands might not be administered just as well by the Commissioner without any Boards?—No; I do not. I think there are very difficult questions arising that any official, however excellent, is better to have other gentlemen to consult with.

92. *Mr. Hurst.*] It takes the responsibility from off his shoulders to a large extent?—I do not think it takes it off his shoulders: as a matter of fact the act is not that of the Commissioner, indorsed by the Board, but it is positively the act of the Board itself.

93. Is there any clashing in the Board of interests?—No; not of interests.

94. *Mr. Macandrew.*] Has there ever been anything in the shape of a deadlock as between the Government and the Board?—Not that I am aware of.

95. That might take place under the existing law?—It might.

96. *Mr. J. Buchanan.*] In your letter you advert to affording the settlers relief who have taken up over fifty acres of land, to increase it to 320 acres; your opinion is that the Government Bill excludes them from that privilege: that is the construction you place upon the Government Bill?—Yes.

SATURDAY, 29th JULY, 1882.

Mr. JAMES MCKERROW, Surveyor-General, examined.

97. *The Chairman.*] You are Secretary for Crown Lands?—I am.

98. Will you take this petition and give the Committee your opinion on the various clauses?—I will. The first clause is to the effect that "many of your petitioners have taken up land on deferred payments, under the provisions of the law in force for the time being in the colony." I notice with regard to this that, out of the 137 petitioners, forty-four have taken up land on the deferred-payment system, and eleven have completed the purchase. Consequently there are thirty-three cases in which the purchase has not been completed, and which are still current. The second clause of the petition says: "That many of your petitioners have obtained their land after competition at auction, and that, owing to the length of time over which the payments were spread, over-competition at a time when a species of land fever had seized the entire community, and a too limited area of land being opened for settlement, they have given prices at auction far beyond the real value of the land."

99. *Mr. J. B. Whyte.*] How many are not paying?—Twenty-eight.

100. *Mr. Macandrew.*] Of course you are only referring to those who have signed this petition?—Yes. With regard to this second paragraph in the petition, I can only say that I think it is scarcely accurate, because most of the selectors have got their land at the upset price. It must be understood that the remarks I am now making refer only to the cases which are involved in this petition. With regard to the statement about the length of time over which the payments were spread, &c., having induced them to have given too high prices, I have to say that the length of time over which payments are spread, is a characteristic feature of the deferred-payment system. Instead of being put forward as a grievance, it is really an advantage to have plenty of time to pay and get settled on the land. The majority of these thirty-three persons got their land at the upset price of £3 per acre without competition. "The 'land fevers' referred to are always occurring, and I believe we are on the eve of another one now. With regard to the 'too limited area of land being opened for settlement,' I remark that the land which is opened for settlement is necessarily a limited quantity, because, apart from the fact that land has to be surveyed, roaded, and prepared before being offered for settlement, there is only a certain quantity of land in the colony, and we cannot give more than