

WEDNESDAY, 26th AUGUST, 1885.

Colonel Sir GEORGE WHITMORE'S examination continued.

410. *Mr. Ormond.*] In the evidence you gave yesterday you spoke almost entirely of the East Coast District?—Yes.

411. Now, with regard to the first part of the evidence you gave, it referred to land which was altogether outside of any land that was under the jurisdiction of the Native Land Court?—Yes.

412. Do you know of any other part of the colony which is dealt with outside of the law altogether in that way—for instance, is there any land round Lake Taupo that is in the same position?—Yes; there was some land there so situated, but I think most of it has gone through the Court lately.

413. I understand there is a good deal of it under lease; but I ask you this question, because you conveyed the impression that your district was the only district in that position; but what I want you to tell me is, whether you know that there are around Lake Taupo sheep-runs with leases before the land has passed through the Court?—There was a large quantity of land at Whakatane that has gone through the Court. There is Mr. Grace's run, and there is a man named Neville Walker who, I think, has a run, but I am not sure that that has not gone through the Court now; and there are others.

414. *The Chairman.*] You say you are not sure?—I am sure he has the run, but I am not sure whether it has gone through the Court.

415. *Mr. Ormond.*] Then, I take it that there are other lands that are in the same position as the East Coast lands affected by this Bill?—Yes; there are lands at Cape Palliser, I believe, and there is St. Hill's run, which has not gone through the Court. There are others on the East Coast nearer to Wellington which have been twenty or thirty years in one hand, but I have never heard that the persons holding made any complaint of their Maori landlords.

416. I should like to hear your view of the working of these Committees?—Yes; I know a good deal about that.

417. You know the Act, and what is intended to be done by it?—Yes.

418. Perhaps you do not know that since this Committee has been sitting important amendments have been submitted by the Native members; have you seen them?—No.

419. In these amendments it is proposed that these Committees should have the assent of all the owners before any action could be taken by them. Yesterday you gave us a good deal of information respecting a block of land which you knew on the East Coast, where there were a great many owners?—Yes; in my own case 1,400.

420. Do you think it would be possible ever to get a Committee appointed if you had to obtain the signature of every owner?—Impossible; there are always a good number dead and others who cannot be got at.

421. Your case which you told us of yesterday was an extreme one?—Yes; but I know of cases where eight or nine hundred signatures have to be got. There would be an average of two hundred owners in blocks of from one to five thousand acres.

422. Do you think it would be possible in any case to get them unanimous?—Absolutely impossible. In some cases there have been people who have not been born, but were only expected to be born, and, as a fact, never came to be born, put into the list of owners.

423. *Hon. Mr. Ballance.*] You stated yesterday that you obtained a lease, and that thirteen-seventeenths signed your lease?—Yes.

424. Have you looked into the provision of the Bill which relates to the election of the Committee, clause 16?—I have just read it.

425. You state that you think it would have been impossible to have got the Natives to sign unanimously?—Yes, if they had to be unanimous.

426. Would it be impossible for the majority to elect the Committee?—No.

427. Would it have been easy?—My experience is that there is nothing of that kind that is easy: it means travelling expenses; but I should say there would be no great difficulty in getting the majority to sign.

428. Had you any difficulty in getting your thirteen-seventeenths to sign?—No; but there is a good deal of expense in all cases. You have to get the signature before a Justice of the Peace; to pay a licensed interpreter; then there usually are no roads through these blocks, and the Natives are living all over them in every direction. All that involves expense, trouble, and more or less delay.

429. Much of your difficulty was to get the presence of a Justice of the Peace?—Yes, and a licensed interpreter.

430. Would it have been much easier to have got nine-seventeenths?—Yes; the difficulty becomes greater as the number of signatures to the deed increases. All those who are resident in one place it may be easy enough to get; but they are often scattered, some are not to be found, and as the number increases there are always some malcontents.

431. Looking to the clause, do you think there would be less difficulty in getting the majority to elect a Committee than it was for you to get thirteen-seventeenths to sign your lease?—Of course it would.

*Colonel Trimble:* Take clause 13.

432. *Hon. Mr. Ballance.*] Well, take clause 13. Will it apply to that? Do you think that the election of a Committee would give as much trouble as getting the signatures to a lease?—They would have to be taken before a Justice of the Peace, a licensed-interpreter, or a European in the service of the Government.

433. Do you think, from your knowledge of the Natives, there would be an inclination on their part to elect Committees?—If I might explain to the Committee, I will say what I think on this matter. The election of Committees is not a system that is traditional among the Maoris at