

1885.

NEW ZEALAND.

WASTE LANDS COMMITTEE

(MINUTES OF EVIDENCE TAKEN BY THE, ON CLAUSES OF THE LAND BILL AFFECTING THE ADMINISTRATION OF PRIMARY AND HIGH SCHOOL RESERVES OF OTAGO.)

Laid on the Table 8th September, 1885, and ordered to be printed.

THURSDAY, 6TH AUGUST, 1885. (Mr. O'CALLAGHAN, Chairman.)

Hon. W. H. REYNOLDS, M.L.C., examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Reynolds, it has been proposed to transfer the administration of the primary- and high-school reserves of Otago to the Waste Lands Board of Otago, on the ground that the reserves would be better administered by that Board. You are one of the Commissioners for Otago, and therefore you have been asked to give evidence before this Committee. Some members of the Committee who are opposed to the proposed change have thought it desirable that you should be heard on the subject, with a view of obtaining information as to the validity of the changes—whether it would or would not be deemed advantageous to interfere (first) in the interest of education, and (second) at the same time to promote the interests of settlement. Will you state this?—The Otago Commissioners consist of the Commissioner of Crown Lands for Otago, the late Commissioner of Crown Lands for Southland, the Hon. Dr. Menzies, Mr. A. C. Begg, and myself; and I may say, without appearing at all egotistical, that the public of Otago have the utmost confidence and faith in the Commissioners, and that the Commissioners (I think the whole of them) have been acting in this capacity from the introduction of “The Education Commissioners Act, 1877.”

2. The same Commissioners?—I think so: I do not think there has been any alteration, but I could not be quite certain. The Commissioners have taken a vast amount of trouble in the performance of their duties, without the least remuneration. They, however, have the satisfaction of knowing that they have been faithfully performing their duty in the trust they held for the public. There has been no fault found with the Commissioners as far as their action is concerned; but there has been interference with their functions on the part of the Government, which has prevented them from acting as they otherwise would have done in the interests of settlement and for the best of the trust. A few discontented persons, who knew that there is an overriding power on the part of the Government, sought concessions which the Commissioners could not at once agree to in the interests of the trust and of settlement. Such persons are sure to go to the overriding power and try to get their views carried out. I feel very well assured that if you take the people of Otago as a whole you will not find any, excepting a very small number—a few dozens of people—who would be opposed to the action of the Commissioners. The object of the Commissioners has been, in the first place, to secure a fair revenue for these reserves, not forgetting that it was also their duty to encourage settlement to the utmost possible extent. They have not looked so much to getting a large revenue as to getting the country settled. I do not know that I have anything further to say; but I shall be very glad to answer any questions if there is any further information wanted.

3. *Mr. Macandrew.*] You say the functions of the Commissioners have been interfered with—that they have not been able to perform their functions with satisfaction to the Government?—Yes—with satisfaction to themselves and the public.

4. Would you state specifically to what you allude?—We have tried to lease these properties up to 1880 or 1881—I am not sure which—but we found it was impossible to do so. People did not want leases; they wanted freeholds. Then we applied to the Government with a view to getting a Bill introduced to enable the Commissioners to sell portions of these lands on deferred payments and for cash. We pressed this for a considerable time—I think two years—before effect was given to our wishes. All this time there was delay, and dissatisfaction that the Commissioners could not settle the land satisfactorily.

5. You have got reserves in the Waikaia District; and I understand one of the chief sources of trouble to you is that you have advertised these reserves to be leased in such a manner as to hold out inducements to any one man to obtain the whole. Can you explain that matter?—We applied to the Minister of Lands to be allowed to have the land put up for sale—I think it was two-thirds on deferred payments, and one-third for cash, but as it is so long back I cannot be certain of the