

1886.

NEW ZEALAND.

GREYMOOUTH RESERVE

(REPORT BY MR. HENRY BUNNY ON).

Laid on the Table by the Hon. Sir Robert Stout, with the Leave of the House.

Mr. HENRY BUNNY to the PUBLIC TRUSTEE.

SIR,—

Wellington, 29th May, 1886.

Acting upon your instructions I proceeded to Nelson, where I had a long interview with Mr. Catley, one of the Royal Commissioners, who gave me much valuable information, enabling me to understand pretty clearly the position of affairs.

Proceeding to Greymouth, I inserted an advertisement in the papers, inviting those who were interested to come and see me and state their cases. About eighty lessees and sub-lessees attended and gave me a large amount of information. Their evidence, which was in substance taken by the Royal Commission, confirms their view of the extremely complicated nature of many of the titles. As the law now stands, it seems hopeless to attempt a settlement of the questions in dispute, there being no power to enforce the decisions arrived at.

That some exceptional remedy is necessary to meet an exceptional state of things is clear. Greymouth is a rapidly-rising place, and, with its magnificent coal-supply, will in time become a very important place; but, with the titles in their present condition, the people do not care to expend their money upon improvements, or even such necessary works as a gas- and water-supply. A vote was recently taken as to the advisability of raising a loan for the two latter objects and negatived, solely because the people are naturally loth to incur such a liability in view of their present insecure tenure. It is almost impossible to borrow money, for the purpose of making necessary improvements, upon the present titles.

Several courses suggest themselves as being desirable, viz. :—

1. To leave the Greymouth Reserve under the control of the Board and the Public Trustee, as provided by "The South Island Native Reserves Act, 1883," and to appoint a Commissioner, with statutory powers, to make conclusive arrangements with the parties interested.

2. To take the control out of the Board and Trustee for a time, and vest it in a Commissioner, who should be authorized to deal with each case upon its own merits, and empowered to grant fresh leases to such persons and upon such terms as may seem to him just. Upon the final adjustment of all existing disputes, and the issue of new leases, the control to revert to the Board.

3. To allow the present holders to buy the freeholds.

4. To appoint a Board instead of the Board mentioned in "The South Island Native Reserves Act, 1883," and to take the matter out of the hands of the Public Trustee. A Commissioner to be appointed, with ample powers, to act with the Board in the management of the reserve.

All other reserves in the South Island might likewise be placed under the control and management of this Board, and such reserves would thus be brought under the control of a Board easily accessible, which would have power to review the decisions and arrangements of the Commissioner. A rough sketch of a Bill to give effect to this last suggestion is appended hereto, marked A.

The main objection to the first course mentioned is that the expense and inconvenience of having to refer all deeds and disputes to Wellington would still be kept up (*vide* Report of Royal Commission), the final decision would still rest with the Board there, and some difficulty would be found in arming a Commissioner with the powers necessary, and suggested by the Royal Commission, if he would still be liable to be controlled by an officer at a distance.

The sole objection to the second course appears to be that the whole matter would be left to the unfettered discretion of one man.