

down from the Waste Lands Committee. The petitioners prayed that the restrictions over the Crown lands might be removed so as to promote the sawmilling industry. The report was as follows: "I am directed to report that, in the opinion of this Committee, after hearing the evidence hereto attached of the Hon. J. McKenzie, the Hon. A. J. Cadman, Mr. Mills, M.H.R., and Mr. Buick, M.H.R., and carefully studying the reports therein, it has been conclusively shown that the sawmilling timber now growing on those Crown lands in the Pelorus district is of such great value and importance to the colony, especially as a lasting factor in providing employment and assisting *bonâ fide* settlement, that we recommend the Government to take immediate steps to open up the valuable forest lands in that district in the interests of sawmilling and settlement." It has been conclusively shown that this industry is of the greatest value and importance. Since that nothing has been done by the Government beyond obtaining a report from Mr. Wilson, an engineer in the Public Works Department, which can be referred to by the Committee later on. The petition that was read first this morning was presented last year, but, unfortunately, there was no time to deal with it. Then the petition circulated by Mr. Fell and others from Nelson was started some few months since. I would venture to point out to the Committee that among those who signed it will be found a large number of people who a few years ago signed another petition praying this same block should be cut up, with others residing in Collingwood and Westland, people who have not the slightest interest beyond wishing to see a national park or something of that kind established; and we think they should make the reserve in their own land district. I will not take up the time of the Committee very long, but I must point out that in their petition to this House there are a number of discrepancies which show conclusively that those who drew up the petition had no local knowledge of the surrounding district. They could not have any idea of the extent of land they were asking for; then they say it is about half-way between the two towns, while it is forty-eight miles from Blenheim and only twenty-eight from Nelson. Their statement also in regard to the bush is incorrect. So far as regards the preservation of the flora and fauna, the block has gone beyond that stage. Settlers have had cattle running there for the last twenty-five years, and destroyed nearly all the undergrowth. Having been through the block repeatedly, I may state that you can ride over a great part of it. It is clear open bush; indeed, the block contains some of the finest bush land in the colony. Our objection to this being set apart for the purpose is that other portions of Crown lands in Marlborough are equally suitable for the preservation of flora and fauna which would not affect the timber industry at all. The Marlborough Land Board have done and are recommending the Government to set apart other suitable blocks or reserves. In the Orieti district we have six other reserves; in the Pelorus district there are eight; in another we have five; and in Linkwater two, besides others not yet surveyed. There are twenty-five reserves of various sizes which the Land Board has set apart. We propose to meet this petition from the Nelson people by recommending that they should choose blocks where the fauna and flora are intact. It is the intention of the Marlborough Land Board to make other selections higher up the valley, taking part of the Maungatapu. We can supply the want there without injuring the large sawmill industry, and without taking away the level land of the district, which will come in and is now required for closer settlement. It is a serious matter to us. I should say the Nelson people are looking at it from a purely sentimental standpoint instead of a practical one. I have always endeavoured to conserve the timber industry, and to have it worked judiciously. I am quite certain, from my personal knowledge of the whole of that district, that if the Nelson petition were granted it will be a serious injury to the welfare of the district and its large sawmilling industry, which will ultimately have to supply the Wairau, Starborough Estate, and other lands in that locality. It will also interfere with the export trade in timber going to Canterbury. There is a very large output going in that direction. I hand in a report from the members of the Marlborough Land Board to the Surveyor-General on the subject of this tramway; also a letter from Mr. Purser, the Mayor of Blenheim, which I will take the liberty of reading to the Committee. [Exhibits Nos. 1 and 2.] The Government has set apart over 2,000 acres in a better position than that which the petitioners asked for as a national park. I would ask the Committee to look again at the map, and see the position for themselves.

1. *Mr. Wason.*] Will you tell us, Mr. Mills, what would be the position if the Government did not open this forest and take this tramway over?—It would kill the milling industry.

2. I am referring to the Nelson petition, if that were granted?—It would lock up 20,000 acres of this valley—first-class land; it would practically kill the industry.

3. That is the main portion of the bush in the district?—Yes. There are some thousand acres outside that particular place with good bush, but they are inaccessible at present.

4. *Mr. J. W. Thomson.*] Is the industry not going on at present? You spoke of the tramway going to it; is it not in use?—Yes, the tramway is working now. It belongs to Mr. Brownlee, who is present, and will tell the Committee how closing this forest will affect that large industry.

5. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] How do you propose this should be dealt with; what should be the sizes of the areas; under what law do you propose that this land should be opened for sawmilling?—If the Government were to take over that tramway they could regulate the disposal of their bush, as I think, in the most judicious way, by letting it to sawmillers under the areas as provided by the Land Act.

6. *Mr. Flatman.*] On royalties?—Yes, on royalties. Making reserves for those who erect their plant there. Under the Land Act it is provided that we can only lease 200 acres in each block; but we can reserve 400 or 600 acres for sawmillers, who would be entitled to work it as they went along. As the heavy timber is taken away, then practically the land is open for settlement, and will be ballotted for.

7. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] There would be no competition practicable: it would fall into the hand of a monopoly?—No; anybody who had the requisite plant might begin, say, with a mile or two more of tramway. In that case it would be open for other sawmillers if required.