

To His Excellency the Governor-General of New Zealand.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY—

Your Excellency's Warrant of the 6th August, 1947, appointed us to be a Commission to study the sheep industry, and Your Excellency's Warrants of the 25th February, 1948, and the 4th August, 1948, extended the time within which we were to report to the 31st March, 1949. On the 5th April, 1948, and on the 2nd June, 1948, we presented interim reports. In respectful obedience to Your Excellency's command, we now present our final report.

When we assembled to consider the matters referred to us, and after hearing preliminary submissions on procedure, it became apparent to us that there was a considerable division of opinion even among experts on many of the questions raised. Moreover, this conflict of opinion extended not only to deductions and opinion derived from the established facts, but also to the very nature of those facts themselves. There was therefore no unchallenged premises of fact from which we could proceed to make deductions, and from which we could formulate conclusions and proposals.

Our first consideration therefore had to be to establish the facts. We could only do this by a comprehensive and exhaustive study at first hand of the sheep-farming lands of New Zealand. To this end we have travelled some 44,000 miles throughout the country, mainly through the remote and problem areas. We have held 130 sittings in seventy-seven different places. We have received formal evidence from 649 witnesses. In addition, we have examined orally, mostly on their own farms, or have met in informal discussions, a further 1,420 persons, making a total of 2,069 witnesses, of whom 2,027 were sheep-farmers. Wherever we have travelled we have examined the pastures which clothe the land, and, if necessary, we have seen the stock to judge its condition.

We do not think we could have presented to Your Excellency a report worth considering without making this study. In our travels we have not been content merely to receive evidence at formal sittings. We have met the farmers in their country centres. We have met them, their wives, and their workers in their village halls and their wool-sheds. We have travelled the back-country roads and beyond to the last homestead on the fringe of civilization to meet the settler and his family, in order to appreciate adequately the conditions under which they live and work. And having so widely travelled, we must commend to Your Excellency's sympathetic consideration amelioration of the conditions under which some hard-working men and women of sterling qualities struggle to live in the back country. Theirs has been a hard life of endeavour against mounting odds with only dwindling resources to carry on. In many a case hope has receded and given place to despair, resulting in the abandonment of property.

We earnestly pray Your Excellency that this position will not be permitted to continue. We consider it is not the wish of the people of New Zealand that men and women should work under such hard conditions. Our country needs the production from the back country. Let not the brilliance of the sheep industry's progress and prosperity on first-class lands dim our vision of the hardship in remote areas. Let us set our hearts to the task of bringing the cheering warmth of a new hope to these back-country people. With that hope, let us send to them the comforts of a modern life—education, electricity, access to doctor and nurse, those important things which mean more than a world to the mother of a family in the back country.