

timber to a market. This tramway belongs to private individuals, and to get to our country you would have to go over this line, and all the timber would have to be taken by this tramway to the seaport. My own opinion is that it would be impossible to utilise this forest reserve without a tramway. If the tramway belonged to the Crown there would be no difficulty in disposing of areas of timbered land for sawmilling purposes in these valleys, and a large revenue would be got from it, and then we should have cleared the land for settlement afterwards." There is also the valuable evidence given by the Hon. A. J. Cadman at the same time, who said, "I have been over the district twice, and I look at the matter in this way: If the property were my own what should I do with it? There is no doubt that, outside the question of detail estimate, there is a large quantity of timber there, and, as has been pointed out, the trouble is to get access to it and get it away. My idea is that it would be better to make some arrangement for taking the tramway over, and let the haulage of the timber pay just the bare cost of working, and let the royalty for the timber pay for the whole thing, which it will do three or four times over." Question by the Chairman: "You believe the royalty on timber would more than pay for the construction of a railway-line right up to the timber?" "Yes, three or four times over, at the very lowest calculation, without going into details. . . . The timber that is in the Rai Valley is only a small portion of the whole amount. There is a very large quantity of timber in the Wakamarina. I think there is at least one hundred thousand pounds' worth of royalties in that place, and in saying this I feel that I am within the mark."

All this valuable testimony clearly proves that the Crown has a most valuable forest in the Pelorus district. And the actual cost of the tramway must not be confined to an estimate of the value of the land and timber in the Rai and its tributaries, but must be spread over the adjoining timber lands, for it would ultimately produce a large and continuous revenue in haulage and royalties on timber to come out of the Wakamarina and Pelorus Valleys. But, apart from these future accessions to the revenue, taking Mr. Weetman's estimate of the surveyed and unsurveyed land in the Rai Valley—say, 20,000 acres—which if put in the market now would only mean £20,000, but if the tramway were purchased by the Government and extended at, say, a cost of £30,000 would then stand as worth £50,000—and we take a mean estimate of the various computations in the reports—there can be no doubt the land would average, say, 15,000 superficial feet of timber to the acre, but to be on the safe side say an average of 10,000 superficial feet per acre, which means in the aggregate of 20,000 acres 200,000,000 superficial feet at 6d. per 100 . . . £50,000  
Then, value of land with convenience of tram-line and heavy logs removed, say, 20,000 acres at £3 per acre . . . . . 60,000

£110,000

Therefore, if the Pelorus Tramway were purchased and extended for the amount mentioned, after deducting the £30,000 for the extension the Government would then have a property worth £80,000, as against its present value of only £20,000; and these figures are taken at the lowest computation. Now, if the money had to be borrowed it would mean £30,000 at 3 per cent., or £900 per annum for interest, which amount could be charged with expenses for working the line in haulage rates, while the tithes for one mill alone like Messrs. Brownlee and Co.'s, who propose to cut 20,000 superficial feet daily, or an average of, say, 4,000,000 feet annually, would provide a sum of £1,000 per annum from that source, which would in less than twenty years create a working fund that would repay the full amount borrowed. If no other sawmills were erected it would take the plant referred to over fifty years to cut all the timber from the Rai and its tributaries alone. Therefore the Government could let other sawmill-sites if they deemed it advisable.

Now, before dealing with Messrs. Brownlee and Co.'s application we must forcibly point out that this is the only valuable forest belonging to the Crown from Nelson all down the east coast to Southland, on this Island, and, as the Board has never seen its equal in the colony, they emphatically indorse the opinion of the recent Timber Conference in urging the necessity for working all our forest land to the best advantage in the interest of sawmillers and settlement, therefore we submit the following recommendations:—

1. That all the tithes or royalties now charged for timber taken off Crown lands should be raised throughout the colony, instead of sacrificing such a valuable asset, as that would be the first step to encourage every owner to conserve whatever valuable timber he may have, instead of recklessly destroying it.

2. That the Government should take immediate steps to purchase the Pelorus Tramway from the present owners, and supply the timber from the Crown lands at certain fixed rates, including haulage and royalties, or let the timber be removed from given areas of land under reasonable restrictions, the tithes to be fixed hereafter, and the sawmillers paying haulage.

3. That if the Government decide not to purchase the Pelorus Tramway at once every reasonable facility by way of reduction in tithes over stated areas of sawmilling-timber should be given to such an enterprising firm as Messrs. Brownlee and Co. immediately, so as to encourage them to extend their tramway up the Rai Valley, and thus continue the excellent work of finding steady employment for the greater number of workmen who have signed the petition.

The whole question is of such vital importance to the Pelorus district and Marlborough that the Board would respectfully request that Government would take this urgent matter into their serious consideration without delay, so that, whatever is decided, this great industry may not be crushed and so many breadwinners thrown out of employment.

The Surveyor-General, Wellington.

C. W. ADAMS,  
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

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