

140. When do you propose to start, if the legislation remains as it is now?—I think in about twelve months from now.

141. You will not wait until the Main Trunk Railway reaches there?—We expect to have the full plants in by that time. We would not expect to start with the full plant at first.

142. How would you expect to get your timber out then?—We would expect to get it down the river.

143. Have you heard any objection on the part of the Maoris to your cutting timber?—No; we got on pretty well, excepting that there is a split between the Raetihi Maoris and the Maunganui-o-te-ao.

144. Do you think these representations are due in any way to the Maoris?—I do not think so.

145. *Mr. Mander.*] How many others have purchased timber rights besides yourselves?—I do not know of anybody else.

146. You have no idea of the extent of the timber which has been purchased?—No. All round this block the Government holds the land. This particular part of the Waimarino was the only part we could get, except in the north.

147. Is there any risk of the railway being deviated at all from the point where it touches you?—There is a fair risk.

148. There is no positive certainty that the railway will go where the line has been surveyed?—No.

149. Therefore you run a considerable risk?—Yes.

150. You say this land is surrounded by Government land?—Settlers are all round it, and I presume it is Crown land.

151. I understand you to say that the Crown settlers had felled and burned a quantity of valuable timber?—Yes.

152. Do you think the Crown land, in its original state, was as valuable for timber purposes as that which you have got?—Yes; I think part of it was more valuable.

153. Have you any idea what the Government paid for that land?—No.

154. They bought that land right out, and not only for the timber rights?—I understand so.

155. *Mr. Jennings.*] Is the block of 10,000 acres you have purchased in the southern part of the Waimarino?—I am not quite clear whether it is part of the Waimarino or not, but it borders on the Waimarino. It might be included in the South Waimarino. There is no doubt that it is part of the same forest that runs through the Waimarino.

156. Do you think the railway will be constructed in about two years' time, and will pass through this particular block?—As a matter of fact, we thought it would be there now.

157. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] You have stated that Ohakune, which is marked on the main trunk line as a station, is only a quarter of a mile away from the nearest part of your block?—Yes.

158. And I think you led the Committee to infer from your remarks that you did not intend to start thoroughly, beyond putting up your plant, to get your milling operations into full swing until the railway reaches that point?—Yes; or somewhere near about it.

159. In answer to a question Mr. Fraser put to you, you replied that it would cost 4s. per 100 ft. to cart the timber to the nearest railway-station at the present time?—I said the present freight would be about 4s. by rail.

160. Then, it is not the intention of your firm to cart any timber to the nearest railway-station now?—No; that would be absolutely impossible.

161. If you did start operations at all previous to the railway reaching an adjacent point to your block, what would you do: would you carry it by means of the Wanganui River?—We should probably endeavour to get orders while the railway-construction was going on.

162. Then, practically, you would hold all the rights you possess for a fitting opportunity—it may be for three or five years?—No; we would do what is fair.

163. You would not cart your timber at a loss?—No; but we are prepared to stand a little loss.

164. Have you paid any money to the Natives?—I could not say definitely what was paid.

165. Was it a large amount?—I do not know what it was.

166. Did your firm anticipate any risks in regard to the venture?—Yes, we do.

167. From the very start you did?—Yes. We have two risks: one is that of the line deviating, and the other is the risk of fire.

168. What reasons have you to apprehend any deviation?—No more than what has been done in the past.

169. Just the bare possibility that it might be so?—Yes.

170. *The Chairman.*] You said that some of this bush was surrounded by Government land that had been taken up by settlers?—Yes.

171. Was there any large amount of timber on that Government land?—Yes.

172. Were the settlers aware that they would be allowed to sell it?—I think the mills have been working on part of it.

173. But most of it was felled and burnt?—Yes.

174. And you are not aware whether they were allowed to sell the timber or not?—I could not say.

THURSDAY, 29TH OCTOBER, 1903.

C. P. SKERRETT, Solicitor, examined. (No. 4.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are asked by the Committee to produce an agreement which the Committee understand was prepared by you for Messrs. Gamman and Co., mill-owners. The Committee wish to get some evidence from you with regard to the agreement. Have you the agreement with you?—Yes, and I am quite willing to produce it for inspection by members of the