

256. Do you think it is in the best interests that you should be allowed to carry out this agreement?—Yes, I do.

257. If the Council is satisfied with your agreement they will ratify it, will they not?—Yes.

258. *Mr. Jennings.*] Is that block you are interested in part of the Waimarino Block?—No; it is part of the Puketapu Block.

259. *Mr. Field.*] It is just north of the Waimarino Block?—Yes.

THURSDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER, 1903.

A. W. HOGG, M.H.R., examined. (No. 10.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You received a letter from this Committee asking you to attend to-day to give evidence in reference to a letter read by the Premier in the House and purporting to come from you?—Yes. I received the letter from a resident of the district, and believing the matter to be of importance I submitted it—accompanied by a short note of my own—to the Premier. I may say that I have received previous letters from the writer, whom I personally know as a man of good reputation, who has taken for years past an interest in public affairs, and who, I believe, is very much respected in the locality. I would have no hesitation in giving you his name, except for the fact that he has not given me any authority to do so, and I have some reluctance in giving the name of a private correspondent. I may say this, however, that from what I know of the writer I have every confidence in his statements being absolutely correct.

2. *Mr. Herries.*] Have you got the letter?—No; I handed it to the Premier, and so far as I know it is now in his possession. It was correctly read to the House.

3. *The Chairman.*] There were some members of the Committee who were not present in the House when the letter was read. Perhaps you could give the Committee the purport of the letter?—I think the letter was published in the Wellington papers at the time, and I presume it appears in *Hansard*; but I can give you the purport of it if you wish. The writer stated that there had been some parties representing a Palmerston syndicate at Raetihi buying the rights over the Native bush in a block of land there from the Native owners, and that these operations had been going on for a considerable time. The writer thought it was not in the interests of the district that all that fine timber should find its way into the hands of one syndicate. That is about the purport of the letter.

4. *Mr. Willis.*] Were there any signatures to the letters when they were put in the papers?—Of course there is a signature attached to this letter. There is no signature which has transpired, but the Premier has the letter and the signature.

5. *The Chairman.*] We cannot take any notice of an anonymous letter?—I might say that the writer has written in absolutely good faith.

6. The position is this: that it has been entirely owing to the letter having been read by the Premier in the House that the Committee has been occupied the last fortnight in taking evidence in connection with dealings with Natives with regard to their timber, and the Committee wishes to get all the evidence possible on the subject in order to see if any injury has been done to the Natives. As I understand from the statement you made to-day, and from the letter sent, it was a warning to the Government to prevent the Natives from being deprived of their interests in this timber for a very small remuneration. The Committee has been taking evidence from those Europeans who have been engaged in this timber business, in order to see what terms they have been making with the Natives; and the Committee is anxious to know if there is any evidence to show that any unfair advantage has been taken of the Natives by these Europeans in their dealings with the Natives. That is the object we have had in view during the last fortnight, and we wish to get full information with regard to the letter which was read. That is the position the Committee is placed in now?—Yes. Well, it takes a little while to get a reply from Raetihi, and I am not in a position to say whether the writer will authorise me to give his name or not. All I can say is that I know the writer, and that his word may be relied upon.

7. Did the writer mention any prices that were being paid to the Natives for the timber?—No.

8. There is just a bare statement?—Just the letter which was mentioned by the Premier in the House.

9. *Mr. Herries.*] Did the writer say that the Natives were being robbed?—I think he said that they were being exploited. I think he complains that the timber was being secured by a syndicate instead of by a number of sawmillers.

10. *Mr. Remington.*] Possibly there has been a misunderstanding with regard to the meaning of the words "exploited to the disadvantage of the Natives"?—I cannot say whether he meant that or not.

11. Could he tender evidence on this matter?—I will wire to him at once to see whether he will come down.

12. *Mr. Willis.*] Is this individual interested in any way in the timber business?—He is a resident of the district, and has timber property.

13. *Mr. Hone Heke.*] Is he a Crown tenant?—I think he is.

14. *Mr. Moss.*] Does he want the timber himself?—I cannot say that.

15. *Mr. Hone Heke.*] When you say he is a resident there and has timber country, and say you think he is a tenant of the Crown, do you think he has got his timber by that means—by selection?—I know he has land containing timber.

16. Was the land Crown land?—I cannot say whether he is a leaseholder or freeholder.

17. But was the land Crown land?—Yes, at one time.

18. He acquired his land from the Crown?—Yes.