

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 11TH SEPTEMBER, 1907.

WILLIAM GRAY NICHOLLS, made a statement and was examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—Licensed interpreter and farmer. I reside at Ohinemuri and have resided there since the year 1865. I am also Chairman of the Ohinemuri County Council. I beg to state that these gentlemen and myself have come to Wellington on behalf of the petitioners, the farmers and settlers of the Ohinemuri district, to support the petitions now before Parliament praying for relief and discontinuance of the silting-up of the Waihou and Ohinemuri Rivers. When these rivers were declared a sludge-channel in 1895 the destruction of the navigation and the great injury to the natural drainage of the district were, I feel sure, not contemplated by the Government or the people of the district, whose knowledge and experience of the methods of ore-treatment were somewhat limited—in this way: The quantity of stuff put through the small batteries that were running at the time did not exceed on an average something like 1,000 tons per month, and the heavier material that was cast direct into the river did not travel so rapidly. The far-reaching and disastrous effects of the fine silt resulting from cyanide operations—then an entirely new process in the district—were quite unknown to the people. Consequently no objection was made to the issue of the Proclamation at the time. In the year 1901 the Ohinemuri County Council commenced action in this matter. I will later on produce the correspondence and the different reports on this question. I wish to mention at this stage, however, that the Thames County Council and the Thames Borough Council are in sympathy with the people of the Ohinemuri district and the Ohinemuri County Council in this matter. I will read a couple of letters from them. This is a copy of a letter received from the Thames County Council: “Council Chambers, Thames, 6th August, 1907.—SIR,—I have the honour, by direction of the Council, to inform you that it fully recognises the damage that is being done to the district by the silting-up of the Ohinemuri River; and, while it acknowledges the importance of the mining industry, it sincerely trusts that some scheme will be devised which, without injuring the industry, will overcome the difficulty with which the agriculturalists have to contend. The Council will gladly give any assistance in its power towards the furtherance of any such scheme.—I have, &c., W. S. CLARK, County Clerk.”

2. *Hon. Mr. McGowan.*] Mr. Bagnall was Chairman at that date, was he not?—Yes. Now that Mr. Bagnall's name has been mentioned I may say that he owns a lot of property on the Waihou River, and the fact of the river being silted up will affect him very considerably. This is a copy of a letter from the Thames Borough Council: “Thames, 9th July, 1907.—SIR,—With reference to your Council's application for support in the matter of the silting-up of the Ohinemuri River with mine-tailings, I am instructed by the Council to inform your Council that they give their fullest support and sympathy to the people affected, and as a copy of the petition to Parliament has been received, the Town Clerk has been requested to get as many signatures to the same as possible.—I have, &c., ALBERT BRUCE, Town Clerk.” I will hand these documents in. [Copies of letters put in.] I wish also to hand in a plan of the district affected.

3. *The Chairman.*] Is it a marked plan?—Yes, it is a copy of the plan furnished by Mr. Perham, the engineer, sent there some years ago by the Government to report. [Plan put in.] I also hand in an index plan of the Ohinemuri County, showing the district affected by flood-water, marked in blue. [Put in.] I may say that I remember both these rivers prior to their being declared a sludge-channel. They were navigable highways, and vessels of from 40 to 100 tons used to trade regularly up to Paeroa and occasionally beyond Paeroa to a place called Mangakotukutuku, about two miles and a half up the river from Paeroa, with heavy machinery for Karangahake, Owaharoa, and Waitekauri. I saw these vessels go up there myself, and I saw the machinery. These vessels drew over 6 ft. 6 in. of water. There were also several steamers that used to trade regularly up to Snodgrass's Wharf. The names of those steamers were the “Effort,” the “Lalla Rookh,” the “Ruby,” the “Tongariro,” the “Te Aroha,” the “Kotuku,” and the “Paeroa.” They were from 40 to 100 tons, and some of them drew over 6 ft. 6 in. of water. They used to trade regularly from Auckland and Thames to Paeroa, and their landing-place was Snodgrass's Wharf. Vessels of similar capacity cannot possibly get there now. The site where Snodgrass's Wharf stood is now a bank of silt, and where the vessels used to lie alongside of that wharf in 6 ft. of water there is about an inch of water now; the site of the wharf is silted over.

4. *Hon. Mr. McGowan.*] Where has the water gone?—To the other side of the river.

5. I am glad to hear it is still there?—It is still in the river, but it may not be after a year or two, when the river is filled up. It will go all over the place. I may say, Mr. Chairman, that these rivers are narrowing and shallowing very rapidly, especially the Ohinemuri River, by the accumulation of silt on its banks and the filling-up and raising of the river-bed is daily increasing. I should like to produce some photographs. The places which they represent are all marked on the plan that has been handed in. This one is No. 8, Pereniki's Bend, on the Ohinemuri River. The depth of the river at that particular spot was over 15 ft.—the Natives used to bathe at that place; but now there are about 12 ft. of tailings on it. [Photograph put in.] This one depicts a shed. The “Te Aroha” used to come up here, lie alongside that shed, and take in potatoes. [Put in.]