

Buckhurst have grasped the position exactly, and have stated it concisely and clearly. When their report was sent in, a third petition was prepared and signed by East Taieri ratepayers, and is before you to-day, approving of the report, and asking that legislative effect be given to it. You have four petitions from East Taieri: one protesting against inclusion in the district right at the beginning, the other three sent in since they were included by the Act, and asking that they be cut out; and the remarkable thing about these petitions is the extraordinary unanimity of the people on the point. As I have said, there are only about a dozen who have refused to sign the petitions. That is the position in a nutshell; and we say it is a monstrous state of affairs that a whole community should be included in a drainage district against their will, and in spite of their protest to the contrary. To sum up our position, you have these four almost unanimous petitions from the eastern side of the district, signed by 230 people; you have the opinion of four engineers, one of whom is appearing before you to-day; you have the opinion of two men who were appointed under the Act to classify the land; and you have a petition also before you from the people on the west side of the Taieri River, signed by nearly a hundred people, supporting us. That is the way we are supported to-day. And what is the opposition to the petition? The opposition comes only from the few who occupy some swamp land both in the East Taieri and West Taieri, principally from the Shand Estate, which owns a very large tract of swamp country estimated at something like 10,000 acres, the bulk of which is on the western side of the river. Some of the tenants of that swamp land have signed the petition and are with us to-day, but the owner and one of the tenants are appearing against us. There is no doubt at all that that is the source of the whole trouble—the Shand Estate; and I have no hesitation in saying it. Then we have this peculiar fact also: that the Taieri Drainage Board, consisting of six elective members and three Government nominees, is opposing the petitions. East Taieri is represented on the Board by two elective members, whereas West Taieri, because it forms the greater portion of the district, has four representatives—that makes six elective members; and there are three Government nominees.

But they would be neutral?

*Witness:* Are they? Just one moment. The two members on the Board who represent East Taieri are with us in this matter. One of them is here to-day, but the other, unfortunately, is too ill to attend. One of the West Taieri members is also with us, and the other three elected members representing swamp land in West Taieri are against us, so that the elective members of the Board are equally divided on this matter. Now, the Commissioners on whose report the Act was passed stated that, although there were only two representatives in East Taieri while there were four in West Taieri, they would recommend that three Government officials be appointed to hold the balance evenly between the two districts, so that East Taieri would not be outvoted by West Taieri. Mr. David Shand, who is here representing the Shand Estate, when giving his evidence before the Royal Commission, said if there were three or four Government nominees the question would be who could pull the Government; and I think his side has succeeded in that, unfortunately for us, because the Drainage Board—which one would have expected to take up an independent position and say, We represent the whole district, and we cannot take either side, so you must fight out the matter between yourselves—have sent the Board's solicitor and its Engineer and a member of the Board to fight us, presumably at the expense of the ratepayers. It is a scandalous state of affairs that a Board which represents the whole district should actively oppose these petitions. It is only able to do so because there are three Government nominees on the Board. Mr. Shand was the Chairman of the Board last year, but at the election in November he was turned out of office. He only received twenty-eight votes, but that does not represent twenty-eight people, because some people have two or three votes. Mr. Findlay got the unanimous vote of the other subdivision in East Taieri. From my own knowledge of the district—and I have lived there for over forty years now—I consider that the few who are opposing the petitioners have not a leg to stand on. The whole community is with us except thirteen people, one of that number being Mr. Shand, and other five his tenants, some of whom have signed the second petition, because they realise that if they are included in the drainage-area they will have to pay the rates. I might point out on the plan that in East Taieri there are hills 100 ft. above the flood-level included in the area, but the mountains higher up are not included in it. Why they have carved out a little bit of the North Taieri which is dry it is impossible for me to say. To show that we are not representing any particular portion of East Taieri, I may tell you that our deputation includes Mr. Cullen (a member of the Board), representing the Irregular Block, East Taieri; Mr. William Shand, who has 800 acres on the river-bank; and Mr. Fowler and Mr. Anderson, representing the lower lands, who all support the petitions.

*Mr. Anderson:* Is that land liable to flood?

*Witness:* Yes. That is, in East Taieri. We have nothing to do with West Taieri. There is no doubt that they need a Board there. They had two River Boards and four Drainage Boards, but they needed the amalgamation of those Boards to deal with the whole district. We have had practically no disturbance in East Taieri until this matter cropped up. Then we have Mr. Gow, Mr. Gawne, and Mr. Fowler representing North Taieri, and Mr. McKeagg representing the middle of the plain. Then there is a strip of land between the main road and the river. The river is banked up on the west side, and yet this strip is included in the drainage district. The owners there have good reason to complain against the west people for having banked the river, thus throwing the water on to their lands, but they are included in the classes liable to higher rating, although nothing can be done to relieve them.

*The Chairman:* But would not the Board deal with that river supposing they were connected?

*Witness:* I might say that since 1870 several engineers and Commissions have inquired into this matter, and I think I am right in saying that the net result of all their inquiries is that, with a bank erected on the west side of the river—there is a bank along the entire western side of the river to protect West Taieri—they say that anything that is likely to do East Taieri any good