

RAWENE, MONDAY, 17TH APRIL, 1911.

GEORGE THOMAS CLENDON examined. (No. 16.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am Chairman of the Hokianga County Council. With regard to the railway extension from Kawakawa to Hokianga, it is a matter of very great importance to this district, and we would urge that you favourably recommend the pushing-on of this line with as little delay as possible. The connection with Kawakawa will to a certain extent overcome the isolation that has hitherto marked this district. We should like to have the line, after reaching Kaikohe, extended to some point on the Hokianga River where there is deep water. What we require most is the Main Trunk, and a connection with some good markets. We have some of the best land in the Dominion up here in the north. The climate is good, but the products at present are lost on account of there being no connection with a suitable market, especially for perishable goods. I would urge that the Main Trunk line be pushed forward as fast as possible, and by the shortest route that can be obtained. We know that the longer the line is the higher the charge for transport, and therefore we desire to have the route made as direct as it can be. We have in this county a very large area of Native lands which have so far been locked up, but facilities are now being afforded which make the position in that respect a little more favourable. The opening-up of these lands, however, will not be of very great consequence until we have a connection with a suitable market. This district is well adapted for fruit-growing, the pastoral industry, and a portion of it for agricultural purposes.

2. What are your views regarding the linking-up of the Whangarei—Opua and the Dargaville—Kaihu existing sections of railway with the Main Trunk?—I am hardly conversant with the country, but I would suggest that when the connection is made between Kawakawa and Kaikohe it should be extended on to Hokianga, and then the line might be worked from both ends back to Mangakahia.

3. You think that the junction of the Main Trunk line with the Whangarei—Kawakawa line would be sufficient?—Yes, for a while.

4. *Mr. Becroft.*] What are the freight-charges from here to Auckland?—£1 1s. per ton, with a minimum charge of 2s. The passenger tariff is £1 6s. single and £2 2s. return, saloon.

5. *Mr. Coom.*] Can you give us any idea of the quantity of good land available north of a line from Kawakawa to the west coast?—I could not give the amount, but there is a very large area. One-third of the Hokianga County is very good land.

6. *Mr. Ronayne.*] You are not in favour of a connection being made between McCarroll's Gap and Whangarei?—I am not. I should prefer the direct route from McCarroll's Gap to Kaikohe.

7. In the event of a connection being made between McCarroll's Gap and Whangarei, and the line being extended from Kaikohe to Hokianga, would you not then be enabled to send your cattle to Auckland with perfect safety?—Certainly we would, and it would facilitate matters to a great extent, but we are looking at the extra cost it would entail.

8. Is there anything to send over the railway other than stock?—Agricultural products, butter, and fruit. I may state that twenty years ago there was a good deal more fruit to be obtained at Hokianga than now, for the reason that many settlers abandoned their orchards because they were unable to get to suitable markets.

9. Is there any possibility of the dairying industry being increased?—Yes; it is increasing very fast now.

10. Would the butter go by rail or steamer?—I should say it would go by rail, as that would give quicker despatch. That is one reason why I said the railway should come to some point on the river where there is deep water.

11. Which way would the merchandise come?—By the cheapest route, of course, but I should think the bulk would come by rail; certainly the goods carried by measurement would.

12. Which way would the timber go?—That would depend a good deal on the rate of freights. At the present time the bulk of the timber is going across to Australia, where there is a better market, and it is being carried at as reasonable a rate of freight as can be got to any of the markets in the Dominion.

13. What are the steerage rates between Auckland and Hokianga?—£1 15s. return, and, I think, £1 2s. 6d. single.

14. *Mr. Evans.*] Do you not think goods would be brought in and taken from here cheaper by water than by railway?—They may be, but there is the drawback of two bar harbours, and the consequent detention thereby, which has been so much against the settlement of this district for the last twenty or thirty years. Three shipments of fat cattle went away from here last year, and one proved so disastrous, owing to the detention of the vessel, that no further shipments were attempted.

15. If you had railway-communication to-morrow, and water-carriage was cheaper than railway, would you not still send by water?—There would be a certain amount go by water, no doubt; but I think the greater portion would be carried by rail.

16. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] Are the freight-rates you have quoted to Auckland or Onelunga?—The freight-rate is to Auckland, the passenger-rate to Onelunga.

17. Is there any reason why the settlement on the west of this district should not be as great as that on the eastern side, provided equal facilities are given?—There is no reason why it should not.

18. Do you think, then, that in the future the population and industries on the western side will be as great as on the east?—Yes.

19. Do goods come in here for distribution inland?—No, they are mostly sent from the other side. For Okaihau a few of the goods come to this port.