

74. *Mr. Becroft.*] Will you tell the Commission what the quality of the land is from McCarroll's and along the eastern route up to Maungakaramea?—As far as I have been on the eastern route, I found it in some degree the boundary between the good land and the poor. There is a considerable quantity of good land, and the poor land lies to the east of the eastern route, and some again on the line that traverses it.

75. And all the good is on the western side?—It is almost all good on the western side of the eastern line.

76. Would you consider this large block of land of over 1,000,000 acres compares favourably with any other large block of land in the Dominion as regards railway-construction?—It will compare on equal terms with any block of hilly land that I am acquainted with. We can carry an equal amount of stock on this land to what is carried on the best land I am acquainted with in Hawke's Bay.

77. Will it compare with any million-acre block where railways have been constructed?—I believe it will produce equally with any other similar block in the Dominion involving the same nature of country.

78. *Mr. Steadman.*] Where does the 50,000 to 80,000 acres of Government land that remains to be tapped by the western route lie?—8,000 acres at the head of the Kirikopuni Valley. There is also about 8,000 acres of Crown land at the head of the Awakino, in from Dargaville; and running from Tutamoe to Karaka there is a block of 6,000 or 8,000 acres. There is also, above the point of junction, another block—in fact, I think I have underestimated the Crown land and the Native land.

79. *Mr. Coom.*] Taking a probable connection between the Kaihu Valley Railway and the Main Trunk line with the present outlet at Auckland, can you recommend a connection from Dargaville to Kirikopuni or the Taita-Mangakahia connection?—I should certainly recommend the Kirikopuni connection, because from about Taita you are going more or less northwards and back on the Main Trunk line from the destination. I think it would open up good country all through. The distance is greater there than from the railway-station at Dargaville to Kirikopuni.

80. *The Chairman.*] You know the Main Trunk line?—Yes.

81. Do you think it is a good business proposition to continue that line from McCarroll's Gap along the Mangakahia to Kaikohe?—I am quite sure that, taking as an example the centre of this Island at the time the Main Trunk line was proposed, when it was almost undeveloped, but has now become populated and the line a payable proposition, the result in the present case would be the same as regards the development of the country north of McCarroll's Gap. It would be an absolutely sound business proposition for the Dominion to construct that railway, and quickly. I believe it will pay, and the country will then carry a large population.

82. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] Can you give us the number of cattle and sheep now carried on the 1,000,000 acres you refer to, and what it would carry in the future when fully developed?—I could not hazard a suggestion as to what it is carrying now, but as to the future I would suggest that it will carry nearly two sheep to the acre.

THOMAS WEBB examined. (No. 26.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a farmer, residing at Te Kopuru. I would like to say that I am not particularly interested in the routes of the railway, as my district is too far away from it. I simply speak as a citizen of New Zealand, and I want to see the best route adopted. The chief reason why I advocate the western route is that it crosses the Wairoa at deep water at Kirikopuni. I consider that the railway would benefit the river and that the river would benefit the railway. Roughly speaking, there is about twenty-five miles of navigable river above where the railway would strike the river at Omano below Kirikopuni. I consider that ten miles below Omano it would pay the people to go up to the railway, instead of going down. That much of the river navigation which is now served by steamer would be brought to the railway, and help to feed it. The railway would help the freights there. I cannot say what they would be, but at present they are £1 15s. a ton to Tangiteroria, by reason of the fact that three handlings are required. I wish to corroborate one part of the evidence of Mr. Hammond, as to the floods on the river on the eastern route. The eastern route crosses the Tangihua River, on which I have myself been stopped by flood coming from Whangarei through to the Wairoa. In addition to that, the Mangakahia River floods are excessive. I have been up there in a launch when there has been 20 ft. of a flood in it. The floods in the winter are liable to be excessive on the Mangakahia, Waiotoma, and the Tangihua, whilst on the western route the line would cross where the river is wide, and floods would not be likely to interfere with the railway. Another point is this: The Hobson County Council went a little while ago to the Tangihua settlers to lay out a little money, and the settlers told the Council that they got their freight into Mangapai at 5s. per ton, and if they had a road they would have good communication, which they would not complain of at all. They were urging the Council to make them a connection with Mangapai, and not to Tangiteroria. I am neither an engineer nor an expert, but I know that on the western route the railway would go to the Wairoa River down the Mangonui Valley generally, and the expenditure would not be so great as on the eastern route, because the valley runs north and south, whereas on the eastern side the spurs run east and west, and they would have to be crossed or gone round. That bears out what Mr. Harding said, that on the western side the grades are not so heavy as on the eastern side.

2. *Mr. Coom.*] Are you aware that the eastern route also crosses the Wairoa at deep water?—I did not understand that. The water is not navigable at the falls. It is navigable in the Wairoa River, a little above the junction, for boats.