

No. 7.

Ruatapu, 9th May, 1913.

SIR,—

I have the honour of submitting the following report on the subjects under your consideration.

In relation to the existing forest lands which it is desirable to conserve for the purpose of soil-protection, preventing denudation, prevention of floods, and water-conservation, the bush adjoining rivers, especially at the mouths and on watersheds, should be reserved for the purpose of preventing erosion and floods, also for water-conservation and scenic purposes.

A remarkable instance of the necessity of protecting the forest growth at the sources of rivers is given by Mr. Elwood Meade, of the Irrigation Department, Victoria, in his paper read before the Science Congress, Melbourne, in January of this year. From his personal observation he told of an area of land in America watered by two rivers. The timber growing at the head of one of these rivers was sold for sawmilling purposes and removed. In a few years this river had practically disappeared, and the land previously irrigated by its waters became a desert subjected to floods after rain, whilst that portion of the area watered by the river from which the timber had not been removed suffered no damage nor alteration.

The loss of valuable land adjoining rivers owing to the banks not being protected by growth of trees is instanced in the river-beds of Canterbury, some of which are over a mile in width. Again, in the Manawatu district, Wellington, the rivers since the removal of the bush frequently change their course, and sweep away large areas of valuable land.

On the raupo flats, Kaipara district, adjoining the Wairoa River, no natural growth exists, and thousands of pounds have been spent, ineffectually so far, to prevent erosion.

The conservation of bush on watersheds is necessary to regulate the flow of the rainfall down the hillsides to the river-beds; the trees and vegetation regulating and holding back the water prevents floods.

Any bush lands suitable for agricultural or pastoral purposes should be quickly, but very economically, cleared of the bush by sawmilling, and the land put into profitable use. The available land for settlement is rapidly getting less and less, and with the demand existing attention should be paid to the heavy forest lands remaining.

In Westland it has too long been erroneously supposed that the land is unsuitable for agricultural and pastoral purposes. The land has been given over to the miner and sawmiller, without due consideration of the resultant work in relation to settlement. The disposal of land is largely in the hands of the Warden's Court, hedged round by the regulations of the Mining Act, with the sole view of utilizing the land or forests for the benefit of the miner and sawmiller. These latter frequently leave the areas in a condition practically unfit, unless a large expenditure is incurred, to bring them into profitable use for settlement.

The method of dealing with applications for timber in mining-areas is as follows: The Warden receives applications and passes them over to the Crown Lands Department for inspection of the area and report. This being obtained by the Crown Lands Ranger, the application, with report attached, is sent back to the Warden, who then deals with the matter. The Wardens have no supervision of the areas so granted, this duty falling on the officers of the Crown Lands Department, who periodically inspect and report on the work done by the millers. This dual control now in existence is cumbersome and unnecessary, and its abolition would benefit the two departments—the miller and the community in general. The Crown Lands Department, having the disposal of the land for settlement purposes after the miller has finished with it, should certainly control the disposal of areas for milling purposes. If this course is followed a systematic method of clearing the land by milling could be instituted.

Under the present system the haphazard granting of areas, owing to the millers picking out only the better portions of the bush and leaving the poorer, would be stopped. The timbered lands should be worked in a face, the land so cleared would be ready for settlement in compact areas, making the work of surveying and roading a cheaper and easier one than at present. It would also enable the County Council authorities to systematically road the district, and eventually save them large sums of money required under the present system to form and maintain roads which will in the future prove unnecessary.

A glance at the map showing the areas already worked and those now held for milling purposes shows the urgent necessity for a better system of granting cutting-rights.

In the report of the Timber Commission, 1909, after fully investigating the question of dealing with timber lands, the Commissioners reported that the system of dual control by the Warden and Crown Lands Department was not in the best interests of the community, and that the disposal of all timber should be in the hands of the Land Board alone.

The method of disposal of timber by granting millers stated areas is not the most profitable or economical from a national point of view. To get the best results, larger revenue for the Crown in the shape of royalty and railway freights, more employment for labour, and, of equal importance, better clearance of the land for settlement purposes, the present system should be altered.

In the Auckland and other districts the timber is accurately estimated on the log measurement of the standing tree. An area open for sawmilling purposes is offered at an upset value at per hundred feet royalty based on log measurement, and disposed of by tender, auction, or in some other suitable and necessary manner.

In the Westland District, on areas granted by the Warden's Court the quantity of growing timber is not measured or estimated by the Crown, the royalty being paid on the sawn output of the mill. The miller under this system is inclined to run through the bush, taking only the clean portion of the barrels, and leaving behind the knotty and faulty trees. Under the system of paying royalty on log measurement he must take all growing timber which has been estimated or measured, or lose the royalty he has paid thereon.