

1913.  
NEW ZEALAND.

# LANDS COMMITTEE

(REPORT OF THE), ON PAPER No. 127, RELATIVE TO THE AGGREGATION OF LAND.

(MR. E. NEWMAN, CHAIRMAN.)

*Report brought up on the 14th November, 1913, together with Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, and ordered to be printed.*

## ORDERS OF REFERENCE.

*Extracts from the Journals of the House of Representatives.*

THURSDAY, THE 3RD DAY OF JULY, 1913.

*Ordered*, "That Standing Order No. 219 be suspended, and that a Committee be appointed, consisting of fourteen members, to whom shall stand referred after the first reading of all Bills affecting or in any way relating to the lands of the Crown, or educational or other public reserves; the Committee to have power to make such amendments therein as they think proper, and to report generally when necessary upon the principles and provisions of the Bill; the Committee to have power to call for persons, papers, and records; three to be a quorum: the Committee to consist of Mr. Anderson, Hon. Mr. Buddo, Mr. Coates, Mr. Forbes, Mr. Guthrie, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. E. Newman, Mr. Nosworthy, Mr. T. W. Rhodes, Mr. Robertson, Mr. R. W. Smith, Mr. Statham, Mr. Witty, and the mover."—(Hon. Mr. MASSEY.)

TUESDAY, THE 29TH DAY OF JULY, 1913.

*Ordered*, "That Paper No. 127, 'Papers regarding Aggregation of Land,' be referred to the Lands Committee."—(Hon. Mr. MASSEY.)

## REPORT.

REPORT ON PAPER NO. 127, RELATIVE TO THE AGGREGATION OF LAND.

THE Lands Committee, to which was referred the paper above mentioned, has the honour to report that it has carefully considered the same, and during the course of the inquiry has examined the following witnesses: John Strauchon, Under-Secretary for Crown Lands; T. N. Brodrick, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington; H. Lundius, Crown Lands Ranger in Wanganui District; R. E. Hornblow, proprietor of the *Mangaweka Settler*; F. S. Pope, Secretary for Agriculture; N. Craig, Crown Lands Ranger, Taihape.

That in the opinion of this Committee the following allegations made by the *Mangaweka Settler*—

(1.) "That aggregation has been rampant in that district" has been refuted by the evidence, and that there has been no aggregation except in a few cases which took place in years past, and was made under the then-existing land laws and with the sanction of the Board.

(2.) "That land agents were going round with their pockets lined with gold to tempt the small settlers to sell out to the larger landowners" was completely disproved by the evidence.

(3.) "That aggregation was encouraged by the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1912, and to a large extent was due to the provisions of that Act" is incorrect.

That the evidence clearly showed that originally much of the land had been cut into sections of too small an area, and that the Land Board had acted in the best interests of settlement by allowing the areas to be increased so as to allow the settlers to occupy an area of sufficient size on which to make a living.

A copy of the minutes of proceedings and evidence taken is attached hereto.

14th November, 1913.

E. NEWMAN, Chairman.

## MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS.

WEDNESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 1913.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m., pursuant to notice.

Present: Mr. E. Newman (Chairman), Mr. Anderson, Hon. Mr. Buddo, Mr. Coates, Mr. Forbes, Mr. Guthrie, Mr. MacDonald, Hon. Mr. Massey, Mr. Nosworthy, Mr. T. W. Rhodes, Mr. Robertson, Mr. R. W. Smith, Mr. Witty.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

*Paper 127, Aggregation of Land.*—Mr. John Strauchon, Under-Secretary for Crown Lands; Mr. T. N. Brodrick, Commissioner for Crown Lands, Wellington; and Mr. H. Lundius, Crown Lands Ranger, Wanganui, attended and gave evidence, which was taken down by a reporter.

Resolved, on motion of Mr. Witty, That Mr. Hornblow, editor of the *Mangaweka Settler*, be asked to give evidence, and also be allowed to bring two other witnesses. (Mr. Anderson dissented.)

The meeting then adjourned.

WEDNESDAY, 8TH OCTOBER, 1913.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m., pursuant to notice.

Present: Mr. E. Newman (Chairman); Mr. Anderson, Hon. Mr. Buddo, Mr. Forbes, Mr. Guthrie, Hon. Mr. Massey, Mr. Nosworthy, Mr. T. W. Rhodes, Mr. Robertson, Mr. Witty.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

*Paper 127, Aggregation of Land.*—The Committee proceeded to hear further evidence on this paper. Mr. R. E. Hornblow, journalist, Mangaweka, attended and gave evidence (which was taken down by a reporter), and was examined by members of the Committee.

Resolved, on motion of Mr. Witty, That Mr. D. Craig, Crown Lands Ranger, Taihape, be summoned to give evidence, and that the Under-Secretary for Crown Lands be also summoned.

The meeting then adjourned.

WEDNESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 1913.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m., pursuant to notice.

Present: Mr. E. Newman (Chairman), Mr. Anderson, Hon. Mr. Buddo, Mr. Coates, Mr. Forbes, Mr. Guthrie, Mr. Nosworthy, Mr. T. W. Rhodes, Mr. Robertson, Mr. R. W. Smith, Mr. Witty.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

*Paper 127, Aggregation of Land.*—The Committee proceeded to hear further evidence on this paper. Mr. D. Craig, Crown Lands Ranger, Taihape, and Mr. John Strauchon, Under-Secretary for Crown Lands, attended and gave evidence (which was taken down by a reporter), and were also questioned by members of the Committee.

Resolved, on motion of Mr. Forbes, That the Lands Department be asked to furnish a report regarding the Mangahoe College leases.

Resolved, on motion of Mr. E. Newman, That the evidence taken in connection with this paper be printed.

THURSDAY, 16TH OCTOBER, 1913.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m., pursuant to notice.

Present: Mr. E. Newman (Chairman), Mr. Anderson, Mr. Forbes, Mr. Guthrie, Hon. Mr. Massey, Mr. T. W. Rhodes, Mr. Robertson, Mr. Statham, Hon. Mr. Buddo.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

*Paper 127, Aggregation of Land.*—The Committee proceeded to hear further evidence on this paper. Mr. F. S. Pope, Secretary for Agriculture, attended and gave evidence (which was taken down by a reporter), and was also questioned by members of the Committee.

The meeting then adjourned.

THURSDAY, 23RD OCTOBER, 1913.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m., pursuant to notice.

Present: Mr. E. Newman (Chairman), Mr. Anderson, Hon. Mr. Buddo, Mr. Coates, Mr. Forbes, Mr. Guthrie, Mr. Nosworthy, Mr. T. W. Rhodes, Mr. Robertson, Mr. R. W. Smith, Mr. Statham.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

*Paper 127, Aggregation of Land.*—The Committee deliberated.

Mr. Nosworthy moved the following resolution :—

“ That in the opinion of this Committee the allegations in the *Mangaweka Settler*—

“(1.) That aggregation has been rampant in that district has been refuted by the evidence, and that there has been no aggregation except in a few cases which took place in years past, and was made under the then-existing land laws and with the sanction of the Land Board.

“(2.) That the statement that land agents were going round with their pockets lined with gold to tempt small settlers to sell out to the larger landowners was completely disproved by the evidence.

“(3.) That the statement that aggregation was encouraged by the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1912, and to a large extent was due to the provisions of that Act, is incorrect.

“ That the evidence clearly showed that originally much of the land had been cut up into sections of too small an area, and that the Land Board had acted in the best interests of settlement by allowing the areas to be increased so as to allow the settler to occupy an area of sufficient size on which to make a living.”

Hon. Mr. Buddo moved as an amendment—

“ The Committee find that aggregation of farms in the Mangaweka districts has been going on to some considerable extent for years past—empty homesteads being frequently met— but the evidence before the Committee goes to show that this has been done with freeholds which are not affected by the limitation provisions under the Land Act or the provisions of the land legislation passed in 1912 ”

On the question being put, That the amendment be adopted, the Committee divided, and names were taken down as follow :—

Ayes, 4 : Hon. Mr. Buddo, Mr. Forbes, Mr. Robertson, Mr. R. W. Smith.

Noes, 7 : Mr. Anderson, Mr. Guthrie, Mr. E. Newman, Mr. Nosworthy, Mr. T. W. Rhodes, Mr. Coates, Mr. Statham.

So it passed in the negative.

On the question being put, That the original motion be adopted, the Committee divided, and names were taken down as follow :—

Ayes, 8 : Mr. Anderson, Mr. Coates, Mr. Guthrie, Mr. E. Newman, Mr. Nosworthy, Mr. T. W. Rhodes, Mr. R. W. Smith, Mr. Statham.

Noes, 3 : Hon. Mr. Buddo, Mr. Forbes, Mr. Robertson.

So it was resolved in the affirmative.

Resolved, on motion of Mr. E. Newman, That the resolution of the Committee be reported to the House.

The meeting then adjourned.





## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 1913.

JOHN STRAUCHON examined. (No. 1.)

1. *Mr. Forbes.*] We have a report which you have placed before the Committee?—Yes.
2. Does it deal with this matter fully?—Yes. Mr. Hawthorne and Mr. Brodrick went into the matter closely: I have not had time myself to do so. Mr. Brodrick is the Commissioner of the district, and the charges were made in respect to his district. The charges have been gone into carefully, but there is no absolute charge made, and therefore you cannot investigate a matter like that. If a special case was given we could inquire into it. It is not a fair position to put the Department in. We have had to hunt round amongst the settlers and ask questions of them. Most of the cases are freehold, and we have nothing to do with them. If they would make a general charge against any particular person or in connection with any particular section, then we would be in a position to go into it and give a proper answer. As it is we can only give general answers. Mr. Lundius, Mr. Brodrick, and Mr. Hawthorne went to a great deal of trouble in inquiring into the statements made in the *Mangaweka Settler* and the *Auckland Star*, but we had simply to fossick about. If the charge is worth making, surely they can give us a definite statement, and then we can investigate it.
3. The provision as to limitation fixed by the Crown in connection with leasehold has not been broken?—No, not so far as I know. Of course, we have no check on the freeholders. We went to a lot of trouble and searched in the Deeds Office, and you will find the search notes in the report of Mr. Hawthorne which is before the Committee.
4. *Hon. Mr. Massey.*] You mean the freehold alienated prior to 1907?—Yes. I can remember that a charge had been made in consequence of last year's Bill. There were only two or three 10-acre sections that changed hands since then. Previous to that there were two or three 10-acre sections around Mangaweka and Taihape.
5. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] I presume what you mean when you say there has been no aggregation worth mentioning is that there is no aggregation going on which the Land Board has any control over by law?—Yes, freehold lands.
6. You do not dispute the fact that aggregation is going on?—I could not say. We searched the deeds of every case quoted, and the particulars are before the Committee now. We have no means of checking them.
7. Take, for instance, the Wilsons' name?—Some of them are not in any way related.
8. We wish to know whether those individuals are connected by relationship, whether the properties are worked separately or as one holding?—That was inquired into and reported to the Committee by the Crown Lands Ranger. The report is in front of you.
9. *The Chairman.*] They are different families altogether?—Yes. Some are related, and others are not, although they have the same name.
10. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] Do you know anything about their being asked as to the different holdings?—The Ranger inquired into that, and one family has different farms.
11. *Mr. Guthrie.*] Take the case of the Wilsons: there is T. B. Wilson, C. G. Wilson, A. and J. Wilson, R. A. Wilson, N. D. Wilson, H. C. Wilson, A. L. Wilson, G. H. Wilson, with an aggregate of 6,321 acres altogether. When this matter was brought before you you had inquiries made?—Yes. A thorough search was made in the Deeds Office, and the Ranger made inquiries on the ground.
12. The result of that inquiry was that these people had nothing to do with each other, and were not connected in any way?—Yes; I understand that three of them are not relations.
13. There are four distinct families?—I think so.
14. And live in four distinct places?—I do not know where they are living, but they are working separate holdings.
15. In fact, T. B. Wilson is many miles away from the others?—There was one a long distance away, but I could not say where.
16. Amy L. Wilson has got 200 acres: did you find out anything about her?—We found out everything we could from what was laid before us.
17. She holds no other land?—I could not say.
18. She resides with her husband on a Native reserve?—I believe so, but I could not say definitely.
19. As to the land held by C. G. and G. J. Wilson, can you give the Committee any information about that?—You could get it from Mr. Lundius, who made a search. I had nothing to do with it personally.
20. You do not know personally that all those Wilsons are not related with each other?—I looked into it at the time, and was quite satisfied after making several inquiries.
21. You know the whole thing through the Wilsons' name being used?—Yes, there were several family names used.
22. Do you know anything about Musket's property?—No. I just got a general idea in reading over the report. You can get that information from those who searched,

23. Do you know anything of Stuckey's case?—No, except what I saw in the papers.

24. You know he is set down as owning 600 acres?—Yes.

25. And another Stuckey as owning 511 acres?—Yes.

26. It was originally an l.i.p. lease—an education lease?—I do not know.

27. Do you know that those two people are not connected with each other?—I was told so.

28. One is a nephew of the other, but they are working different farms and are absolutely distinct?—That is what I understood.

29. *Hon. Mr. Massey.*] I want to read this paragraph which appeared in a number of papers, as follows: "All through this district" (Mangaweka) "there are agents out, their pockets lined with gold, in order to tempt the small farmer to take advantage of the Reform Government's legislation to convert his leasehold into a freehold and hand it over to the man possessed of capital. In this manner our best dairying lands are being converted into sheep-runs, families are leaving the country and the townships impoverished." I want to know whether you can say from your own inquiries or from any other source if there is any truth in that statement I have just quoted?—No truth whatever.

30. Do you know whether there has been any aggregation as the result of last year's legislation?—No, not as a result of it, but some took place just afterwards, of two or three 10-acre sections about Mangaweka.

31. Will you explain what took place?—It was transferred to other people who held 5-acre or 10-acre sections alongside.

32. But even though that aggregation took place so far as those 5-acre or 10-acre sections were concerned, there may have been nothing objectionable in it?—Yes.

33. I have no doubt you know of a number of instances where it was not prejudicial to the interests of the country that a man should be allowed to take an adjoining section?—I know of hundreds of them: they go through almost every day. It is the Land Board's place to search them and then send them on to you for your approval.

34. That is a pretty common form?—Yes, as long as they keep within the limits.

35. And you think it justifiable?—Yes. Those lands that are questioned beyond Masterton were cut up into areas of too small a size in the original time. They wasted a lot of money in making roads, and that has been remedied by one neighbour buying out another, but still keeping within the limit.

36. I suppose you know of many cases where this so-called aggregation took place where the tenure was Government leasehold?—Yes, within the limits, of course.

37. Always within the limit provided by the Land Act of 1907?—Yes.

38. Is it your experience that there is more aggregation in this way in the case of leaseholds than in the case of freeholds?—It comes under my notice more, but I could not say it was a fact. I do not see the aggregations under the freehold, but I see them under the leasehold.

39. You would see the aggregations of freeholds since the Act of 1907?—Yes.

40. *Mr. Witty.*] In regard to the taking up of these 5-acre and 10-acre sections, has any individual to your knowledge taken up more than one area?—Under the Village Settlements Act they cannot—they are limited to one lot, unless the regulations are altered.

41. You say that you know of cases since the Act was passed where one person has bought out another who already held one section?—I think there are three cases of small sections, but they could not aggregate unless they first of all acquired the freehold.

42. I am talking about the freehold. Do you know of any cases of a man already holding one section who has taken up more than one other section in addition?—No, I cannot recollect any. There were three sections, but they are in different parts of the district referred to, as far as I recollect. There were three in the Mangaweka and Taihape districts—one near the Mataroa Tunnel, one near the township, and one at Mangaweka.

43. They were not taken up by one man?—No, not by one man—they were many miles apart.

44. *The Chairman.*] Have these aggregations to be approved by the Land Board before they go to the Minister?—Yes.

45. Does the Land Board give the approval after inquiry or before?—After inquiry.

THOMAS NOEL BRODRICK examined. (No. 2.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wellington.

2. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] The point the Committee is interested in is as to whether these blocks of land belong to families, or whether the holders are relatives or in any way connected. How many of the holders of the lands in the case of the Wilsons are working together?—I know they are widely separated. I supplied plans showing the positions of the various holdings of the Wilsons, and I am quite aware they do not belong to the one family at all. I did not inquire about that, and was not prepared to give evidence about it. After I sent in my report I met some of the Wilsons and asked them about it, and they told me that the other people were not related to them in any way. I know that there are two families of the Wilsons, and I believed that there were three, and that is all I can say about it. I would like to mention this point: that it may be perfectly lawful for various members of one family to hold separate holdings without it being aggregation. That is the difficulty we find in carrying out the law. We may know that a man's father may hold land, and he comes to us and declares that he is landless and we know he is. We cannot refuse him the land because we do not know what he is going to do with it.

3. Nothing that you have in the way of legal power ever affects these particular holdings?—No.

4. *Mr. Guthrie.*] In regard to the Wilsons, the mistake was made in connecting them as all the one family?—Yes.

5. You do not know who the Wilsons are?—I know some of them belong to the J. G. Wilson family. Young Wilson told me that the other Wilsons were not related to him at all.

6. And that is no doubt because J. G. Wilson's name was mentioned, and the family is supposed to be big landowners, that all the other Wilsons were connected with them in the reports that appeared in the Press?—Yes, I think that was a mistake.

7. Do you know that there are four distinct Wilson families who are not connected in any way with each other?—No, I do not know that. I knew that there were at least two, and I believed there were more, and that the holdings were widely separated in some cases.

8. Do you know how the land they hold is classed?—I did not see it myself, but I think a good deal of it is pastoral land. You would probably be able to get that from Mr. Lundius.

9. I mean, first- or second-class land?—A good deal of it would be second-class land. Some years ago a lot of the land we would now class as first-class land was classed as second-class at that time.

10. *The Chairman.*] Is there any truth in the statement that this aggregation has been caused by the legislation of last year?—At the time that letter was published we had only sold 10 acres in the vicinity of Mangaweka that had been converted into freehold under the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1912. I searched and have given particulars of every holding that had been sold in the district at that time under that Act.

11. You heard the statement read from the Press by Mr. Massey which really caused this inquiry to be made. The statement is "that the small farmer is being tempted to take advantage of the Reform Government's legislation to convert his leasehold into a freehold and hand it over to the man possessed of capital." Is that statement, in your opinion, true or not?—I have no means of knowing anything about it.

12. Do you know whether aggregation has taken place as a result of last year's legislation?—Not so far as I am aware. It goes out of our hands when it is made freehold, but at the time I had that search made in March there had only been a few sections bought altogether. I know that did not refer to them. They mixed things up. Round about Mangaweka that land was sold years ago on the o.r.p. system, and that is what has been aggregated to a large extent. People acquire the freehold and then do what they like with it. They could do so with land sold prior to 1907.

13. I want to know whether, in your opinion, the legislation of last year caused this aggregation or not, or whether it was done previously?—No, it was done prior to that.

14. *Mr. Guthrie.*] In your experience as Commissioner of the Lands Department, do you find that originally sections have been cut up too small for people to make a living off under the different settlement tenures?—In some places, yes.

15. And the Land Board has always been willing, so far as the law allows, to permit the aggregating of these sections in a reasonable way to give a man a chance to make a living?—Yes.

HARRY LUNDIUS examined. (No. 3.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—Crown Lands Ranger in the Wellington Land District.

2. *Mr. Forbes.*] You have made inquiries into this matter of the aggregation of land?—Yes, I reported to Mr. Brodrick, the Commissioner.

3. And this is your report that we have before us?—Yes.

4. And did you find that there was any warrant for the statements made in the Press about the aggregation of land going on in the district?—Well, to my mind, it is the thin end of the wedge; but, as far as I can say as to aggregation, I do not think the statements were warranted.

5. You think there is a certain amount of aggregation going on in the district?—I know in several places where a neighbour has been bought out, and thereby the district has been depleted of one settler.

6. That is going on, according to your observation and inquiry?—Yes.

7. Well, is there any method you can suggest to prevent that?—The trouble is that people can make it freehold, and in the case of land taken up before 1907 under the o.r.p. tenure there is no limit. You cannot prevent it under the law as at present.

8. Was the bulk of the land in that district taken up before 1907?—It has been going on for about fifteen years under the o.r.p. tenure, and the bulk of the land was taken up before 1907.

9. So that nothing can be done under the present law?—No.

10. *Mr. T. W. Rhodes.*] With regard to the specific cases mentioned of the Wilsons, Gorringes, Masons, and Stuckey, did they take place prior to the Act of 1907?—The lands were bought prior to the passing of the Act of 1907.

11. And any aggregation that went on in connection with them would be prior?—Yes.

12. Therefore it was not the result of the legislation of 1912?—No.

13. In the report it states that Wilsons' ranged from 1904 to 1911, Gorringes' from 1911, and Stuckey's from 1912: is that to your knowledge correct?—Yes, so far as I know.

14. Do you know whether in the Wilsons there are different families?—I think there are two or three different families. I have not been in touch with that district for the last five or six years, so I am not well acquainted with it.

15. Do you know whether the different holdings are adjoining or widely separated?—I think there is one section some distance apart and two or three close together, speaking from memory.

16. Do you know how many miles they are apart?—About four or five, roughly speaking. One is separate.

17. You could not say which holding?—No, I did not make out a list. [Plan produced and referred to.]

18. How far apart is N. D. Wilson's holding from T. B. Wilson's?—About fourteen or fourteen miles.

19. And from H. C. Wilson's to N. D. Wilson's?—About eight miles.

20. So that there are at least three widely separated areas held by the Wilsons?—Yes.

21. So that they must obviously be worked independently of each other?—I think so.

22. Could those sections be regarded as aggregation in the ordinary sense?—I do not know which families have those sections. Of course, the sections could be worked jointly, but I do not think it is likely they would be as they are so far apart.

23. *Mr. Witty.*] I notice there are six sections on the plan coloured red: could you tell me if all those sections have been taken up by the one family?—No, there are two or three different families, I think. Originally they were taken up by different families.

24. There are certain sections coloured red close together: do they belong to one family or different families?—I think, two families.

25. There are also six yellow sections close together: are they held by the one family?—That is Stuckey's land; I think there are two families there.

26. If you have been making inquiries you ought to be certain in both cases, because it has a very important bearing with regard to aggregation?—I sent in my report to the Commissioner, but I had no means of ascertaining. Mr. Brodrick could find out by searching.

27. Were you not in the district?—It was not in my district. I was called upon to make a preliminary inquiry.

28. Did you inquire whether they were all owned by one family or not?—Yes, I did. It is father and son.

29. Are they worked as one property?—They are worked together as one.

30. Can you say whether there is or have been six homesteads on those six sections?—I think there have been four homesteads.

31. And now there is only one?—The son lives in one and the father in another.

32. There are, then, two homesteads less than there were previously?—Yes.

33. I think you said that people were buying each other out. Do you know if they have bought more than one additional section?—I think there have been cases where they have bought two or three sections from their neighbours.

34. With the right of the freehold is the aggregation of those sections likely to take place more than was the case formerly? There are better facilities; but do you think there would be more sections taken up to make larger areas than there would be under lease?—There might be, but I am not certain.

35. You do not think the giving of the freehold would be an inducement to aggregate?—So long as the land comes under Part IV of the Act of 1907 the Government have the power to limit the area.

36. But up to the limit, do you think it is more likely to be aggregated now than formerly?—Yes, I certainly do think so.

37. *Mr. Nosworthy.*] There is nothing in the statements that appeared in the *Mangaweka Settler* to prove that the statements made were correct?—I think the statement is exaggerated.

38. You think it is a prospecting expedition?—Yes.

39. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] Are the sections coloured red owned by N. D., R. A. C., G. H., and A. and J. Wilson held by father and sons?—I could not tell you. I have not been there for some years.

40. Do you know the part coloured yellow?—That is Stuckey's—father and son.

41. Then there is C. J. Wilson and A. J. Wilson?—I could not say. I have not been in touch with that district for about eight or ten years.

42. What would be the general value of that land per acre, improved?—It would be about £8 or £10 per acre.

43. In going round the district, what is your opinion of the trend of occupation: is it in the direction of the holder owning more than one section which was originally o.r.p.?—I think it is. Of course, as a man gets on he looks to extending his holding and buys out his neighbour.

44. Expressing a general opinion, you consider that aggregation of that class of holding is going on?—The tendency is that way. I do not mean to say that a man gets more than a reasonable living off the area.

45. But there is a tendency to aggregation?—Yes.

46. *Mr. Guthrie.*] You know the whole of this district thoroughly?—I used to.

47. Do you know the Mangamahariki Road?—Yes.

48. Do you remember Brewster living there?—Yes.

49. Do you know Campbell's section?—Yes.

50. And Philip Smith's section?—Yes.

51. Do you know that J. G. Wilson and Sons have bought that?—I knew J. G. Wilson and Sons had bought up some that used to be a Native reserve—the Donnelly reserve.

52. You know the Otamakapua Native Reserve?—Yes.

53. What was the class of land there?—Second class.

54. What areas was it cut up into?—From 1,200 to 2,000 acres.

55. You see A. and C. Wilson's land marked on the plan?—Yes.

56. Do you remember them taking up that land originally?—Yes.

57. Have you any knowledge of how the sections belonging to the two Wilsons is worked?—No.

58. The other Wilsons are living on the opposite side of the river?—I have not been up there for years.



59. You remember Vile's section?—Yes.
60. That is Amy Wilson's section as mentioned in the return?—Yes, it is a 200-acre section.
61. And is a woman entitled to hold 200 acres?—Yes.
62. Now, in regard to Stuckey's sections: do you remember who owned the 600 acres on Section 6?—Yes, Mr. Hammond.
63. Was it in your time that Mr. Stuckey bought Hammond out?—Just when I left there.
64. Do you remember the education reserve?—Yes, Mr. Nataskie had it.
65. Do you know the Awarua Block?—Yes, that is sheep and pastoral country.
66. Do you know T. B. Wilson, of Hunterville?—Yes.
67. Have you any reason to believe that the various Wilsons there are related to each other?—No.
68. Do you know that there are four families and that they are not connected at all?—I do not think they are.
69. Who held Sections 65 and 76?—Mr. Brewster and Mr. Whotton.
70. Who lived on the land?—Brewster, I think.
71. Did he have a family up there?—Yes.
72. Do you know Wilson, of Pakihikura?—Yes.
73. Did he have a family there?—I could not say. Campbell used to live on one section.
74. Who is working J. G. Wilson's place?—So far as I know, they work it with their manager.
75. Take Native Reserve No. 25: in your time was any one living there?—No.
76. Who bought it?—Wilson.
77. And he was the first resident there?—So far as I know.
78. They originally took up the land?—Yes.
79. Has any change taken place since the original holders to the disadvantage of others?—No, only that there is one man there in place of two settlers.
80. What kind of homesteads are on Sections 5 and 6?—There used to be a good house on each of them—a better one on Campbell's than on Smith's.
81. You do not know there is a family living in each of those houses now?—No.
82. Now, with regard to Gorrings's sections: what class of land is that?—Second class.
83. What is the limit of the holding of that land?—2,000 acres.
84. Two brothers have taken up those sections?—Yes.
85. What was your opinion of that land as compared with the land on the opposite side?—Very many sections on the opposite side of the Kawakawa are fit for dairying.
86. When that land was classified had any one any idea that it would be brought into dairying?—No.
87. Was there any access to that land then?—No, only by the river-bed.
88. If you had been called upon in the early days to classify that land across the Kawakawa in comparison with the land on the opposite side, would you have classified it as first-class land?—No.
89. Do you think when the land at that time was cut up into sections that the sections were abnormally large?—No; I think that land was cut up into very reasonable areas.
90. Should Gorrings's, McKenzie's, and Brown's land have been classified as first-class land at first?—No.
91. Do you know of your own knowledge that those men have got anything extra since the Land Act of 1912?—No, they are within the limit.
92. When you made inquiries up there after the charges of aggregation had been made, did you find that in any of those cases that they had under the Act acquired extra areas?—When I went up there I did not have the means of finding out who the individual was who had them.
93. You met the editor of the *Mangaweka Settler*?—Yes.
94. And he gave you his idea?—Yes. He admitted that so far there had not been very much harm done, but he wished to urge the Government to introduce legislation to stop it in future.
95. Did he admit to you that Stuckey's land was not too large in area?—He admitted that he did not think they had too large an area.
96. You remember the settlers about Titirangi Road?—Yes.
97. Would you consider 200 acres too much for a man to live on in that district?—No, I think a man would require 600 acres there.
98. Do you know that Houston's section was one that Stuckey acquired?—Yes.
99. What happened to Hutten?—He is at Raurimu, and doing very well.
100. It has been said that the schools have been closed in the district owing to this aggregation going on, and cases have been cited of Karewarewa and Ruahine. You know both of those settlements?—Yes.
101. Do you know that Karewarewa was cut up under the Village Settlement Act into small areas of 5 or 10 acres?—Yes, up to 30 and 40.
102. As a practical man, and from your knowledge of land-settlement, was it possible for those men at Karewarewa to make a living off those clearings of 5 and 10 acres?—Not after the roadwork had been done: they were too small.
103. When the roadwork was done and it was found that these men must increase the area to make a living, would you have recommended an increase in the areas?—Yes, I did on several occasions.
104. And did you do the same at Ruahine?—Yes.
105. Do you know the Pemberton Small Improved Farm Association?—Yes.
106. Do you know it was cut up into 70-acre sections?—Yes.
107. Do you think it would be possible to make a living off 70 acres there?—I think it is too small.

108. The Land Board allowed them to increase the holding by adding another section?—Yes.
109. Did you recommend that?—Yes.
110. Do you know that in those letters that have been written to the Press those cases have been quoted of aggregation where two sections were given to one man?—I think that was a proper thing to do.
111. And the statement being made about the land being mopped up and aggregated was only a case of necessity?—Yes.
112. Did you know the whole of the Martin Small-farm Settlements—the three of them?—Yes.
113. Were they cut up into 200-acre sections?—Yes.
114. No one was allowed to aggregate at first?—No.
115. And since?—A good many of those sections were forfeited and given out under the optional system, and then they were allowed to take up to 640 acres. They were only held in 320-acre sections previously.
116. Do you know of any cases in that district where one section was allowed to be divided between two adjoining sections?—Yes.
117. Was that because the land was found to be insufficiently large to keep a family on?—Yes, at the time.
118. Your experience of that district is that the original areas have been found to be too small?—Yes.
119. And that the Land Boards, by the recommendation of the Crown Lands Rangers, allowed the holders to increase the areas?—Yes.
120. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] You said the value of the land in those sections was, roughly, £10?—Yes.
121. What would you say the carrying-capacity of that land was?—About two and a half to three sheep per acre.
122. Take the first section of 370 acres in the name of the Wilson family: that would carry from nine hundred to twelve hundred sheep?—Yes.
123. Would you consider there would be a living to be made off nine hundred sheep in that district?—A man would not get very fat on it, but he would pull through, I think.
124. At any rate, the 1,605 acres owned by A. and J. Wilson would be?—There is not a great deal of difference in the country.
125. It is quite evident that at that rate the holder would keep from three thousand to four thousand sheep, but by the aggregation of sections on the basis of a thousand sheep it would be possible to make a reasonable living with the equivalent of four holdings?—The configuration of that country is such that you could not make them into four different holdings, on account of giving each one access.
126. Then, by the aggregation of additional sections, you hold that they could have been held in single sections and still a living obtained?—I think so.
127. In regard to village-settlement areas, you said you recommended that some of them should be amalgamated. Would they not have been of advantage to the workers in the districts making homes on them and farming the balance?—That was the intention of the settlement at first. After a few years the work run out, and the settlers had to fall back on the land to make a living. The areas were then found too small to make a living off, and the Board sanctioned the aggregation up to a reasonable living-area.
128. And is the population less there than what it was originally?—Yes; not very much less, but still it is less.
129. And you are of opinion that one of those sections would not have provided a reasonable living for a settler?—Yes.
130. *Mr. Nosworthy.*] When you say that the land is valued at £10 an acre and would carry three sheep to the acre, are you reckoning wet or dry sheep?—Dry sheep.
131. In regard to the A. and J. Wilson's sections of 1,600 acres, do you not think that, taking one year in and one year out, if it carries one sheep to the acre they are doing very well?—It is good country there.
132. *Mr. Witty.*] I notice there is a person named Amy Wilson who has got 200 acres: does she live on the section?—I could not say. I have not been in touch with the settlers.
133. Is she a married woman?—I could not say.
134. I heard a short time ago that she is a married woman and that her husband lives on a Native reserve. Can you give me the area of the Native reserve her husband is living on?—About 1,153 acres.
135. You do not know whether there has ever been a homestead on those 200 acres?—Yes, I think there was one.
136. Are the wife and husband living on the land or not?—I do not know.
137. If the land was divided now would any of the sections marked be deemed first-class land?—Some of it possibly at the present time would be classed as first-class land, but at that time it was all second-class.
138. I think you said that the areas as cut up originally were large enough for a person to get a living off?—Yes, that is so.
139. Take the six sections marked yellow: could that land be divided into six sections and keep six families?—I do not think so—not that particular portion. The back portion is very rough.
140. Would it take four?—I doubt it. It might take two.
141. But originally it would carry one to each section?—Yes, I think so.

142. *Mr. Anderson.*] You said the population is less now than it was originally. There was a lot of clearing, I suppose, in the early days?—It was all bush with the exception of a few small patches, but nearly all heavy bush.

143. Would that affect the population then as compared with the present time, on account of the work there?—It is a floating population. I did not consider that. I meant, by "population," the settlers. Of course, naturally there would be bushfellers and fencers, but I do not consider them as population.

144. Are there any schools there?—After the settlers came the schools became established.

145. Are the schools there now?—Yes.

146. You told Mr. Wilson that you did not know whether each of the Wilsons is living on a separate section?—Yes. I have not been in touch with this district for ten or twelve years.

147. *The Chairman.*] What is the nature of the country in question in regard to its physical formation: is it flat or hilly?—It is all hilly—good papa country.

148. Then, in your report you say, "The areas aggregated were only sufficiently large to provide a comfortable living," and that "the holders were residing and working the land in a *bona fide* manner." Is that true?—Yes.

149. Is the land steep land that you could not ride over?—Most of it you could; some of it in wet weather I would not care to ride over.

150. Is G. H. and N. D. Wilsons' land country that you could get over?—Yes, most of it. It is very steep in parts.

151. When you went round the district did you go round with Mr. Hornblow, the editor of the *Mangaweka Settler*?—No, interviewed him.

152. When did you visit the district?—In April last.

153. Has this aggregation been caused by the Land Act of last year?—No, I do not think so. It was in March I made my report, and not April.

WEDNESDAY, 8TH OCTOBER, 1913.

ROBERT EDWARD HORNBLow examined. (No. 4.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A journalist residing at Mangaweka, and proprietor of the *Mangaweka Settler*.

2. You are aware that the Committee is inquiring into the question of the aggregation of land, and the matter was brought up in the *Mangaweka Settler*, the following words appearing: "All through this district there are agents out, their pockets lined with gold in order to tempt the small farmer to take advantage of the Reform Government's legislation to convert his leasehold into a freehold and hand it over to the man possessed of capital." We will be glad to hear what you have to say on the matter?—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, in referring to this matter I want the Committee to distinctly understand that it is not a matter of making political capital out of this business at all. Long before the present party came into power I directed the attention of the authorities to the aggregation, and also to the speculation and dummyism that has been going on throughout the Rangitikei and Oroua districts. It has been carried on for some considerable time—at any rate, for the last twelve years, since I have been in the district. I called attention in the article mentioned to land agents travelling round with money in their possession to buy up holdings for the benefit of those people who had capital to spend. I still stick to the statement I have made, that it is a fact that land agents have been employed by men who are in search of properties and who already own properties. They have travelled round the district with money to buy these sections. The first article I wrote on the subject was on the 18th February. I might say that since the new clause was inserted in the Land Bill of last year it has been detrimental to Mangaweka and, I consider, to the country generally. If we take Mangaweka as an illustration, I might state for the information of the Committee that probably Mangaweka may be placed in a very different position to most of the other townships throughout the Dominion. When Mangaweka was originally laid out those who framed the Act laid out village allotments. Their reason for doing so was that they considered that by and by as time went on the blocks of land adjacent to the town would be taken up in large holdings, and that labour would be required on those farms during a certain period of the year. In order to keep the labour in a central place the Government at that time framed their law so as to allow these suburban sections to be taken up by working-people. The land was taken up in holdings of from 6 to 10 acres. In no case were they supposed to dispose of those sections to their neighbours, but since the new Act was brought into force a number of holdings have been taken up by neighbours. There is one instance alongside my own home, of which I produce a photograph, which will be more convincing to the members of the Committee. The one neighbour has taken up three of those village allotments. [Photographs were produced of various cases of aggregation of small and large sections throughout Rangitikei and Oroua.] In some of those instances the land was aggregated prior to the clause in the Bill being brought into force. The areas are village allotments of 10 acres in the majority of cases. I produce also a photograph of a holding at one time held by Mr. Rummell which has been aggregated. You will notice in the list supplied by the Crown Lands Ranger where the Masons took up various blocks of 1,000, 500, and 200 acres. The photo produced is one of the residences. I could have got another dozen or so of photographs, but I did not have sufficient time at my disposal, but I thought those I produce would be interesting to the Committee as showing the class of buildings and what is happening. Speaking of Mangaweka, the position is not a party question at all, but I believe in connection with these matters the present and previous Ministers in charge of

the Departments concerned were ignorant of what has been going on in the country districts, and they naturally look to their officers to give them the necessary data to go upon. As far as our district is concerned, things have not been carried on as they should have been to enable legislation to be brought forward to stop aggregation. I am not going into the details of the report and the remarks made by the Under-Secretary, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and the remarks made by Mr. Lundius, but I say their report as published in the Press is a misleading report, and the statements contained therein are inaccurate. It is not a fair report at all as far as our district is concerned. The numbers of acres that have been quoted are not correct, as I shall be able to prove in the course of my evidence. In addition to the country that has been aggregated in and around Mangaweka, I might mention that Utiku, Pohonui, and Te Kapua are places where aggregation is rampant at the present time. The aggregation is of 200- and 300-acre blocks, and is now mounting up to over 1,000 acres. No doubt Mr. Guthrie, who is a member of the Education Board, will bear me out in saying that I do not think there are a dozen children left in the Ohutu School. It is reported the average attendance does not exceed six children. Owing to the aggregation that has gone on the attendance at the Ruahine and other schools has also depreciated to the extent of fully 30 per cent. I give that as an illustration of what is going on in connection with aggregation. I do not wish to confine myself to what has taken place during the last twelve months, but also prior to the last twelve months, as I consider it is a question which affects the whole of the people of this country. In connection with recent cases of aggregation near Utiku I refer to Weston's transfer of his property of 200 or 300 acres to McCartney. Then, as to the case of the Masons, I think this is a clear illustration of the land-jobbing and land-speculation which is going on near Mangaweka. Masons are non-resident people of the district—they belong to Wanganui; and they sent agents into the district and purchased Mr. Stevens's property for £12 an acre—a block of 1,000 acres. In addition to that, they bought up a reserve of 500 acres, and then bought up another 200 acres.

3. *Mr. Guthrie.*] What was the reserve?—An education reserve. They held the property for about eight months. Mr. Stevens thought he had done well out of it, and he left this country to settle in Australia. He went to Australia and travelled over different parts, but he was dissatisfied and came back to New Zealand. He went to the South Island and found nothing suitable there equal to the land about Mangaweka, so he came back to Mangaweka again and gave an advance of £3,000 to get his property back from these speculators who held the property. In addition to what he previously held, Mr. Stevens has taken up the 500-acre education reserve. Then there is the case of Keating and Smith. The Smith family also hold considerable property. I am now speaking of the country up towards Tairua. One of the family, Mrs. Phoebe Smith, has taken over that section during the last two or three months from Keating. Then, as to the Hawhaengo Settlement, adjoining Mangaweka, you have the case of Cameron. He bought Pittam's section, for which he paid £10 or £15 an acre, and he sold it within three months for £25 an acre. He has now taken up another section, and, I understand, getting the freehold in Manui, which is three or four miles out of Mangaweka. He has taken up a block belonging to Hurley; the transfer has been granted by the Board, and they must realize that this sort of thing is nothing else but land speculation and land-jobbery.

4. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] Could the Land Board in that case refuse a transfer—have they the right?—I do not think they could, because at the time he put in the application the man had no land—he had disposed of his section. I do not think they could turn round and prevent a man taking up another section. I do not think there is any provision in the present Act to prevent the land-jobbing which is going on. He bought the land in this case—it was not a ballot. There was another farm opposite to Pittam's, belonging to Kraiger. He disposed of his section to Caselberg, who also held another block. The latter paid £15 an acre to Kraiger. I am giving the prices because the Crown Lands Ranger said the land in the Kawhatau Valley averaged from £8 to £10 an acre. Wilson's land has been offered for sale at £15 an acre. An attempt is being made to get some of these big estates cut up near Mangaweka. Caselberg has aggregated that of Kraiger's, and Billingham's property has also been disposed of. The latter transaction recently took place. Then we have cases in Mangaweka: Amer has taken over three sections, and originally he had a block of 8 or 10 acres. He found it paid him better to buy out the adjoining neighbour. He did so, and he paid £400 for 6 acres of land of village allotment. He removed then from his old house into the latter, and turned the former into a barn. Since the Act came into force in which l.i.p. tenants have the right to acquire the freehold he has bought another village section on the opposite side of the road. It is a well-known fact that people have great difficulty in getting grazing, and many of them would be only too glad to avail themselves of the opportunity given them by the Government to acquire these sections. They have not had the opportunity, and have to go elsewhere. On the opposite side of the road, almost adjoining Amer's, is Bertlestones' section, and that has been acquired by Mr. McDonald, who holds 400 acres at Manui. He is turning it into a freehold, and has let it to a tenant. Then we have the case of Charlie McKinnon, in the Mangaweka Village Settlement. He owns several hundred acres at Kawhatau, and also a large block on the Main Trunk line. He also has purchased 10 acres from Deaken, and has converted it into a freehold, also buying out the adjoining neighbour, Stevens, and converted that also into freehold. Another point to prove my statement in connection with land agents is that the money is being invested for speculative purposes. I will take the case of Mr. Powell, in Ruahine. Harris Bros. have a lot of land in different centres: one of the brothers bought this place from Powell, and it was reported in the paper that the reason he wanted to take it up was because he wanted to reside on the section. The Land Board held it over and then decided to grant the transfer. From that time he has not resided on the section, and has taken several people there to sell it to them.

He has no intention of residing on the land. At first I was reluctant to come and give evidence, but when the Press, taking up the opposite side in regard to aggregation, thought fit to refer to the matter they practically gave me the lie direct that nothing of the kind was taking place, and that I could mention no specific cases. The statements put forward by the Lands Department and the Crown Lands Ranger are not correct in regard to Gorringer's sections. The report stated they only owned some 3,000 acres of land, but, as a matter of fact, they have over 6,000 acres, and I have the testimony of Mr. Gorringer himself before the Californian Thistle Commission in Mangaweka, in which he said that he farmed 6,000 acres in the Kawhatau district, and yet the Crown Lands Ranger says they only own 3,000-odd acres. I am prepared to substantiate the statement I have made in connection with the above by giving the size of the farms they have bought out, and, in addition to these, it is reported they have from 8,000 to 10,000 acres in the Waikato, and also last week they purchased two large farm holdings on the Manawatu line. Of the properties they purchased in the Kawhatau there was one section of 200 acres, one section of 1,497 acres, a section of 1,435 acres, a section of 320 acres, a section of 315 acres, one of 188 acres, one of 177 acres, one of 196 acres, and another of 1,756 acres. The last is a Native lease with a compulsory purchasing clause, and in all it makes a total of 6,000-odd acres. It has been stated that the land is not worth more than £8 or £10 an acre. I know Mr. Guthrie is familiar with the land in the district, and I can mention a section opposite to this owned by the late Mr. Thomas Cooper which carried six hoggets to the acre all the year round, and yet the Ranger gave the value of that land, improved, at from £8 to £10 an acre. Some of the land is worth £15 to £20 an acre there. I have a photograph here showing Dixon's land, which he paid £25 an acre for. [Photographs produced to Committee.] Now we come to the Stuckey family. I notice in the report that it was said Mr. Stuckey and his son held the land. Well, Mr. Stuckey had been out of New Zealand for the last twelve or fourteen years, and Mr. Stuckey, sen., has nothing whatever to do with that land. I have known the whole family for the last thirty years. The land is held by Mr. Stuckey, jun., and another young fellow there, who is either a nephew or a brother. Two of them held six sections of land, containing 1,294 acres. I think the statement made in the evidence which was sent to me in connection with the people who held the land there previously is correct. There are about six families who have been bought out there. The evidence in regard to the Stuckeys is quite correct. Now, in regard to Harry and Charles Wilson, the sections they hold contain 1,800 acres altogether. I might mention in this connection that I know nothing whatever and had nothing to do with the report published by the Lands Department in which it was shown that this Wilson family own some 8,000 acres. It never appeared in my paper. The fact is that when the Lands Department were drawing up their report they took the whole of the Wilson people together, whereas, as a matter of fact, one Wilson is about twenty miles away from the others I am referring to. Mrs. Wilson has a 200-acre section, but they have not resided on it, and there is no residence on it. Mrs. Wilson has never resided on it, but resides on another place adjoining with her husband. In connection with this I have already mentioned that the land owned by Mr. C. Wilson he would be quite prepared to sell at £15 an acre. The whole of this section is one of the finest and best dairying country in the Kawhatau country. The land is honestly worth the amount they are asking for it according to the stock it carries. Of course, I do not go altogether by the reports that appeared in the Reform newspapers, but I think in the interests of the country it is only right that the Lands Department, when they issue information of that kind, should issue information that is correct. Now, in referring to the effect that this aggregation has had on Mangaweka—I am referring to Mangaweka more particularly because I am interested in the case, and have been resident there for the last twelve years—I could mention numerous instances of aggregation going on all over the country. As a matter of fact, the *Feilding Star*, which strongly supports the present Government, ridiculed the assertions I made in connection with land-aggregation, but recently it called attention in a leading article to the fact that it was desirable if those who were taking an interest in land-aggregation were to turn their attention in the direction of Waiata, in the Colyton district, where an enormous amount of aggregation was going on, which proves that not only in our own district, but all over the country, aggregation is taking place. I think one of the most serious charges I can level against the aggregation curse in our district is the fact that our only creamery has been closed down this season. I have here a photograph of the creamery, which no doubt is well known to some members of this Committee. Settlers in the Kawhatau Valley and in and around Mangaweka looked forward to the creamery being a source of revenue and assistance to them in connection with their industry. The only industry we had there in connection with dairying was the creamery, and this has been closed down because there is an insufficient number of cows being milked to carry on the industry. I think this is a very strong point in favour of the statements I have made in connection with aggregation which has been going on in and around the district. As far as Te Kapua is concerned, I have a statement here which has been published which will prove conclusively that Te Kapua, which is adjacent to Mangaweka, is suffering from the same thing.

5. How far is Te Kapua from Mangaweka?—It is about thirteen or fourteen miles. The aggregation commences from the Mangaweka railway-line, and it is continuous right throughout the country as far back as Ponui. I will just briefly refer to some inquiries made, because it may be interesting to the Committee. It is as follows: "It is about twenty years since the Te Kapua Block was first made available for settlement. Mangaweka and Taihape were practically non-existent in those days, and access to the holdings was by means of a track from Hunterville. The block comprised just over 13,000 acres of first-class land, and was cut up into sections varying in size from 100 acres to 320 acres, sections of less than 200 acres being in the majority. The number of settlers was originally more than sixty, but aggregation has been indulged in

to such an extent that there are now only eighteen. Of the original settlers Messrs. Davane, Munro, Mickelson, and McCarthy are said to be the only ones who have not disposed of their holdings. The extent to which the holdings have been aggregated may be gauged from the following facts, which are the result of a careful investigation: There are now six settlers who, between them, are in possession of no less than twenty-one of the original holdings. One settler who originally held 100 acres has absorbed the holdings of six other one-time settlers, and he now has 1,400 acres. Another settler purchased four of the original holdings, and the area held by him now totals 1,200 acres. Another holds 1,800 acres, having acquired the holdings of several of his neighbours. Another who bought out three of his neighbours now holds about 1,100 acres; and still another settler who bought out three others is now the possessor of 1,000 acres. Other settlers have acquired either one or two of the original holdings, and aggregation is still going on. Of course, the effect on the district is apparent, and the settlers now find that they are minus a good many of the advantages that were theirs when the number of settlers was greater. The store delivery-carts at one time made regular visits to the block, but the number of settlers now does not warrant a continuance of this boon, and a big order now has to be made up and sent in before the storekeepers will undertake delivery. The settlers who are still in possession of small holdings are feeling the effects of this, and are bearing the brunt of the aggregation evil. It has been alleged in certain quarters that land-aggregation in this district was due to the passing of an Act whereby holders of land under the lease-in-perpetuity system are enabled to acquire the freehold by paying the original capital value of the land, plus 1 per cent. for each year that the land has been held under the leasehold system. The facts are that aggregation has been going on for a number of years, and a number of cases have occurred since the Act stated came into force in November last. It is stated, however, that some of the sections at the present time are being freeholded with the object of selling them to adjoining settlers, and there does not appear to be any legal means of checking the evil. It is claimed that the chief cause of land-aggregation in the Te Kapua district is that the holdings were originally too small for the settlers to make a living on; but presumably a good number of them made enough out of their original holdings to enable them to buy out their neighbours, and this may be taken as proof enough that the land was yielding a good return. It is all good land and is carrying an average of two and a half sheep to the acre, and the carrying-capacity will be largely increased when the area under cultivation is increased. A holding of 100 acres may be too small to provide a decent living, but 200 acres of this land may be made to yield a satisfactory return. There may be some excuse for aggregation within reasonable limit, but that limit has been greatly exceeded by those who now hold over 500 acres of this land. The farmer of 100 acres must of necessity make his land yield more profit per acre than the holder of 500 acres, or he could not make a living off it." I am not so narrow-minded as to lead you to infer that it is not right that some people should not have 500 acres. There is some country where it would be impossible for a man to get a living out of 500 acres; but those sections I am referring to in the Kawhatau Valley, there are some men who went there eighteen or twenty years ago who have reared families and made a living on 100 acres of land, and to turn round and say that this land I refer to of Gorrings', Wilsons', and Stuckeys' is not capable of keeping numerous families is contrary to fact.

6. *Mr. Anderson.*] Are there many of them?—There are several families there who came from Timaru in the South Island. They evidently came from very good stock, and I know in all those cases they had large families. This information I am now giving is what I obtained when travelling round the district. The article further states, "Aggregation simply means that land which is capable of producing £3 or £4 per acre when farmed in small holdings will produce only about half the amount when used merely for grazing purposes, and little or no attention is paid to cultivation." I believe I am well within the mark when I say that the Kawhatau Valley through aggregation has lost over one hundred and fifty souls during the last few years. On the blocks of land possessed by the Gorringe family there are eight individuals employed, and it originally kept some dozens of people. "Apart from the aspect presented from the viewpoint of a political economist, there is to be considered the baneful effect of reaggregation on the business life of the towns." Those who visited Mangaweka would be shocked to see the number of empty houses and shops as compared with what we had eight or nine years ago. The attendance at our school has fallen off, and business people complain bitterly of the loss due to aggregation, and this curse is accentuated by the insertion of the clause in the Land Bill of 1912, and the evil effects of that legislation is going to be disastrous to this country before another five years have passed. "It is, however, a serious matter for the townspeople, as every reduction in the number of settlers has a retarding influence on the progress of the town, as well as on the general prosperity of the country as a whole." We find the present Government and previous Governments did the same, spending thousands of pounds in repurchasing blocks of land while they are allowing aggregation to go on, and you will have to pay exorbitant prices for the land to get it back again. I contend it is time that the representatives of the people of this Dominion brought in legislation to stop the speculation and aggregation that is going on in different parts of the country. I know the newspapers made certain remarks and denied the truth of what I said about the aggregation going on round about Utiku. The following is an illustration in regard to Utiku: "Some years ago a block of Native land, containing about 2,000 acres, and covering the whole area between the main road south of Utiku and the Ridge Road, was subdivided into nine sections by the owners, but for some reason or other these sections were leased to only two persons working as partners. The passing of these nine 222-acre sections into the hands of one firm was bad enough, but in a recent transaction the same firm has acquired an additional 1,200 acres of first-class land, comprising five sections, in the Awarua 1A No. 2 Block, which were owned by three Natives. This firm is now in possession of about 4,000 acres in all,

as an area of something like 600 acres in another part of the district has also been acquired. The whole area consists of first-class land, and the 1,200 acres recently acquired was cleared and grassed. In this case, then, two persons in partnership are holding an area of land which should be occupied by nearly twenty settlers. In the interests of the whole district it is a pity that the Native owners were persuaded to depart from their original intention of close settlement. If they had not done so there would in all probability have been about twenty dairy farms or small sheep-farms on the area of land that is now used for grazing a good many less sheep than it would carry if worked in small holdings. This strip of country has a road frontage of about three miles, and there is a shearing-shed at each end of the block. It is a painful object-lesson to see such an area of dairying country within easy distance of the Ohutu Butter-factory mopped up in this way, and the annual loss sustained by the district in connection with this case alone is sufficient to justify the strongest condemnation of the evil of land-aggregation. Between Utiku and Mangaweka an area of 1,600 acres has been acquired by one person, who has purchased the holdings of three adjoining settlers. This land practically adjoins the area previously mentioned, so that the small farmers have been excluded from a very large area in the vicinity of Utiku. In view of the fact that dairying is being carried on successfully on adjoining holdings of less than 100 acres, it is manifest that this land, which is of good quality, is particularly suitable for dairy-farming in small areas. Another case of aggregation recently occurred in the Hawhaengo Block. A settler who held 85 acres of first-class land in one part of the block and about 1,000 acres in another part of the same block has just acquired the 74-acre dairy farm of an adjoining settler. So long as the law permits this system those who add farm to farm cannot be blamed, but those who have the welfare of the district at heart will see all too clearly that a remedy is needed. The basic principle of political economy ignores the desires of individuals and recognizes only the welfare of the community. If there were illimitable areas of land awaiting settlement it would not matter an iota how large the individual holdings were; but when every land ballot is besieged by eager applicants for sections, and large numbers are still left landless, the case is very different. Among the direct effects of aggregation are: loss of settlers; loss of trade; less output; less facilities for education and social intercourse, and a fostering of selfishness and speculation. It is, of course, gratifying to find our farmers so prosperous that they can buy out their neighbours, but it is not good for the country that they should do so." I think in this connection that I have given you sufficient evidence that land-aggregation is going on in our district, and if I had the time at my disposal I could show you that there are equally as glaring instances over other portions of the Oroua and Rangitikei electorates. I do not think there is any further necessity for me to waste the Committee's time by going through the various statements made by the newspapers who have disputed my statements so far as aggregation is concerned. As a matter of fact, there is one gentleman on the Committee whose sons have aggregated ten holdings of between 1,000 and 2,000 acres. I got the records from the County Council, and they show that Mr. Guthrie's sons hold ten sections in the Ruahine country.

*Mr. Guthrie:* That is not so.

*Witness:* I merely give that as an illustration. There are either two or three sons. I do not think it is necessary for me to go further into this question. I think I have given the Committee sufficient data to go upon in connection with aggregation to disprove any statements that have been made by the Lands Department or by those who oppose the statements I have made. I shall be pleased to answer any questions.

7. *Mr. Forbes.*] Do you consider that the Crown lands report bearing on the question of aggregation published in the Press is a true statement of the position?—I have the statement in front of me, and I have no hesitation in saying that the official reports are a misrepresentation.

8. What particular parts are misrepresented?—In connection with those I referred to, such as Wilsons. Wilsons were credited with having 6,658 acres, made up of 3,372 acres of freehold and 3,286 acres of leasehold. Evidently they are mixing up the Wilsons on the Ruahine-Rangiwahia Road with the Wilsons at Upper Kawhatau. The latter own some 2,000 acres of land there. They have bought out five different settlers. They are non-resident and have land in different parts of the North Island, and instead of having five or six settlers as originally, to-day we have one man and a pack of dogs. These are the only residents on this block. I would not say it is first-class land, but it is good grazing-land and capable of carrying two and a half sheep to the acre. These are the Wilsons who reside at Bull's. Of course, there is another Wilson referred to in the report, T. R. Wilson. He lives away out on the Mataroa-Mangaweka Road, and there is no relationship between T. R. Wilson, the Wilson in Kawhatau, and the J. G. Wilson of Bull's. I think this should be made clear, because a lot of people are under the impression that the statements were made wilfully by the Department. Personally, I never made the statement, and never referred to them in the *Settler* as being one family.

9. Did you say that the Chamber of Commerce in Mangaweka had made representations to the members of the district, Messrs. Newman and Guthrie, about this matter of aggregation?—I do not know whether they made any reference to aggregation; I understand both Mr. Guthrie and Mr. Newman are doing their best to assist in opening up some of the country for closer settlement. I understand they are doing their best to assist in any way they can, as the representatives for both districts, in cutting up some of these estates or in giving any information.

10. And do you think what is required is that the Government should purchase this land and resubdivide it again?—Yes, I think the time is opportune to do that. I believe some settlers who have large holdings are prepared to dispose of the land provided they can get a fair amount from the transaction—that is, a reasonable profit out of it. I am not prepared to say what they are asking. The only ones referred to were the Wilsons, who, I understand, are prepared to accept £15 per acre for Mr. C. Wilson's property. Of course, there are certain portions of Gorringer's estate which they would not take £20 an acre for—that is, where the homestead is. I am not



prepared to say that positively. It simply means that the Government will either have to take steps to purchase or to put on the screw in connection with the graduated land-tax to force them to disgorge.

11. Are there many people round there anxious to get land?—Oh, yes. Take a case in Hunterville recently. Simpsons disposed of some of their land under the new Act; the Government provided the money for five or ten families, and they went in for the land under the Land Finance Act. They are well satisfied with it, and dozens of people would be in the same position if they could get hold of the land. The difficulty is they have not enough capital.

12. You mentioned that a dairy factory in the district closed down?—Yes, the Mangaweka Dairy Factory.

13. Is that situated in a good dairying district?—Yes. In a central position both for the dairying district of Mangaweka, for the small farming centres alongside, and also for the Lower Kawhatau Valley.

14. The closing up of this factory was on account of the aggregation?—No doubt it has been caused through aggregation.

15. How long ago did it close?—This is the first season.

16. And were the settlers doing all right out of dairying?—Yes, every one of them.

17. What did they sell out for?—Because the land originally cost them £1 or £1 5s. an acre, and they sold out from £9 to £15 an acre and bought other land; and with the experience they had of buying up partly improved lands they have gone up in the direction of the Main Trunk line and commenced *de novo*. They know there is a good speck in view as soon as they get a bit of the bush down.

18. If this land in the Kawhatau was reopened for dairying, would there be plenty of people to take it up?—Yes, every bit of it would be taken up.

19. Do you think the dairy factory would be restarted again if the land was available for dairy-farmers?—There would be three or four dairy factories started if all the land I have referred to in connection with aggregation was cut up into small holdings.

20. Is there much dairy-farming done there?—Yes.

21. Are the farmers in good positions?—Yes, they are all in fairly prosperous circumstances.

22. You say the township is very much handicapped by the fact of this aggregation going on and the depopulating of the country?—Yes, that is so.

23. *Mr. T. W. Rhodes.*] In regard to the Hawhaenga Village, you say there has been a good deal of aggregation?—Yes.

24. What are the conditions there: is it practicable for a man to make a living off the original area of 6 to 10 acres?—There have been more than 6 to 10 acres. Some have been 60, 80, and 100 acres.

25. I understood you to say the areas were from 6 to 10 acres?—Those are the village allotments at both ends of the town. The old residents who have stayed there had no worse land than that disposed of, and they have carried on and made a living in the district and reared their families.

26. Are the conditions for making a living at the present day better or worse than they were?—Better.

27. Therefore you say they could still make a living?—Yes, the small farmers could still keep on there taking their milk to the factory and make a good living.

28. Could a man milk sufficient off 10 acres?—No. You are referring to the village allotments. As I pointed out, they were originally laid out for the benefit of the workers, so that when they could not get work on the adjoining farms or in the immediate vicinity of Mangaweka they could put in their spare time on their own sections, keeping a cow or two and growing fruit and produce, &c.

29. Without additional work they could not make a living?—No, certainly not.

30. Is there plenty of work available now?—Yes, plenty of work at certain periods of the year. I do not mean to say that it is continuous. You can understand, in connection with farming, whether dairying or sheep, that there are only times during the year when certain extra services are required, and there has always been plenty of work for the settlers who have had these sections.

31. Then, in your opinion, there is no need for aggregation?—No, not in the suburban sections adjoining the township.

32. And in your opinion the Land Board was wrong in allowing the transfers?—Yes, most decidedly.

33. Speaking generally, supposing the Government were desirous of acquiring land for settlement, is there any land that the Government could purchase outside of Wilsons at a reasonable price?—Yes, thousands of acres.

34. And it could be cut up?—Yes.

35. Have any representations been made?—Not that I am aware of.

36. Would it not be practicable for some of the settlers in the district who are so anxious to get land, and Wilsons being willing to sell, for them to form a land-settlement finance company?—Yes. I do not know whether the suggestion has been put forward.

37. If that suggestion were made to them they might be prepared to do so?—Yes. I do not think the Wilsons are anxious to hold on to the land if they can get a fair price for it. I think Harry Wilson's flat land is worth £15 an acre.

38. You think it would be possible to form a land finance company?—Yes.

39. Can you offer any suggestion as to how this difficulty could be overcome—you know the district well?—You mean as far as aggregation is concerned?



40. As far as bringing about closer settlement—aggregation is already done?—Yes, we cannot alter that. The point is now how to get over the difficulty.

41. What could be done to benefit it? Take the provisions of the Land Settlement Finance Act and the acquisition of lands for closer settlement, would that overcome the difficulty?—It would provided a clause was inserted debarring them from going in for aggregation—making a certain limit. I do not think that 650 acres of some of the land is too much for a man and his family to own

42. Speaking generally, the aggregation is not all of recent date?—Oh, no.

43. You said it had been going on for ten years at least?—Yes.

44. *Mr. Witty.*] Are these village settlers in Mangaweka better off on 6 acres than they would be right in the township on a quarter-acre or an acre?—Yes, most decidedly. I think the rent for the 6-acre sections to the Crown comes to about £1 or £1 2s. 6d. per annum.

45. They would pay more than that?—Yes, they would pay 8s. to 10s. a week for a cottage in the town.

46. And the land is suitable for keeping a cow and raising vegetables?—Yes.

47. You have read the evidence given here the other day by Mr. Strauchon, Mr. Brodrick, and Mr. Lundius?—Yes.

48. Have you any wish to examine those witnesses?—I do not think any good could be gained by it. I can quite understand the position. No doubt Mr. Strauchon from the information placed before him gave a fair statement. The same applies to the Commissioner. I do not know that Mr. Brodrick has ever been in the district, and as to Mr. Lundius, he has been so long out of the district that it is a matter of impossibility for him to give a reasonable answer to the statements at all. It is hardly to be expected. The most remarkable thing to my mind is that the Lands Department ever sent him there. They have a Ranger stationed at Taihape, a man intimately acquainted with the district, and that is the man who should be before the Committee to give his report as to what is going on, and to verify or otherwise the statements that I have made.

49. You mean that Mr. Lundius has not been in the district for some years?—No, he has been removed; his headquarters are in Wanganui.

50. How long has he been away from the district?—For five years or more.

51. Who is the Ranger for the district now?—Mr. Craig, of Taihape.

52. You say that the Mangaweka Factory has been closed down on account of the lack of cows?—Yes.

53. Would there be any more cows if there were more residents?—Yes, certainly. Nearly the whole of the Kawhatau Valley is adapted for dairy-farming.

54. And now it is being used for sheep-farming?—Yes.

55. You mentioned that there were six settlers in one place holding twenty-one holdings: were those twenty-one holdings each suitable for any one to make a living off?—Yes, every one of those sections that were cut up.

56. Are each of those twenty-one holdings capable of carrying a family?—Yes.

57. I think you said that one man had six of those holdings?—Yes.

58. Therefore he is holding what would keep six families?—Yes.

59. Another held four and several others had three each?—Yes, that is so.

60. I think you said there is no residence on those 200 acres of Mrs. Wilson's?—That is so.

61. And yet the Ranger has stated that there is a residence there?—There is not.

62. You mentioned that there is Californian thistle growing on some of those large blocks. Are the Rangers carrying out their duties in seeing they are kept in check?—No. I might mention that there is a good deal of dissatisfaction in connection with the leniency shown to the big squatters throughout the Kawhatau Valley.

63. On these aggregated lands is it possible to keep down the thistles as easy as it is on smaller areas?—No. That is the trouble that the smaller settlers complain of. In the Kawhatau Valley my attention has been drawn to the fact on more than one occasion when going through the valley that some of the settlers who have the larger estates have neglected to keep the Californian thistle down, and the Inspectors have been told not to interfere with the large landowners in regard to cutting the thistles.

64. Told by whom?—I understand, by the Department.

65. Can you prove that?—I have letters in my possession written by men in the Kawhatau Valley. I was shown acres of Californian thistles in full bloom, and it was reported that the owners were told that no action would be taken against them by the Department. I am referring to the Gorrings and others. I could bring evidence to prove that it is a fact from the settlers themselves that the thistles have not been cut. They think it is criminal for the large landowners to be allowed to let their Californian thistles thrive when their neighbours have to cut them down. I was taken over two properties belonging to neighbours of the Gorrings where the thistle had started and they had kept it down by cutting it out, while right over the fence you could see the Californian thistle in full bloom and no one interferes with them.

66. How many people work on the estate of the Gorrings?—About six or seven.

67. You maintain that if it was in smaller blocks similar to the original areas that the Californian thistle would be more likely kept down owing to the larger number of settlers?—Yes. The only way to keep it down is by closer settlement.

68. I understood you to state that a man named Harris bought a section which he does not live on, and yet he has plenty of land elsewhere?—The family has. My attention was called to his non-residence by one of the settlers in the district.

69. And he wants to sell it?—It was in the market advertised for sale.

70. I think you said there were only six children at one school?—Yes, the average attendance.

71. How many were there formerly?—Between thirty and forty.

72. I think you said that the attendance at the school in Mr. Guthrie's old district has gone down 30 per cent.?—Yes.

73. There are times in a district when children pass the school age and there are no young ones coming on: is it through that, or because the people are leaving the district?—People leaving the district.

74. Have you seen the blocks on the map that have been aggregated?—I just saw the Wilsons'.

75. Are those correctly stated on the map?—They are correct with the exception of 1,700 acres not coloured and not included. It was originally leased by Brown.

76. To whose block should it be added?—To Gorrings'.

77. You stated that land agents are travelling around. Are they travelling round to buy up for aggregation purposes?—Yes, to buy up for settlers who already have land there. In the presence of the representative of the *Auckland Star* we had cases and names mentioned of people outside this district as far back as the Forty-mile Bush where agents had written to buy sections to be aggregated, and I think in that connection I was quite justified in making a statement of that kind in the Press that land agents were out and speculation was rife. I think I have proved that in connection with transactions that have taken place with regard to absentees, people who hold land for a few months and then sell it again, and never reside on it.

78. I think you said the clause in the Land Bill would be detrimental to Mangaweka: in what way?—By aggregating all the small village holdings and by purchasing the fee-simple of all l.i.p. lands. Of course, in connection with these sections we have the Land Board, which is supposed to be the watch-dog in connection with land transactions of this kind, but the Board is now a nonentity, because a person comes along and goes outside the Land Board and can buy the fee-simple of the land without consulting them.

79. Therefore it has not been in the interest of the small districts that this Land Bill was passed?—I do not think it has.

80. You said that the reason the Land Department provided for small sections of 8 and 10 acres at Mangaweka was because occupiers were able to work for others outside?—Yes, that is so.

81. And is there still enough work?—Yes, those residing on the sections get plenty of work.

82. *Mr. Anderson.*] When did this aggregation take place—prior to the 1st January, 1913?—Yes, and since the 1st January.

83. And is Gorrings' land aggregation?—Yes. That has been going on periodically ever since they took up the sections over ten years ago. My point was this: that the statements made by my opponents that there was no land speculation going on were misleading. Take Gorrings' case: I look upon them as land-grabbers and land speculators, and to prove what I say I will give you this information: Prior to Frank Gorrings coming into the Mangaweka district he held first two small sections of 200 acres in the Pohangina Valley. He then bought out Brown Bros.' section of 640 acres, he also held Lewis's section of several hundred acres, and then 600 acres at Komako. Later on he sold his interest in those properties at an enormous profit. He then came to Mangaweka, and was joined in further land transactions by his brother, and they are still speculating. Now they are going down to the Manawatu line and buying up farms there, and before long you will have a repetition of aggregation in the Manawatu district. It is reported they can get money from Home at 3 per cent., and with this they can buy up their neighbours, and eventually you will have sheep-runs instead of dairying in the Manawatu district. In addition to the land marked on the plan, they have a block of 1,700 acres which is not coloured on the plan adjoining their own property at Kawhatau, and also 200 acres purchased from Mr. Phyn last April.

84. Then the passing of the Land Act of last year had nothing to do with the aggregation of Gorrings' land?—As far as the 200 acres purchased from Phyn is concerned, because they bought that last April, with the addition of the Native lease of 1,700 acres.

85. Had they any power to purchase that under the old law?—I could not say.

86. Was the 200-acre section a leasehold?—Yes, it was on the o.r.p. tenure.

87. They had not power to purchase that section under the old law?—I could not say positively whether they had power or not.

88. Had the occupier turned it into freehold?—No.

89. But the Gorrings have?—Yes.

90. Do the same remarks you made about the Gorrings apply to the Wilsons?—No, not to the same extent. The Wilsons have owned their properties all along. Soon after they went there they acquired 200 acres, and then a lease of several hundred acres.

91. Have they acquired any land since the passing of last year's Act?—No.

92. I am talking about the big holders. Have any others but the Gorrings?—Not those I have mentioned.

93. So that there was power under the old law to aggregate?—Yes.

94. Has the only aggregation in your district been in connection with the village settlements?—No. In connection with the Masons and Stevens and others mentioned, that was under the Act of last year.

95. Were the Masons' and Stevens's farming lands?—There are two families of Stevens. The one I am referring to is Archie Stevens in connection with village allotments, but Masons had purchased land outside that altogether. Although they aggregated they had power under the old Act. It was not done under the new Act.

96. The only aggregation that has taken place has been in connection with the village settlements?—Yes, in Mangaweka, that is so.

97. In these village settlements were the owners anxious to get rid of their holdings?—Yes, that was their object in selling them. They had got the freehold, and, of course, by previously paying about £1 an acre and getting so much interest it gave them an opportunity of acquiring larger areas on the Main Trunk line.

98. Were some of the settlers able to milk cows on the small sections and obtain a living without working for any one else?—No, that was never intended. It was intended that the small sections should assist them when out of work.

99. What is the aggregation now?—There are three holdings aggregated into one, and so on. There would be 18 acres in the first three.

100. Would the owner be able to make a living off that?—Yes, because, being so close to town, they could sell the product from the cows, the milk and the butter, and carry sufficient cows independent of anything else and make a living.

101. What class of man is he who has aggregated like that?—He is a man who is in constant employment driving a grocer's cart, and he is living on one section.

102. Was he living on one of those sections prior to aggregating?—Yes.

103. He simply bought out his neighbours?—Yes.

104. And their object, I understand, was to get a larger holding?—Yes. I might point out the serious position in which we are placed in Mangaweka. You can hardly expect a business man or a man who has to depend upon outsiders for his living to get up on a public platform and depreciate what is going on. It would be possible for a man to come along with capital and buy up the greater portion of the town from the railway-station up to within a few chains of the centre of the town, including cottages, at as cheap a rate as they are paying for land in Taranaki. If this sort of thing is permitted to continue—I do not think it was intended by the Minister of Lands or members of Parliament to allow it to take place at the time the Act was passed—it is going to ruin the township.

105. Do you think it is probable under the law that that could take place in a township like Mangaweka, that a man could buy up the whole township?—It is quite possible to do what I have stated.

106. Do you think it is probable?—Yes, I do.

107. As a matter of fact, the Land Act of last year has only had that prejudicial effect in regard to aggregation that you are speaking of in reference to the village sections?—Yes, i.e. village sections. The same applies to the small farms in connection with the i.e. outside Mangaweka.

108. You know that aggregation under the old law was going on all over the country?—Yes.

109. You spoke about Californian thistles, and said it was easier to keep them down on a small holding than on a larger one. What size would you designate as a small holding?—From 150 to 400 acres.

110. Have you ever been in the Otago District?—No.

111. Would you be surprised to hear that it is impossible to keep Californian thistle down on the rich flat lands of the Tairāhiti and Clutha?—I would not, though some negligence has been shown in regard to the large landowners in our district.

112. Do you know they have been trying for years to keep Californian thistle down, and they cannot manage it?—Yes, I have noticed it in the South Island newspapers.

113. Would you be surprised to know that the settlers wish to do away with the Noxious Weeds Act down there?—As far as the big settlers are concerned; but throughout our district the owners of the small holdings would oppose anything of the kind.

114. And the dairy-farmers?—Yes, they would oppose it.

115. Would you be surprised to hear that the dairy-farmers have waited on me to get meetings held for the purpose?—I would be surprised. It is a matter of surprise that a report from the Californian Commission held up in our district months ago has never been published for the benefit of the people there. In Mangaweka there were nine to one in favour of keeping the thistle cut down and enforcing the Act. I know, as far as our own district is concerned, and I can speak of my own knowledge, that where the farmers have taken the trouble to keep the ground clear the thistle has not spread, and yet on the adjoining properties where they have allowed it to go ahead and flourish the places are in a deplorable state.

116. *Mr. Nosworthy.*] You say that you think 640 acres is not too much for a man with a family. You mean first-class land?—Yes, certainly.

117. Then if this district was divided up amongst the people, would it provide more than 640 acres?—No, it would not.

118. Well, as there is no hard-and-fast rule and you cannot map a district out like that, is it not in a better condition to-day than it would be if a lot of places are left as they are—is it not better to produce wealth and allow it to cut itself up by effluxion of time?—No, I do not agree with you, for this reason: take our district, we have lost family after family, and these used to spend their money in our town. The tradesmen have lost the support they used to get, and it invariably happens that where you have large holdings held by men in good positions they patronize very rarely their own local town, but send out of the town for their supplies, and the business people not only lose the benefit of the small settler, but lose the trade that should be given to them from the big man.

119. Are you aware of the fact that there are a good many towns in New Zealand, especially in the South Island, that are not making any progress, but are going back?—I have no knowledge of the South Island, but I know that money is very tight and business is slack everywhere.

120. I mean that places have been in a sense oversettled, and the inclination is for the people to sell out and for individuals to take up larger holdings, because they find they can work

better on larger-sized places than on very small ones?—I cannot speak as to your district. From my experience of Mangaweka, ten years ago we were in a far more prosperous condition. We had twice the population, and everything was much better than it is to-day, and this condition has been brought about by aggregation.

121. Does not that apply to a great many places in the North Island for the time being to a greater extent than it does after things are settled down?—Yes, under certain conditions. That might apply in the case of co-operative works. If we have large sums of money being spent it is only natural that we have more money in circulation, but even making due allowance for that I contend, as far as our district is concerned, we are suffering from the effects of aggregation, and would be far better off if the land was not allowed to be aggregated and we had the families still there.

122. You say that some of that land carries six hoggets to the acre?—I gave one particular instance.

123. That would be only a bit of flat country—you would not profess to say that that would apply to the district?—No. The average land all through the Kawhatau Valley would carry two and a half to three and a half dry sheep to the acre.

124. You do not lose sight of the fact that it is possible, in a district like that you speak of, there may be as much money for the small settler in sheep and cattle when you come to take into consideration the question that he has to employ labour to milk, whereas he can keep sheep with less labour? It may be to the advantage of the district to run it in larger-sized areas or holdings and keep sheep?—I cannot say that in connection with our district, for the reason that in the majority of instances they employ their own labour in connection with the dairying industry. They have their own families, and they are under no extra expense in carrying on the industry.

125. That is right as long as they have families, but when the families grow up and go away from the district it drives the people to take to a different process of farming?—Yes, there may be instances of that kind. A man may have six or seven children, and they leave their homes and get married and take up sections for themselves. In that case it would be impossible to carry on dairying.

126. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] Are the holdings in your district all farmed and occupied by the owners, or are they merely managed by a substitute or a dummy?—I consider there is a good deal of dummyism going on throughout our district.

127. Will you state a case?—Yes. Take the upper Kawhatau, the place that was previously occupied by Wheeler, and now owned by one of the Marshalls, some of the wealthiest people in the Rangitikei. They own 1,000 acres or more, and they have a manager up there. Then take Hewitt's property: he is a wealthy man residing in Pahiatua. I am quite sure he never resided on his property in the upper Kawhatau, and that is managed by a manager. I could give several other instances.

128. Do you know of cases where exceptional leniency has been shown by the Land Board?—I know a few years ago I felt compelled to draw the attention of the Land Board to the leniency shown to individuals who took up land away back and never resided on it, and it was only after extreme pressure that they have been forced to reside periodically on the land. They then clear out again, and later on leave the district altogether and put managers on instead.

129. These are cases within your knowledge?—Yes.

130. Prior to going into the Mangaweka district, are you aware of any of those people you mentioned, such as the Gorrings, being looked upon as land speculators, or were they settlers?—Judging from the statements I have already made in connection with the doings of Mr. Gorringe before his brother joined him in the Pohangina district—aggregating land and selling it again, not remaining on it, and doing the same up in our district and also in the Manawatu—I think is as good an illustration as you can get in connection with land speculation.

131. You think the cases in point do not show any inclination to settle?—No, none whatever.

132. In your statement to the Committee you mentioned that there were a large number of empty homesteads in the vicinity of Mangaweka and the district: is that due to aggregation?—Yes.

133. Can you say, roughly, within a radius of ten or twelve miles of Mangaweka how many empty homesteads there are?—If I was to take Ruahine, Kawhatau, Meanee, and Mangaweka, I do not think I would be far out if I were to say that, roughly speaking, there are between fifty and sixty empty homesteads on account of the aggregation. I think I am well within the mark when I say that.

134. And it has a material effect on the attendance at the local school?—Yes, in every case. In answer to Mr. Anderson I said that the attendance at the school had gone down by 30 per cent., but I find now that it would be about the same in other centres on account of the aggregation.

135. Has the aggregation any material effect on the business of Mangaweka?—Decidedly so.

136. Is there any reduction in the number of retail shops in the town?—Yes, quite 25 per cent. reduction to what it was five years ago.

137. What effect would it have generally on the prosperity of the town?—A very bad effect.

138. Trade has diminished?—Yes.

139. Is population decreasing?—Yes.

140. Do the statistics show that?—Yes.

141. Have any cases of aggregation occurred in Mangaweka on account of last session's legislation?—Yes, several cases I have already mentioned.

142. What would you consider will be the effect of that legislation in the future with regard to aggregation?—Speaking from my own experience of Mangaweka, I think it is going to prove very disastrous to the country throughout the Dominion—that is, if you take Mangaweka as an illustration.

143. It conduces under that Act to making it more easier than under the previous conditions?—Decidedly.

144. In reply to Mr. Forbes you said the Government should again acquire the land around Mangaweka and resettle it?—Yes.

145. Is the Committee to understand that you suggest the Government should acquire the o.r.p. sections that have been made freehold?—It is the only way out of the difficulty.

146. At what particular point would you consider this settlement should finish—is the Government from time to time to go on reacquiring and resettling as aggregation proceeds?—Unless they bring in legislation that is going to debar that sort of thing, it is the only way they have out of the difficulty. Not only this Government, but previous Governments, have spent thousands of pounds in acquiring estates throughout the country, and yet they are permitting men who have means to aggregate thousands of acres of land at from £8 to £10 an acre and then selling it again at from £15 to £20.

147. Then I assume the Committee are expected to understand that the continuance of Mangaweka as a town and a centre is absolutely dependent on the resettling of the lands from time to time under the present conditions?—The way things are going on at the present time, as long as the law allows these people to step in and aggregate their neighbour's land and turn it into large sheep-runs, unless legislation is brought in to prevent that the only way to get the land back, unless by paying an exorbitant price, is to get the Government to resume the land from time to time.

148. That is the only solution of the difficulty?—Yes, under the present law.

149. *Mr. Guthrie.*] Your statement in the paper was to the effect that the land agents were out, and you explained that by saying that you knew of definite cases?—Yes, definite cases where land agents had been canvassing landowners to sell their properties.

150. Have they not been canvassing these same men for years and years past?—Probably so.

151. You mention the cases of Harris and Powell: do you know Powell's section?—I do.

152. How many times has it changed hands?—Several times. I could not tell you how many, but it is a section I would not have.

153. You know the man who originally took it up could not make a living on it?—Yes, he could not make a living. I reckoned that 500 acres of that rough country was little enough to get a living off.

154. The Hawhaengo Settlement is different from Mangaweka?—Yes.

155. It was established for those people in the district who were working in the district and making a living for themselves?—Yes.

156. It is very poor land, is it not?—Yes, some of it.

157. And some of the settlers who were there originally have gone to different places?—Yes, with the exception of one or two.

158. Pittams had to leave?—Yes, and he sold to Cameron, and then Cameron sold to Dixon. I should like to make a remark about that transaction. I referred to a price of £25 an acre being paid by Dixon for the section. I think in the interests of the people of this country it is infamous that land agents should be allowed to lie in wait for new arrivals in this country—men who have had no experience and who have a certain amount of capital. Dixon arrived in this country with £300, and the land agents heard he was likely to go in for land. It is in the interests of the people of this country to protect a man who comes from the Old Country from the land speculator. This man Dixon has been practically ruined by them. He put his £300 down, and a land agent and the seller collared the cash, and the poor fellow had a mortgage over his cows and land to make up for the amount due on the holding. It is well known that the section is an old river-bed, and the whole of that 60 or 80 odd acres will not carry twelve milking-cows. The land agents have robbed that man, and it would be well for the Committee to consider the question of making a recommendation to the Minister on the matter.

159. This Hawhaengo Settlement was specially set apart for workers?—Yes.

160. When the Government works were going on in the district?—Yes.

161. And the Government works are done now?—I do not know whether the Hawhaengo Settlement was cut up then specially. It was thought that eventually, with the possibilities of the valley, it would be a sort of village township.

162. You are also acquainted with Kairewarewa?—Yes.

163. In regard to the Timaru Settlement, that was originally settled, was it not, by Timaru settlers under Mr. Hall-Jones?—Yes.

164. How many of those original settlers are there now?—I suppose there would be about 15 or 20 per cent. at the outside.

165. Can you give the Committee any reason why those people left the sections?—In the majority of instances to better themselves and take up larger holdings. They took up land originally at £1 or £1 5s. an acre, and as their families were growing up they thought they had better sell out to their neighbours. The areas varied from 72 to 150 acres. The average was about 70 acres.

166. They were eventually found to be too small?—Yes, some have hung out, but it has been merely an existence. You could not expect them to make a good living off 70-odd acres. It was monstrous to give them only 70 acres.

167. You know the Pemberton Improved Farm: the sections were too small there?—Yes, and they had to allow them to aggregate.

168. There were a great many settlers there at first?—Yes, there was double the number of children in those days.

169. Those people, with the permission of the Land Board, were allowed to join two and three sections together?—Yes.
170. And consequently several settlers had to go, and the children had to go too?—That is so.
171. But you would not call that aggregation?—No, not in that case.
172. Then, in connection with the Martin small-farm blocks, I understand they were 200-acre sections?—Yes.
173. And many of them were too small?—Yes, some of them. They ought to have had at least 500 acres. When it came to broken country it was not enough. Some of that country is very broken.
174. You believe the Land Board was justified in a case of that kind in allowing the sections to be aggregated?—Yes, decidedly so.
175. You mentioned large sections in the upper Kawhatau that are held by absentees?—Yes.
176. Would you tell the Committee where those sections lie?—They lie practically about eighteen miles from Mangaweka—some of them right up under the ranges.
177. What are the areas?—1,000, 1,500, and 2,000 acres, or they may be a little more.
178. The majority of that country would not be fit for close settlement?—No, the majority would not be.
179. You mentioned some places in Mangaweka: Bertlestones—have they left their place?—Yes; McDonald has bought it.
180. Did he not purchase it because of the difficulty of getting the children to school?—I do not think so—he has a school close by.
181. In regard to the Gorringe Brothers, you characterized them as not being settlers?—Probably it is hardly right to say they are not settlers, but it is more land speculation than settlement.
182. Have they ever been off their land?—Just periodically, when they visited the Old Country. They work on their land, certainly, and no doubt do their share of work.
183. Do you know any harder working-men in the Kawhatau?—I believe they are industrious men.
184. You referred to them as still further aggregating down the Manawatu line?—Yes.
185. Have they both aggregated down there?—M. Gorringe has. I have taken it from the names in the *New Zealand Times*, written by that paper's Shannon correspondent.
186. You cited Stuckeys as having taken six sections between two of them?—Yes.
187. What does the whole lot amount to?—To 1,294-odd acres.
188. One of those sections of 300 acres is an education reserve?—Yes.
189. Do you consider that good land?—I had a letter from one of the previous owners, who since have another property. They declared that by disposing of that section they had jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire.
190. There are two Stuckeys there, and you said you thought they were related?—The Ranger said they were father and son, but the father of the elder one has been out of New Zealand for ten years to my knowledge.
191. They are two separate people?—Yes.
192. And have 1,200 acres?—Yes.
193. And your idea is that when you get on to the Titirangi Road it is rough country?—Yes. If I went up there I should want 600 acres. I do not think I could make a living off less on the roughest portion.
194. Now, in regard to Harry Wilson and his wife, they got that land seven or eight years ago?—Yes.
195. He has been farming there all the time?—Yes, consistently.
196. And is a hard-working man?—Yes.
197. Are you acquainted with the whole of his 1,200-acre block?—No, I have not been over the whole of it, but it is rough at the back.
198. There is a portion along the front that would be eminently suitable for dairying?—Yes, but not some of the back portion.
199. Would you say that Vile's old section was fit for dairying?—No, only a portion.
200. Now, in regard to Charlie Wilson, you do not suggest for a moment that there is any connection between them except that they are brothers?—No, they are absolutely separate and work their land separately.
201. Charlie Wilson has always resided there?—Always.
202. How was that land classified in the beginning?—Second-class land.
203. And he could hold 2,000 acres?—Yes.
204. The next section is Gorringe's section, and he bought that from another man, did he not?—Yes.
205. That is second-class land also, and also the adjoining sections?—Yes, it was all classed as second-class land in those days.
206. When these people took up that section there was no access to that land?—With the exception of a rough track. There were no roads or bridges to a portion of the holdings.
207. Do you not think that the bad access and the difficulty of getting any one to go in there would make it necessary to class it as second class?—I have always been of that opinion. There is no such thing as unearned increment with land of that description.
208. You say they have taken up another 1,700 acres this year?—Yes.
209. Is not that only a lease?—It is a lease at the present time, but with a right of purchase.
210. They may or may not purchase it?—Yes, but they have the right to do so.
211. You say they hold other land on the other side of the river on the main road?—Yes.

212. Did they buy that land?—I think they leased it. That is Phyn's section. They only bought the freehold in March or April last. I am only giving this information as an illustration and not out of any personal feeling.

213. With regard to the other Wilsons, there was no connection between those families?—None whatever.

214. The sections in the Te Kapua district were known as the Palmerston Knights of Labour block?—Yes.

215. And it was found to be cut up into areas of too small a size?—Some of it was, but some of the land there is far superior to that which we have at Te Kapua. Hintz has some of the finest blocks there.

216. This settlement was very badly off for roads?—Yes.

217. Do you not think that has had a great deal to do with the aggregating of land?—I cannot say that in every case. I know of men who I have been intimately acquainted with who have been dissatisfied with their bargain and who have had opportunities of acquiring larger sections in other parts of the country at considerably less than what they realised on their land. I know a man who sold his property of 200 acres there and he got sufficient out of the sale of the 200 acres to buy 850 acres up on the Main Trunk line.

218. You know the Cantons—they came from Palmerston?—Yes.

219. And they sold out there because they thought they were going to pick up more land?—Yes.

220. All this aggregation we have been alluding to has taken place in years gone by?—Yes, during the last ten years, and it is still going on.

221. You say there are six settlers holding twenty-one sections?—Yes.

222. The areas would be about 2,000 acres?—They would average about that.

223. In the district within ten or twelve miles radius at least sixty families have gone?—Yes, throughout the county I have mentioned.

224. That includes the Hawhaengo Settlement?—Yes, and out as far as Te Kapua.

225. You are of opinion that some of this aggregation was justifiable?—Oh, yes, in connection with those inferior small sections. In connection with the small sections in the Hawhaengo and Pemberton Settlements they were justified in aggregating.

226. The only objection you have is in regard to the large areas?—Yes, and also the township sections. It is a great mistake, and driving the people out of the country.

227. You say that Guthrie Brothers have aggregated ten sections?—Yes.

228. Do you know there were six or eight sections lying there for years that no one would take up?—Yes, I know there were some lying there.

229. And Munro gave up his section?—Yes.

230. Because there was no means of getting on to them and no homesteads?—It has turned out that those sections your sons have are among the most prolific of any sections in that district.

231. There is no aggregation about that—the two of them have the original holdings, one having 500 acres and the other 600 acres?—The information supplied to me was that there are ten sections. The County Council has it down as ten sections.

232. In order to work those sections are you aware that they had to buy a homestead, and with the sanction of the Land Board and approval of the Ranger after he came and inspected the thing they got the extra section?—There is no doubt access to some of the sections was difficult.

233. Are you aware that the Land Board approved of what the Guthrie Brothers have done for the purpose of true settlement?—Yes, that is apparent.

234. Do you admit there is no aggregation of ten sections seeing that was originally taken up in two holdings?—Yes, according to your statement.

235. And with the approval and after being advertised by the Board?—Yes, that is quite right.

236. What you say about the ten sections is not correct—your information is wrong—that those sections are on the valuation roll as separate sections?—I think the Council was quite right; but you had several sections there yourself, and I think in taking them they have also counted those sections you held.

237. You attribute only to the fact of last year's legislation the aggregation of the village settlements at Mangaweka?—Yes, and it also applies to all l.i.p. sections, because they will have the same opportunity of aggregating by converting them into freehold all round our district.

238. In regard to Stevens, he wanted to sell out?—Yes.

239. And Mason bought him out?—Yes.

240. And Stevens came back and wanted to buy the section back?—Yes; there are two or three absentees like that. All the country right up to the Makohine is in the same position. They put managers on and the owners are absentees. They have miles of country suitable for cutting up into dairy farms. In regard to the Masons, they took up three blocks of 1,000, 500, and 200 acres: the two former have been repurchased by Stevens, the other is uninhabited at the present time. This was purchased within the last twelve months, but not under the Act of 1912; but the Act would have made no difference.

241. *The Chairman.*] You are not an expert in regard to land for sheep-carrying?—No.

242. In regard to the price of land at Kawhatau, I understand from your evidence that the price was about £15 an acre?—Certain portions of it.

243. You also referred to property purchased by Mr. John Marshall from Mr. Wheeler: are you aware that that property was purchased for about £9 an acre?—Of course, now you are going right under the ranges. I am not referring to that—I am referring to the lower Kawhatau, not in the vicinity of the ranges. The statement was made by the Ranger that the lower and upper Kawhatau was improved property and only worth from £8 to £10 an acre. To prove

that his statement was wrong I told the Committee this morning that I had it on the very best authority that one of the Wilsons wanted £15 an acre for his land. I am prepared to say that Gorrings' land with the homestead would not be sold for £20 an acre. That land is thoroughly improved, and is worth £25 an acre.

244. Are you aware of the fact that this land had been sold for £9 an acre?—That is so, but then it is hardly a fair way to put it. Although that land was sold for £9 an acre, I would sooner give £15 an acre for this land than £9 for that nearer the ranges.

245. You referred to the Marshalls as having plenty of land, and you referred to aggregation. Are you aware that he has four children without land?—Yes, but I know the Marshall family also possess something like 20,000 acres of good land in one block.

246. The land that has been referred to in this inquiry is mostly held by Gorrings, Stuckeys, Wilsons, and Guthrie Brothers?—That is so.

247. Have any of those people acquired land since the passing of the Act of 1912?—Yes, the Gorrings.

248. How much of theirs has been acquired since?—The portions coloured brown on the plan—1,700 acres and 200 acres.

249. You know that the 1,700 acres is a leasehold with the right of purchase?—Yes.

250. So that it comes to this: that the only piece they have acquired as freehold since 1912 is the 200 acres?—Yes, and that purchased on the Manawatu line.

251. Then Wilsons, Stuckeys, Masons, and Guthrie Brothers acquired their land previous to the Act?—Yes.

252. With regard to the Guthrie Brothers, are you aware they hold 1,600 acres and that it is divided amongst three men with wives and families?—That is so.

253. With regard to Te Kapua land, you say that land would carry three sheep to the acre?—From two and a half to three dry sheep to the acre.

254. You consider that the temporary set-back to Mangaweka has been caused by the aggregation of country lands in the vicinity of Mangaweka?—Yes.

255. And you suggested that the only way to overcome that was either to get back the lands or to increase the graduated land-tax so as to prevent it?—Yes.

256. Are you aware provision is being made under the new Bill to prevent aggregation?—Yes.

257. Being an experienced man, does that meet with your approval?—No, I differ with some of the clauses of the Bill.

258. *Mr. Anderson.*] You said that there had been non-residence on some sections in the district, and that you had complained to the Land Board?—No, I did not complain directly to the Land Board. I had written in the newspaper commenting on the fact. I have commented on those things for years in my ordinary business as a journalist.

259. Did that come under the notice of the Land Board?—I could not say. They may have seen a copy of the papers.

260. Then you have not personally brought it under their notice?—No.

261. And did some of this non-residence take place before the passing of the Act of last year?—Oh, yes; it has been going on for the last ten or twelve years.

262. Have you drawn attention to it since the passing of last year's Act?—No, not in connection with non-residence. Most of my time has been taken up in connection with aggregation.

263. *Mr. Guthrie.*] You said Mangaweka had gone back?—Yes.

264. Is it not a fact that one reason for that is that the expenditure on public works is now no longer necessary?—No, I cannot say that, because we have not received any great benefit out of public works in Mangaweka for the last seven or eight years.

265. The sections and huts were occupied by working-men?—Yes. Eleven or twelve years ago there was a population of about eleven hundred, but the population has now fallen down to about four or five hundred.

266. Mangaweka was very prosperous at the time the railway-works were being carried out?—Yes, and should be now.

WEDNESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 1913.

JOHN STRAUCHON examined. (No. 5.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are Under-Secretary for Lands?—Yes.

2. There have been statements made by Mr. Hornblow in evidence before this Committee more or less reflecting on the Department. In one statement he says, "I think it is in the interests of the country only right that the Lands Department when they issue information of that kind should issue information that is correct"?—We have taken every precaution to see that the information we supplied is correct.

3. Then, further he says, "I have the statements in front of me, and I have no hesitation in saying that the official reports are a misrepresentation." He is referring to the report dealing with aggregation?—He has only rumour to go upon. I do not suppose he ever went to the Registry Office to search as we did. We took every precaution in regard to our reports and the information contained therein, and as far as we have gone I am sure the statements are correct.

4. In your opinion the statements made by the Department are correct?—Yes. We took every precaution to see that they were correct.



THURSDAY, 16TH OCTOBER, 1913.

FREDERICK SIDNEY POPE, Secretary of Agriculture, examined. (No. 6.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Pope, the Committee are now dealing with the question of the aggregation of land, and one of the witnesses, Mr. Hornblow, made certain statements with regard to the Californian thistle being allowed to obtain on some of the large blocks. He used this as an argument in favour of preventing aggregation of land. The Committee thought, seeing there was a complaint of favouritism against the Department of which you are the head, it would be only fair that you should have an opportunity of making a statement on the point. I will read to you the paragraphs:—

“You mentioned that there is Californian thistle growing on some of these large blocks. Are the Rangers carrying out their duties in seeing they are kept in check?—No. I might mention that there is a good deal of dissatisfaction in connection with the leniency shown to the big squatters throughout the Kawhatau Valley.

“On these aggregated lands is it possible to keep down the thistles as easily as it is on smaller areas?—No; that is the trouble that the smaller settlers complain of. In the Kawhatau Valley my attention has been drawn to the fact on more than one occasion when going through the valley that some of the settlers who have the larger estates have neglected to keep the Californian thistle down, and the Inspectors have been told not to interfere with the large landowners in regard to cutting the thistles.

“Told by whom?—I understand, by the Department.

“Can you prove that?—I have letters in my possession written by men in the Kawhatau Valley. I was shown acres of Californian thistles in full bloom, and it was reported that the owners were told that no action would be taken against them by the Department. I am referring to the Gorringses and others. I could bring evidence to prove that it is a fact from the settlers themselves that the thistles have not been cut. They think it is criminal for the large landholders to be allowed to let their Californian thistles thrive when their neighbours have to cut them down. I was taken over two properties belonging to neighbours of the Gorringses where the thistle had started and they had kept it down by cutting it out, while right over the fence you could see the Californian thistle in full bloom and no one interferes with them.”

Now, that is the statement, and the Committee would like to know whether any such favouritism has been shown, or whether there has been any discrimination between the large and small landholder?—No. The Department has never shown any discrimination between the large and small landholder. I have never been able to find any shadow of foundation for such statements. Any Inspector who did follow such a course would be in serious trouble with the Department. So far as the Department is concerned no such favouritism has ever been countenanced in any way whatever, directly or indirectly. The statement that some instructions had been given was entirely inaccurate. No instructions that large landholders, or any other landholders, were to be allowed to let their Californian thistles flourish have ever been issued.

2. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] Was it not said that the Department was discriminating?—The policy of the Department in regard to the administration of the Noxious Weeds Act has not undergone any change in recent years. It is the same now as it has been any time during the last five years.

3. Have you charge of the Noxious Weeds Inspectors?—I have charge of the whole Department, including the Noxious Weeds Inspectors.

4. In a district like Mangaweka, how far is a Noxious Weeds Inspector to be expected to control?—Do you mean geographically? If so, I could not give him the exact boundaries of any district. Each Inspector has a large area.

5. Would it be more than one county?—No.

6. You think it would not be a larger area than the Rangitikei County?—No.

7. Is his whole time taken up in inspecting various properties?—Yes.

8. In the event of his observing thistles, presumably Californian thistles, going to seed in a district, has he orders to take action against the offender?—Yes. He gives him, in the first place, a more or less friendly notice—a printed notice, not the legal document—that he is expected to do the necessary work. If that has no effect it is followed up by a legal warning, and actual prosecution if no attempt is made to comply with the Inspector's orders.

9. Have you been able to go out into your districts and see for yourself how far the Act has been complied with?—No, not to any extent. That is done by Mr. Clifton: he deals with any matters of that kind more closely than I do. Mr. Clifton has spent a great deal of time in the district under discussion.

10. Have you reason to believe with the evidence before you that the Act has been complied with, especially in a case such as mentioned in the evidence submitted to you?—The Act is not fully complied with in any part of New Zealand. It has never been the policy of the Department to drive the Noxious Weeds Act to the full. To do so would mean the hunting of a very large number of settlers off their land.

11. Were they to comply with the Act fully they would be unable to remain in occupation of their land?—A good many of them—hundreds.

12. Presuming the subject we are now on to be Californian thistle, what does the Department insist on to comply with the Act?—That land should be cleared to prevent seeding.

13. Do you not think that if land is fit to be occupied at all that the Department should insist on the prevention of seeding?—Well, of course, that is the theory of the thing. Theoretically we do, but it is not practicable in all cases. There are plenty of parts of the country where there are immense areas of Californian thistle, but it is absolutely impossible for the landholders to deal with them in the strict terms of the Act. What the Inspectors do is to exercise an amount of discretion. They administer the Act as far as it appears to them to be reasonable.

14. I will give you a case. Riding across country in the North Island last summer after thistle-seeding time, I rode along a ridge on the side away from the prevailing wind. There were about 5 acres of solid Californian thistles: not one foot of the ground but was covered. In a place like that on a high ridge, do you not think it is necessary that the Noxious Weeds Inspector should go over the property and see for himself the state of things?—They do so. It does not follow because thistles are met with that the Inspector has not done a great deal to get them cut. The man may have been actually prosecuted. He may have first of all been told by the Inspector to cut those weeds; then he may have received the printed warning; then he may have received the legal notice; then he may have received a letter from the Inspector later on stating that he would have to recommend prosecution; then he may be actually prosecuted. The whole process may have been gone through; but that does not actually cut the thistles. It must not be assumed that because the thistles are growing nothing has been done.

*The Chairman:* I do not think the question of noxious weeds is under discussion. It is the question of whether partiality has been shown to large landholders.

15. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] My attention has been drawn to the statement that probably the Inspectors have been told to deal lightly with the large landholder. Have you been asked this question?—The statement is false.

16. *Mr. Guthrie.*] How long have you been in charge of the Department?—A little over four years.

17. During that time have you received any letters objecting to the action of the Inspectors in different parts?—Yes, on both sides of the fence, as it were. I have received letters, and the Minister has received letters, complaining that the Act was being too strictly enforced in some cases, and complaining that the Act was not being strictly enforced in others. The man who has weeds on his property naturally does not wish to be forced to take action to cut them and control them; but the man who has no great number of weeds on his property but is in the neighbourhood of a man who has weeds wants the Act very drastically enforced, and the Department sometimes is between two fires. Inspectors do their best to meet the position reasonably.

18. You have got the file of those letters on the subject?—There is a large number of those letters: they are on record.

19. At any time have you, as head of the Department, issued any instructions to the Inspectors to relax their vigilance?—Never.

20. Not by instructions of any Government?—No.

21. There was a Commission lately to investigate this question?—In one district—in the district that is under discussion.

22. Has that Commission reported?—Yes. Mr. Clifton went especially into the district and made inquiry very thoroughly on the spot.

23. As the outcome of that Commission's inquiry have you changed your treatment or issued fresh instructions to the Inspectors?—Not in any way.

24. Then the law remains in force just the same as it was, and the Department has issued no new instructions?—Not to any one.

25. *Mr. Anderson.*] You know the position in the South?—I know something of it.

26. You said that it would drive settlers off their land if the Act was enforced?—In some instances.

27. You know there is country down in Southland that is full of thistle. Is the country we are speaking of anything like the country in the South?—In some cases it is even worse, but there is a great deal of that kind of country there. The class of country that I refer to more particularly is country with rocks, stumps, &c., where it is impossible to take a machine through. The whole work would have to be done by hand.

28. Do you remember a remark made when introducing a deputation to the Hon. Mr. Mackenzie in Dunedin to the effect that the regulations should be relaxed?—Yes, I remember.

29. It was shown there by experienced farmers that it was quite impossible to clear the land of the thistles?—Yes.

30. I think that as a result of that Mr. Mackenzie introduced an amendment to the Noxious Weeds Act allowing the settlers' evidence to weigh with the Magistrate?—That is so.

*The Chairman:* I think we are going away from the subject of the examination.

31. *Mr. Anderson.*] Is it not possible that Mr. Hornblow has been misled as a result of the altered legislation? The provision may mean that the Inspectors' evidence will not be so valuable in obtaining prosecutions under the new law as it used to be?—That is so.

32. And is it not possible that Mr. Hornblow may have been misled on that account?—It is possible. There were some statements in the newspapers some time ago—whether in Mr. Hornblow's paper or not I could not say—practically to the same effect.

33. You do not think he would be likely to be misled by the altered action of the Department?—I do not think so, because there was no altered action. The only difference is that Inspectors' evidence carries less weight with the Magistrate than it used to.

34. An Inspector would not be so ready now to bring an action as he was before?—No, because he has to produce proof other than his own word. In previous times, before that amendment that you speak of, any Inspector—

*The Chairman:* This is going beyond the range of the subject.

*Mr. Anderson:* My point is this: that the law was found to be utterly impracticable in the South where these weeds are common, and where the settlers found it was utterly impossible to eradicate them. It may be that the Department have not brought as many actions in the North—following on what they are doing in the South—as they would have done if the Inspectors' evidence had been sufficient to secure a conviction. That is my point. I have no doubt it is a fact.

*The Chairman:* I want to draw attention to the fact that the only question Mr. Pope was to answer was whether he had given instructions that large landholders were to be favoured.

35. *Mr. Statham.*] Were instructions given by any member of your Department to do so—that is, to any of the officials to your knowledge?—Not to my knowledge. No official of the Department had any authority to do so. I think I am safe in saying no official has.

36. *The Chairman.*] Is it a fact that all are treated alike?—It certainly is.

37. Has there been any change of policy between the different Governments?—No change of policy.

WEDNESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 1913.

NATHANIEL CRAIG examined. (No. 7.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—Crown Lands Ranger at Taihape.

2. You are aware that this Committee is holding an inquiry into the question of the aggregation of land?—Yes.

3. Will you make a statement in regard to the matter?—I will be pleased to answer any questions.

4. *Mr. T. W. Rhodes.*] What is the value of the agricultural lands in and around Mangaweka Settlement?—They average from £12 to £15 per acre. It depends on the distance you go back.

5. It has been alleged that there has been certain aggregation of some village sections in the immediate vicinity of Mangaweka: do you know anything about that?—No, I know nothing about the aggregation of Crown lands within the immediate vicinity of Mangaweka. There has no such thing taken place to my knowledge.

6. Not in the case of those small 5-acre sections?—We have possibly given a section that would be really of no use for any man, even to make a living off, to an adjoining neighbour—stony, poor land.

7. People have been allowed to acquire an additional section of poor land?—Yes, in one or two cases.

8. And do you consider that is in the interests of the country?—In the interests of settlement and of the country.

9. Was the original holding, in your opinion, sufficient for a man to make a living off?—It was not sufficient for him to make a living off—it was stony land.

10. Supposing a man was working outside at casual work?—No, you would not get even a working-man to live on it and make a living.

11. It is alleged that homes have been vacated through this aggregation being allowed?—No, that is not the case—not to my knowledge.

12. You are the present Ranger for the district?—Yes.

13. There has been evidence given before the Committee in regard to farm sections in the Kawhatau Valley: has there been any aggregation there recently within your knowledge?—What kind of lands?

14. Rural lands?—Do you mean Crown lands or freehold lands?

15. Freehold lands?—Freehold lands, Yes; but Crown lands, No.

16. Say, under the Act of 1907, have Crown lands been allowed to be aggregated?—No. We have possibly allowed a settler who had not sufficient land to make a living off to take up another section so as to make a living, but that is all that has been done. The interests of the country have been safeguarded by doing that.

17. Do you know anything about the Gorringes and the Wilsons?—Yes.

18. How many different Wilsons are there in the district?—Two families. There are four holdings between the two brothers.

19. And each work independently of the other?—Yes; in fact, they are all married, and they are very good settlers, and have separate holdings.

20. Now, with regard to the Gorringes?—There are two families there, but they are aggregating land to a considerable extent. They have now something like 6,000 acres.

21. Of Crown land?—No, freehold private land.

22. *Mr. Witty.*] Have you been stationed in the district for long?—Five years.

23. And you have noticed that there has been some aggregating of land in the district?—It all depends on what land you mean.

24. Any land in the district?—Of course, with freehold land a man has a right to sell it.

25. Are there many empty houses in Mangaweka?—No, not in the town.

26. If Mr. Hornblow says there are he is not stating what is correct?—Not at all.

27. Do you know any one named Hewitt?—No. I know the country.

28. Does he live there?—I do not know. There are some sections that have been turned into freehold.

29. Has this section been freeholded?—I do not know without looking it up. I know the locality, but I cannot locate the section.

30. It has been stated that several of the people who have got land are not living on their holdings?—Of course, if they have carried out the improvements and fulfilled the residential conditions there is no necessity for them to live on the land.

31. Some of them have not, I understand?—Not in my district, that I know of. Most of the settlers have willingly fulfilled the conditions of the leases.

32. You do not consider there is any aggregation going on except in the case of privately owned lands?—None whatever.

33. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] It has been stated here that some small sections have been purchased by adjoining owners in the Town of Mangaweka, the freehold of which was granted under the legislation of last year. Are you aware of such transactions having taken place?—No. Of course, if the freehold had been granted the land may have been sold unknown to me. I may not hear of any such transaction. Possibly I might not hear of such a transaction for months and months.

34. In your journeys through that district have you noticed a number of empty homesteads anywhere?—Old original whares. All that land was cut up into 200-acre sections, and you will see the remains of old homes on some sections, but there are no good houses shut up.

35. There are no really good homesteads?—No; no habitable houses shut up.

36. Are those sections on which there are uninhabited houses of any considerable value per acre?—The value may run from £12 to £15 per acre. That would be the average throughout the whole district.

37. Would it be suitable for dairying purposes?—No, not taking it on the whole. There may be little flats which may be suitable for dairying on, but it is mostly suitable for pastoral runs.

38. Where is dairying mostly carried on in that district?—There are a few sections round about Mangaweka, in the Ruahine district and in the Rangiwahia, but taking the bulk of the land it is all pastoral and round country.

39. If you heard it stated that the population of Mangaweka was, say, 40 per cent. less than it was, say, ten years ago, would you think that was a correct statement?—Quite possibly. The sawmilling would account for that, and the construction of the railway, and one thing and another always means a difference in the people living in a locality.

40. But would not the railway ten years ago have gone right ahead?—It was just about completed then. There is always a lot of public-works people and workmen living about the place.

41. If any one said that the adding of one section to the other, and leaving these small homes uninhabited, had reduced the population, say, by 30 or 40 per cent., would it be in any way near the truth?—Not in the agricultural population.

42. It might if you took the effect on the town?—Yes, it might.

43. Generally speaking, you would consider it was not an unreasonable statement to make that the population had been reduced during the last ten years by 30 per cent.?—There has been some reduction, no doubt, but I would not like to say how much.

44. Freehold land when sold by the occupier would not come under your notice in any way, would it?—Except I had to report in regard to whether they had complied with the conditions. Where everything is in order the Ranger is not referred to.

45. Have there not been a number of the o.r.p. tenures turned into freehold?—Yes, a few have been gradually taking them up and buying out the freehold.

46. Do sales take place whether they are under the freehold or still under the o.r.p. tenure?—Sometimes.

47. It makes no difference to the question of transfer?—No, I do not think so. It all depends on how much money the man is offered.

48. *Mr. Guthrie.*] It has been stated that the sections in the Mangaweka Township have been aggregated lately to a very considerable extent: is that your experience?—No.

49. You know the land down near the station?—Yes.

50. Have people been living on those sections during the five years you have been there?—Yes. Those settlers have fulfilled the conditions of the leases without any trouble at all. I have had no trouble with those settlers at all.

51. Could a man make a living off those sections?—No, and they were not meant to.

52. What were they meant for?—As homes for working-people.

53. Would that be a suitable place for a man to reside in who was looking for work in the district?—No, there is no work there to induce a man to settle and live there at the present time.

54. Formerly there was plenty of work, such as co-operative works and railway works, going on?—Yes.

55. And at that time you agree that the idea was that those men if they got a home there might permanently settle?—Yes. A man must go where he can get work.

56. You know that the men could not live there?—Yes, we find that now in all the small settlements along the Main Trunk line.

57. And if the matter came to you as Crown Lands Ranger for a report on the subject, would you have any hesitation in advising the Board that under the conditions existing they should allow some of the small sections to be increased?—It would all depend upon the circumstances of the case. I would take everything into consideration before making a recommendation to the Board.

58. Do you know Ames's land there?—Yes.

59. Has he got a good home there?—Yes, a good home, and permanently resides there.

60. Do you think the Board did anything wrong in allowing him to take up the adjoining 10 acres?—No, it was only the right thing to do.

61. You do not consider that was a disadvantage to the district?—No, I think it was rather an advantage.

62. In regard to Hawaenga, it is said that the original settlers there have practically all gone and it has been aggregated?—There have been only three or four settlers there for years.

63. What class of land is it?—Poor stony land.

64. If you were asked to report in regard to cutting it up to make village settlements, would you recommend it?—No, not now that the bush is cleared off.

65. Do you know Kraiger's settlement?—Yes.

66. It has been said that Caselberg has been aggregating. Has he got more land than he could make a living off?—No.

67. Caselberg may make a permanent settler and make a living?—Yes, and make a good settler.

68. Do you think it would be a good thing for him to take up other land?—Yes, and I would recommend it.

69. You know the Karewarewa Settlement: as compared with Hawaenga what is the land like?—It is better land.

70. Do you think a man could make a living off 10 or 20 acres there?—No.

71. When the public works were going on there what use was made of this place?—I do not know that there has been much use made of it at all. It has been a sort of deadhead all through. After these small village settlements have been created they have never been developed in the way it was intended.

72. The Karewarewa is surrounded by small sections?—Yes.

73. That is not a place where you would expect labourers in a village settlement to be established?—Well, it might have been supposed when settlement started that there would be sufficient work for a working-man to go there and make a home, but experience has proved that it is not so.

74. The only thing to do is to allow them to join sections together so as to make a living off them?—Yes, to get revenue out of them.

75. Would you call increasing the areas there aggregation of land in the sense in which it is used?—No, not at all.

76. You know the Ruahine district?—Yes.

77. And the Pemberton Small-farm Settlement?—Yes.

78. It was originally cut up into 70-acre sections?—Yes.

79. Did you think a man could make a living off that land of 70 acres?—No.

80. And do you think it was for the Board to allow these men to join a couple of these sections together?—Yes; that has been done, and the men are making a success of it now.

81. Do you know who the men were who originally took up that land?—No, it was before my time. I know they were simply working-men, and those who are left on the land are good settlers, and a credit to the colony, and doing well.

82. It has also been said that at Karewarewa, Kawhatau, and Ruahine the schools have suffered because families have gone away: is that due to what you would call aggregation?—It may be due to people who go there on very small holdings thinking they would make a success of it, and after a lot of hardship they had to give it up and remove their families to places where they could get a living.

83. A sweeping statement has been made that the closing of the schools and the closing of the butter-factories is due to what is styled this enormous aggregation going on: do you think that is the case?—No, I do not.

84. Do you think the attendance at the schools has gone down because of the increase in the area of sections owing to it being found necessary to add one section to another?—Yes, because the land is just like water—it has to find a working-level; but if a man has not a sufficient area to live on he has to get out.

85. Photographs have also been shown to the Committee of depleted homesteads and that kind of thing. You said in your evidence that there were a number of whares?—They were the old whares of the early settlers.

86. Would you call them residences on a farm?—I would not call them pig-houses now.

87. You mean, in comparison to what is there now?—Yes.

88. Several cases have been mentioned of aggregation, and the people who have been mentioned in this connection are the Gorrings, Wilsons, and Guthrie Brothers?—Yes.

89. A return has been published in the papers of the large area that is held by the Wilsons?—But there are four distinct families with four distinct businesses.

90. They are not near to each other?—There are two brothers near each other, Charlie and Harry. They are both married men with families, and both have separate farms.

91. Have they ever been connected in business in any way?—Not to my knowledge.

92. You know Campbell's old place that J. G. Wilson has bought?—Yes, that is a different family altogether, and they are miles away.

93. Do you know the sections on the Mangamako-Pemberton Road that formerly belonged to Brewster?—I know the road, but not the sections. I know one of the Wilsons is living there.

94. You know the Te Kapua district?—Yes.

95. Do you know the Wilson who has got land up there?—Yes, D. B. Wilson.

96. Is he a relative of the other Wilsons?—No.

97. Has he got a separate homestead?—Yes.

98. Have the Gorrings aggregated land?—They have bought freehold land.

99. Do you know if all their land is in their own name?—I do not know.

100. How was their land classified when they took it up?—The original holdings were second-class land, o.r.p.

101. And what area was allowed to be taken up?—1,500 acres each of Crown lands, and their wives also have land. The total area held by these people is something like 6,000 acres between the two Gorrings and their wives.

102. Have they obtained any of that land recently?—They bought that section of Brown's. They have exercised the right of purchase in their lease, and it is freehold land.

103. Was that in any way due to the land legislation of last year?—I do not think so. The lease was taken up prior to the legislation being put on the statute-book.
104. How long have the Gorrings been there?—I should say, about ten or twelve years.
105. Have they ever been off their land?—Not to my knowledge.
106. Are they working their land?—Yes, they are permanent settlers. The two brothers and their families are there.
107. With regard to the question asked you about Mr. Hewitt: you know the land above the Pourangaki?—Yes.
108. How far is that from Mangaweka?—Nineteen miles.
109. How far can they go from this land till they reach the mountains?—From the end of the road, two miles.
110. How is Hewitt's land up there classed?—Second-class land.
111. What is the area that Hewitt holds there?—About 400 acres.
112. Do you know whether he is an original settler?—I cannot say. It is only sufficient for him to make a living off.
113. When any of the settlers turn their land into freehold have you any control over it?—No.
114. How many years' residence has to be put in under the o.r.p. tenure?—Six years.
115. Would any of them have been allowed to turn their land into freehold if they had not fulfilled their residential conditions?—There have been no cases of that kind. The Land Board would not have allowed it. They insist on the conditions having been fulfilled before granting the freehold.
116. Then Mr. Hewitt must have fulfilled his conditions?—In all probability he must have before he could get the freehold.
117. Would you consider a man was a practical man if he said that the land in Kawhatau would carry six sheep to the acre?—I should say he was spinning a fairy. It might carry six sheep to the acre on rape and turnips.
118. Would Tom Cooper's section carry anything like six sheep to the acre?—No, not half.
119. The Te Kapua district is also under your control?—Yes.
120. Can you tell the Committee under what conditions this district was originally settled?—A lot of it under the farm-settlement-association system.
121. How are they off for roads in that district?—Fairly well. They are now being considerably improved by burning papa and also metalling them. Murray's track is metalled now for something like twelve or thirteen miles from Mataroa.
122. Do you know how long it is since these sections were first opened up?—Something like eighteen years.
123. What was the nearest town at that time?—Hunterville, which was fifteen or twenty miles away.
124. That is the Knights of Labour Settlement?—Yes; 200-acre sections.
125. Would you consider that was a suitable place to go and establish a small settlement at that time?—The land is not suitable for cutting up into 200-acre lots. A man could not get a living off that—it is purely pastoral.
126. I want you to say whether in your opinion it was only to be expected that those sections would have to be increased in area?—Yes, a living-area.
127. What do you consider the carrying-capacity of that land?—The best it will do is from two to two and a half sheep to the acre.
128. Do you know the Martin No. 1 small-farm sections?—Yes, they were cut up into 200-acre sections.
129. Taking the whole block, do you consider 200 acres was sufficient for a man and his family to make a living off?—No.
130. Do you consider that the aggregation that has been talked about, which includes increasing the area of these small sections, is against the best interests of the district?—It is in favour of the best interests of the district.
131. Then can the Committee understand from you that this increase in area is not the serious aggregation that we hear of?—Yes.
132. Do you know the places that my sons have?—Yes.
133. Do you know what they originally took up?—Yes, they have about 600 acres each, which is only sufficient for them to make a living off.
134. And they are living there and got homes there?—Yes, and wives and families; and good settlers they are, too.
135. It has been said that they have aggregated ten sections?—No; they have only three sections each, and there are three families.
136. The portion that they took up at the back, was that land taken up under the Martin small-farm settlement?—It lay unoccupied for years before they took it up.
137. What did the Land Board do then?—They could get no one to take it up until your sons did so.
138. What was it cut up into?—200-acre sections; and now there are three sections knocked into one. It is very rough land, too.
139. You know their back block?—Yes, I have been all over it.
140. Could you find any homestead-sites on it?—No, except where the homestead is.
141. Is there any access to the back block?—No, except through their land.
142. Do you consider the Land Board did anything against the interests of the district in giving them the extra section in front?—No; what they did was in favour of the interests of the country.

143. The front sections are l.i.p.?—Yes, one or two.
144. Then the State would consider that they have an interest in it?—Yes, they have an interest in it.
145. And you consider the Land Board did the right thing?—I do, most decidedly.
146. Were these sections offered publicly for selection?—I believe so. It was before my time.
147. Are you aware whether my sons got this land from the Land Board in any other way than by the ordinary way of making application?—Only in the ordinary way as far as I know—the same as any other settler.
148. Do you consider, taking the average pastoral land there, that 100 or 200 acres would be sufficient to provide a permanent home for those taking it up?—Oh, no; in fact, they require 500 or 600 acres.
149. Are you surprised at what has taken place in that district in regard to increasing the area of the sections?—No, there is nothing to be surprised at.
150. Why?—Simply because a man must have a living-area.
151. Do you know any people there except those we have mentioned who are aggregating to any serious extent?—No, not to any serious extent.
152. Do you consider that the district is prosperous?—Yes, very much so.
153. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] What do you consider the value of the land within a radius of ten miles of Mangaweka, leaving out of consideration Mr. Guthrie's sections?—From £12 to £15 an acre.
154. What do you think is the carrying-capacity of those sections?—From two to two and a half sheep per acre.
155. Would you consider that two ewes were too much?—Some are doing two and a half ewes all the year round.
156. Roughly, what do you consider the profit off a ewe?—About 12s. I will give the Committee an illustration. I know sections in the Turakina Valley, and a settler I know very well told me confidentially his position. He has 600 acres of improved land, and his total receipts last year from all sources was £1,200. He is getting a gross income of £2 an acre off the land. It is the finest land in the district, and he is a practical man.
157. Would you consider that is the average?—Yes, it is above the average, because he is a thorough, capable fellow.
158. If you put that farm down at £2 an acre gross, what would the average farm return?—About £1 10s. an acre.
159. Assuming that one settler purchased another block of 200 acres, making a total of 400 acres, what would you consider would be the gross income that he should receive?—Something like £1 10s. an acre. That would be about £600 on 400 acres. His working-expenses would run into something like 8s. an acre, excluding the cost of living and interest on loans.
160. Would you consider that is just a reasonable living?—Yes, for a man and his family.
161. The net result from £600 of gross income?—Yes.
162. What do you consider would be the net results?—If you take 8s. per acre, which would be a fair amount for working-expenses, then you have to allow for living-expenses and interest on loans, and he would not have very much left after he has paid for his living. If he was a careful man he would have something over, but I do not think it could be done on less than that.
163. *Mr. Forbes.*] Do you think it is possible to make any more settlement in that district, or is it settled up to its full limit?—We have a few odd pieces of Crown land that could yet be settled near the mountains which are now in hand.
164. Could the settlers move up a little bit closer?—No. It is unoccupied Crown land.
165. Taking the district as a whole, freehold and everything else, is there any possibility of having more settlement there than exists at the present time?—How would you do it?
166. By purchase or other means?—It would simply drift back into the position it is in now. You have to come back to the living-area.
167. There is nothing held in that district except a living-area?—Excepting the few cases mentioned.
168. There are no persons holding more land than what would be looked upon as a reasonable think to make a living off?—No.
169. There are no larger areas?—No, I do not think so.
170. It has been classed as mostly second-class land?—No, the great bulk of this is first-class land; but near the mountain the land depreciates.
171. Do they get along all right?—Yes, they do very well. The land is more undulating there, and not so broken.
172. In your opinion the land is as closely settled as it is possible to settle it?—Yes, for settlers to make comfortable homes and a comfortable living for themselves.
173. *Mr. Guthrie.*] You know Stevens's sections outside the township?—Yes.
174. Did he sell them recently?—I know he bought the freehold of them recently. I heard he had sold, but I could not say for sure.
175. Do you know how much land he held there?—Something like 1,000 acres between himself and his wife.
176. Do you know if that is a case of aggregation?—I do not think so; it is rough country.
177. Who is there now?—I cannot tell you. It is not a thing which comes within our district at all; the land is freehold.
178. Could that in any way be attributable to the Land Act of 1912?—No. He had the right to turn it into freehold years ago under the o.r.p. tenure.
179. *The Chairman.*] You gave as your opinion that the average income of that land was £1 10s. an acre gross?—Yes, a fair average.

180. Would you consider that a fair average taking one year with another?—Yes.

181. For the last ten years, for instance?—No. Of course, the roads are getting better and the capacity of the sections are getting better. I would not say for ten years, but possibly for six or seven years.

182. You must be aware that wool and sheep are at exceptionally high prices just now?—Yes.

183. Are you basing your calculation upon present prices?—On the prices for the last two or three years.

184. Do the people fatten lambs there?—No, mostly stores. Of course, they get away a few fats.

185. Do you know the country well within, say, ten miles of Mangaweka?—Yes.

186. How long have you been there?—About five years.

187. What proportion of the country approximately would be suitable for dairying within, say, ten miles of Mangaweka?—A very small portion of it in comparison with the whole—an infinitesimal portion.

188. You said there was less population in the district than before the railway went there, and you also said the land was occupied as fully as you think it could be occupied. It is difficult to reconcile those two statements. Do you adhere to the statement that there is less population than when the railway went through?—Yes, rural population. That accounts for the small sections being given up.

189. Were these small sections given up because it was found by experience that men could not make a living out of them?—Yes; they were forced out of it.

190. What area of the Te Kapua land do you reckon a man requires to make a living?—About 500 or 600 acres.

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