

Mr. Hanna, counsel for the Paeroa Borough, also made suggestions in his closing address as to the amounts of the contributions that might fairly be assessed against the different interests involved, and he put the local land interest down for a subscription of nearly £12,000 a year (see Appendix C).

These two suggestions are fairly liberal ones, and represent, we think, the limit of the burden that the settlers can carry. The findings of the Commission appearing later on in this report provide for a somewhat lighter burden, but a burden that we feel satisfied is a fair one, and can reasonably be placed on the land.

It appears that some of the earlier settlers within the benefited area have disposed of their properties since the improvement-works were started, and at greatly enhanced prices. It will probably be impossible to bring these persons into any rating scheme now and this is much to be regretted, as they are the ones who have derived the most substantial benefit from the scheme.

COLLECTION OF CONTRIBUTIONS FROM RATING-AREAS.

The parliamentary Committee of 1907 (see I.-4A of 1907) recommended that any scheme for arresting the silting of the Waihou and Ohinemuri Rivers should be on a contributory basis, the local bodies whose districts are affected providing their quota towards the cost.

It seems to the Commission that until the Board referred to in section 20 of the Act is set up and actually levies a rate on the river district, as provided in section 23 thereof, it would be advisable to follow the recommendation of the parliamentary Committee, as it would doubtless be much easier and more convenient for the Minister to have power to levy on the local bodies concerned for the contributions required rather than to have to define special-rating areas and to strike and collect rates. The local bodies levied upon should be given power to reimburse themselves by levying a rate over their district, or over whatever part of the district they may consider benefited by the river-improvement works, and such rate should be either on the unimproved value or at a rate per acre, and enforceable without any prior poll of the ratepayers being necessary.

The Minister has not the requisite machinery at his disposal for quickly and cheaply levying and collecting rates, whereas the local authorities have complete machinery ready to hand, and they could collect the special rate without any expense whatever by simply adding another column to the rate notices that they regularly send out.

In classifying the lands, however, as required under section 9 of the River Boards Act, 1913, the rating authority should have power to add additional classes—namely, lands from which soil, sand, or other material is or is likely to be eroded and carried into streams or drains so as to obstruct the flow of water therein or otherwise damage such streams or drains; also lands benefited by the Waihou River being available for navigation. The proviso to section 17, subsection (4), paragraph (d), of the Act of 1910 should be repealed, and the second proviso to section 9 of the River Boards Act, 1913, should be amended, in the case of the Waihou and Ohinemuri Rivers, to provide for rates being levied where soil is likely to be eroded and damage caused thereby.

BENEFITS TO COUNTIES AND BOROUGHES CONSIDERED.

(1.) *Thames County.*

As regards the counties concerned, it seems to your Commissioners that the interest of the Thames County in the scheme, and the benefits to accrue therefrom, are not very great, and that no rating on the lands in that county, except the area in the Puriri and Hikutaia Ridings, will be practicable. The steamer traffic on the Waihou River is a means of many settlers in the Thames County getting in supplies and of getting produce to market, and this, of course, is a benefit justifying some contribution.