

No. 5.

His Honor J. MACANDREW to the Hon. E. W. STAFFORD.

SIR,—

Province of Otago, New Zealand,
Superintendent's Office, Dunedin, 1st February, 1869.

In compliance with the request contained in your circular letter No. 513 of the 27th November last, I have now the honor to forward the enclosed answers to queries relative to the condition of the Forests of this Province.

I have, &c.,

J. MACANDREW,

Superintendent.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.

Enclosure in No. 5.

REPLIES to DR. HECTOR'S QUESTIONS.

Q. 1.—What is the area, character, and value of forests in the district?

A.—The total area of forest in the Province of Otago is 1,421,000 acres; this includes the West Coast forests of the Province, approximately estimated at 350,000 acres. The forests consist principally of maple, broadleaf birch, and other inferior trees, interspersed with totara, black, red, and white pine, with occasional patches of manuka. Their value at present is estimated by their distances from towns and habitations; and where forest is abundant, it is not so valuable as the open grass land: £20 an acre may be set as their value near towns, and where distant and inaccessible they cannot be said to have any marketable value.

Q. 2.—What was the original area of forest?

A.—The original area of the forests of Otago, prior to the coming of the Maori four or five hundred years ago, after careful and extensive observation, I have concluded to have extended from forty to eighty miles inland from the sea, and ten to thirty miles from the bases of the western mountains. The interior and drier portions of the Province, such as the Maniototo, Manuherikia, Wanaka, and Waitaki plains, I am of opinion were never covered with forest, as no root-mounds are found there, and which are so abundant in all other parts of the Province, where these root-mounds are to be seen representing the positions of fallen trees. The original area then of the forests may have extended to seven or ten millions of acres. At the coming of the white man as permanent settlers, that is, in the year 1847, the original area of the forests may be set down at 1,440,000 acres.

Q. 3.—How much is still in Crown lands?

A.—About 1,356,000 acres.

Q. 4.—State what has been the relative destruction of forest on Crown lands and on freehold?

A.—The destruction of forest on Crown lands has been much greater than on freehold, unless where it has been cleared for cultivation. Freeholders watch and preserve their forests, if not cultivated, whereas licensed wood-cutters recklessly destroy the Crown property.

Q. 5.—What causes have led to the destruction of the forest; particularizing the relative effect accidental fires, felling by holders of bush licenses, and destruction by cattle?

A.—The principal causes of the destruction of forest may be said to be bush fires, caused sometimes accidentally, sometimes by shepherds burning the grass off runs, and one instance is recorded of a fire having been caused by lightning. The most valuable timber—that is, timber accessible to population—is almost invariably destroyed by accident; and the system of cutting down trees without removing the branches immensely adds to the destruction. The destruction by cattle is not apparent in this Province. I may state from experience that forest given to licensed wood-cutters is invariably burnt down in the course of three to six years. When in the interior twelve years ago, I saw 4,000 acres of forest which had been destroyed by one fire; and as no European or Maori had been known to have visited the spot previously, I concluded that it had been set on fire by lightning.

Q. 6.—State any damage which has occurred to agricultural districts or other destruction of property, such as mills, &c., that has been imputed to floods, or droughts being rendered more severe through the destruction of the forest?

A.—I know of no instance.

What is your opinion on the following points:—

1. Are bush reserves advisable, or should the forest be allowed to pass into freehold, with a view to their better conservation than at present?

Opinion.—This subject has engaged my attention frequently as a member of the Waste Land Board. I have also had from time to time to give evidence before the Provincial Council, but I do not see that any satisfactory solution of the question has been made; the point is one on which a young and an old country would differ. The poor man—that is, as this phrase is interpreted here—viz., the well-to-do labourer and working proprietor, who are the most influential political bodies, require reserves of bush set apart for them for the use of their houses and farms. The complete sale of forest therefore meets with most energetic opposition. The conclusion that I have been led into is, that the Government must meet this feeling to a certain extent by concession, and allow part of the accessible forests to be reserved for the general public, while the remainder can be sold; that remainder is the part which is preserved; the other goes to early destruction, but it satisfies the dominant class.

2. Does the system of granting bush licenses lead to an extravagant waste of the forest; and could you propose any system of supervision by which the forests might be thinned without their absolute destruction?

Opinion.—The system of granting bush licenses leads to an extravagant waste of forest. What I would advise, if the law is strong enough, is to appoint and pay Forest Wardens for the purpose of marking out the area to each licensee, no other area to be granted till the allotment is completely cleared of stem and branches; it is the leaving of the branches that creates the great havoc during