

1875.

NEW ZEALAND.

CLAIMS UPON LANDS TAKEN OVER BY THE PROVINCE OF
AUCKLAND FROM THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT.

(FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE RELATING THERETO).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

No. 1.

MR. JAMES MACKAY to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

Auckland, 17th July, 1875.

Referring to my Memorandum of the 7th instant, on Sir George Grey's letter of the 19th May last, addressed to you on the subject of land purchases, I have the honor to transmit herewith a return showing approximately the value of the property held by the proprietors of saw mills within the District of Hauraki. This information has been principally obtained from the mill-owners themselves, who have given me every facility in their power to complete the return. The totals are cost of erecting fifteen saw mills with working plant, £106,855. Payments to Natives for timber, including in some cases cost of survey of the blocks on which it is growing, £42,045. Value of logs in stock, £64,982. Total value of Mills, working plant, standing forest, and logs in stock, £209,732. The annual average production of timber is valued at £120,750. The number of men employed in these mills is 678. Vessels employed in the carrying trade, 27, manned by 82 men.

These figures are slightly different from those mentioned in my memorandum of the 7th instant, that was, however, my own estimate before the return was completed; the alteration is so small as to be hardly worth noticing.

The more I consider the scheme proposed by Sir George Grey, to give compensation to the mill owners for their rights, the more I feel convinced that it is impracticable and detrimental to the best interests of the country. The goldminer is one of the largest consumers of sawn timber, and his industry would be retarded and suffer loss if the sawmills ceased to supply his demands.

I previously drew attention to the fact that supposing the proprietors of sawmills were bought out in the manner suggested by Sir George Grey, the Colony or Province would derive no equivalent advantage, because the system of granting timber licenses, heretofore pursued by the Provincial Government, gave but small receipts, when compared with the value of the privileges granted. In proof of the correctness of my assertion, I enclose herewith a return compiled by Mr Tole, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, showing the amount paid for timber licenses over Crown Lands within the Coromandel Peninsula, and the District of Hauraki, during the fifteen years commencing 1st July, 1860, and ending 30th June, 1875. The total is £192 10s.

I have no hesitation in saying that any mill owners would under other circumstances have paid to the natives for the timber cut on the Mahakirau block alone, four times the total sum shown by Mr. Tole as having been paid to the Crown for licenses over the whole of the blocks specified by him.

I enclose copies of correspondence with the Mercury Bay Saw Mill Company respecting a proposed reduction of the term of years for which they hold the right to cut timber on the Taranoho and Kaimarama blocks.

It has been stated recently that some of the deeds of grant or leases of timber held by sawmill proprietors confer rights other than those required for the cutting and removal of timber from the forests to their mills. If such privileges have in any case been granted by the native owners, they have not been exercised or desired by the lessees or grantees, and would, I believe, be relinquished at once, on application of the Government. I have discussed the question of ordinary agreements and leases on all their bearings with the principal owners of timber residing here, and am convinced they are willing to make favourable terms with the Crown, and merely desire to be confirmed in their claims to Kauri timber, with necessary easements in the shape of roads and water rights, to enable them to convey it to their mills, with the privilege to cut any other timber or firewood required for their own use. If these rights were secured and confirmed to them, they would be perfectly satisfied; and there would not be the slightest danger of any future misunderstanding arising between them and the mining population, who are the only persons liable to have any conflicting interests, as the land on which Kauri grows is unfit for agricultural purposes and settlement.

I have, &c.,

JAMES MACKAY.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Wellington.