

8. In proof of the immense wealth of the gold fields of this portion of the colony, your petitioners refer with some degree of confidence to the splendid results achieved within the past few years from the quartz-mining industry at Inangahua and Lyell, from which places gold approaching to the aggregate value of £700,000 sterling has been obtained, of which nearly a quarter of a million has been paid in dividends. The number of registered quartz-mining companies in the Inangahua and Lyell is shown to be sixty-four, having a nominal capital of nearly a million and a half. The total amount expended upon mining works in the Inangahua is £546,000 sterling. The number of stampers employed is one hundred and ninety, while the estimated value of the different mining properties is £241,000 sterling. The area occupied under mineral leases is one thousand acres. The average gold yield obtained from stone in the Inangahua is 17 dwt. 7 gr. per ton, which is rather more than 85 per cent. higher than the average yield per ton obtained from quartz-mining in the adjacent colonies. The cost of crushing shows the disproportionately high average of 18s. 9d. per ton—an amount of nearly 96 per cent. over the average cost of crushing in Victoria. When it is considered that in Victoria firewood for steam-driving purposes has to be purchased and transmitted long distances, while here it is procurable on the spot at the mere cost of cutting it, and that abundance of coal is also available for the same purpose, the great excess of cost of crushing here can alone be attributed to the high price of labour in the Inangahua; and, as the price of labour is ruled entirely by the cost of living, until the keep of the miner is cheapened it is quite impossible to effect any serviceable reduction in the rate of wages. The immediate consequence of this is that numberless mining undertakings, capable with cheapened labour of employing large numbers of hands and yielding a fair profit upon the capital invested, are lying idle and unproductive, to the great loss and disadvantage of the district and the serious detriment of the colony generally. The enormous cost of the carriage of machinery and supplies from the seaboard is the one crowning evil of these districts, and thus a field, capable of being made to yield tenfold its present wealth, and of affording profitable employment to many thousands of miners and others, has been limited to a population ranging from eight hundred to one thousand two hundred—the average yield of gold per ton of quartz being nearly double here than what it is in Victoria. This of itself must point to the fact that, with proper facilities for carriage and communication, and cheapened labour, these districts will, before long, attain a rank of productiveness far beyond that yet reached in any of the sister colonies; and that, when these quartz-mining and coal fields are fairly opened up, they will maintain a permanent population of many thousands of persons, and provide an opening for capital and enterprise such as New Zealand has not yet seen.

9. That your petitioners feel assured that, rich beyond comparison as these fields unquestionably are, possessing, as they do, a larger number of distinct gold-bearing lodes than any other region in Australasia, the development of their wealth can never be otherwise than fitful and languishing until the country is opened up by means of an arterial railway giving access to the chief centres of population, which would at once cheapen and enormously widen the field of labour, give life and vigour to the work of settlement, and provide an immediate outlet for thousands of the industrious population of the colony.

10. The vast area of the coal deposits of this part of New Zealand, embracing, as it does, the valuable Westport fields, furnishes another all-important argument in favour of the prayer of your petitioners. Throughout the entire line of the proposed railway from Hampden to Reefton coal is to be seen in the greatest abundance, while in the Inangahua proper the magnitude of the deposits appears to be inestimable; but in the absence of railway communication this boundless store of wealth lies unutilized and unproductive.

11. The breadth of land which the railway in question would open up for settlement, agriculture, and pasturage within the limits of the three counties named is a further important argument in favour of the work. Your petitioners find, from a report furnished to the General Government in the year 1873 by the Nelson Inland Railway Communication Committee, that the area of good land which would thus be rendered available was estimated at nine hundred thousand acres, and that, as the great bulk of that land is at present a worthless estate in the hands of the Crown, the value which would be immediately given to it by the construction of the railway adds additional strength to the claim of your petitioners.

12. In the year 1877 the Conservator of State Forests traversed from Greymouth to Nelson, *via* the Grey, Inangahua, and Buller Valleys, and his report shows that there is no portion of the Middle Island which possesses so rich a natural endowment of timbers, the valley forests being especially valuable to commerce.

13. For further and more detailed information as to the numerous other valuable mineral products which have been proved to exist in this portion of the colony, your petitioners beg respectfully to refer you to the accompanying carefully-compiled tables, feeling assured, as they do, that the statistics therein contained will impress your honorable House with a just sense of the high obligation which awaits you to speed the work of colonization in these remote but prolific communities, not merely as a reward to those whose persevering energy has proved them to be such, but as a sure and enduring means of contributing to their commercial and industrial progress, and adding to the material prosperity of the colony at large.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honorable House will authorize the adoption of the Buller, Inangahua, and Grey Valley's route for such railway, and make the necessary appropriations in order to enable the work to be proceeded with immediately at Reefton, in the direction of Lyell, in order thereby to establish the confidence of your petitioners in the certainty of the undertaking, and also from both the Brunnerton and Foxhill ends; or grant your petitioners such other relief as in the wisdom of your honorable House may seem most expedient.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray, &c.

P. Q. CAPLES,
(And upwards of 2,000 others.)