

NELSON.

REPORT of the COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS for the YEAR ended 30th JUNE, 1879.

Lands absolutely Disposed of.

ONLY 1,290 acres have been sold during the year, which realized the sum of £3,223 16s., the average price per acre being—Town lands, £96 16s.; suburban, £3 2s. 6d.; rural, £1 0s. 9d. Excepting in the Westport District, no lands have been offered for sale by public auction, and the high minimum price of land fixed by “The Crown Lands Sale Act, 1877,” has, to some extent, prevented lessees from purchasing the fee-simple of their holdings, the land in many parts of this district not being worth £1 per acre.

Land selected under Settlement Clauses.

Part III. of “The Land Act, 1877,” not being in operation in this district, the lands selected for settlement have been so selected under the leasing clauses of Appendix E. of that Act, which are better adapted for the settlement of the outlying lands of this district. Under these clauses, 8,577 acres have been applied for during the year, the applications being 118 in number.

Lands held under Pastoral Occupation.

The total area let during the year for pastoral purposes amounted to 4,472 acres—viz., three leases, under “The Nelson Waste Lands Act, 1874,” of blocks of over 500 acres, and two occupation licenses under clause 10, Appendix E., of “The Land Act, 1877.” The area held under pastoral licenses on the 30th of June in this district was 157,377 acres; and under leases, of blocks of over 500 acres, 282,101 acres: making a total area of 539,478 acres held for pastoral purposes; the annual rental being £4,246.

Minerals.

Copper.—Several licenses to prospect for minerals, other than gold, have been granted during the year, and some discoveries of copper have been reported. Steps are being taken to have the ore properly tested; and there is, I believe, reason to hope that the result will be very satisfactory, and that the ore will be found to be of superior quality.

Coal.—I regret that I am unable to report any large increase in the output of coal in this district. The Westport Colliery Company have not yet placed any coal in the market, owing to the non-completion of the very extensive works in course of construction for connecting the mine with the port of shipment. The lessees on the North Beach, Cobden, have failed to raise the company to work their leasehold.

Public Reserves.

I have already specially reported on the necessity for some legislation with regard to leasing reserves. A considerable revenue is annually lost to the Government owing to there being no means of leasing reserves upon such terms as would justify any outlay by the lessees. If the Land Board had power to lease by public auction for a term of years, say fourteen, a good rental could be obtained for the reserves in this district, and the land would be cultivated and improved.

“The Land Act, 1877.”

As pointed out in my report last year, sections 41 and 44 need amendment to meet the requirements of this district. The high price put upon town and village lands by section 41 practically withdraws all village lands in the interior of the country from sale, and stops settlement; and under section 44 town and suburban lands put up to auction and not sold cannot be afterwards sold at the upset price, but must be offered again from time to time by public auction. Rural lands cannot be sold for less than the minimum price payable for land open for sale for cash—namely, £2 per acre. This latter provision has already stopped the sale of several sections near Westport to *bonâ fide* settlers, who were anxious to purchase after auction at the upset price.

Some provision is also required to enable land submitted to public competition and not sold to be declared open for selection under the leasing clauses.

“The Crown Lands Sale Act, 1877.”

The high minimum price of land fixed by this Act has, as I anticipated, caused much dissatisfaction among the lessees and applicants for leases in this district. Many applications for leases have been withdrawn, and several leases have been surrendered, the lessees seeing no chance of acquiring the freehold at less than £1 per acre. That this high minimum has greatly retarded settlement must, I think, be admitted when the number of applications for leases received during the year is compared with the numbers received during the previous years under similar leasing laws—for instance, in 1877, before the Crown Lands Sales Act came into operation, 450 applications were received, this year only 118 have been received. I have therefore to recommend that the Act should be amended so as not to apply to the Nelson District. The minimum price then would be 10s. per acre, as provided by Appendix E of “The Land Act, 1877.”