

SESS. II.—1879.  
NEW ZEALAND.

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# GREYMOUTH NATIVE RESERVES

(PAPERS RELATING TO).

*Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives, with the Leave of the House.*

## No. 1.

Greymouth, 2nd September, 1879.

DEPUTATION to the Hon. Mr. GISBORNE of RESIDENTS of GREYMOUTH, being Leaseholders under Native Trust, introduced by Mr. Kennedy, late M.H.R., as to the Unsatisfactory Position of the Tenants on the Native Reserve, within the Town of Greymouth.

WITH regard to this question, *Mr. Kennedy* said that this was a grievance of old standing, and had been under the consideration of several successive Governments; but that, though each had admitted the unsatisfactory condition of affairs, no definite action had been taken to mitigate the evil. The present condition of affairs was this: that the greater portion of the town was built on the Native Reserve, on the basis of twenty-one years' leases, granted by the Commissioner (*Mr. A. Mackay*); that several of these leases had only a few years more to run, and that there was no guarantee whatever that any of them would be renewed; that this insecurity of tenure had overridden all inducements to advancement, the buildings being still all of wood, whereas if there were any security of tenure, many would have built of stone or brick; that the rents were excessively high, amounting to between £3,000 and £4,000 per annum, which was a very heavy drain upon a small community; that, although it might be said that this would be the case even if the property were owned by European residents, it was not so, as in that case we would be paying to each other, whereas, as it stands, the money is nearly all going out of the district, a great deal of it being devoted to the maintenance of the Natives in other places—some even in the North Island. This state of things is producing quite a depression in the locality, and this feeling of depression will be more and more felt the nearer the leases approach towards maturity. When residents came here first, saw Natives, who said they could deal with the land, and got from them leases renewable for ever at reasonable rates, but were told by *Mr. Mackay* that these leases were worthless, and had to take what we could get in lieu of them. This was twenty-one years' leases, which was all *Mr. Mackay* would give, but he stated verbally that renewals would be granted at fair rentals. The case has recently, however, assumed another phase. Some Natives had a meeting here recently to ascertain what the position of the case actually was, and presumably to decide what they would wish to have done in the matter, and it would almost appear now as though the residents would be henceforth at the mercy of the individual Natives themselves. I have understood, in fact, that it was even proposed to Crown-grant the land to individual Natives, and need scarcely say that this would probably lead to gross injustice being done to the present leaseholders, as Natives might then pledge or sell their Crown grants to other individuals without even asking the improvers to buy, and we would be thus deprived of the value of our improvements. In view of all these present and prospective hardships, the deputation have therefore waited upon you with the hope that you will be able to get them some redress, as they feel convinced that the Government of which you are a member would have the power to do so, the present Opposition having been favourable to it; but not seeing their way to bring it forward, as it was thought that *Sir George Grey* and *Mr. Sheehan* might oppose it. Though the grievance is sufficiently obvious, we must admit that we are not in a position to suggest the exact form that it would be best for the remedy to take. In fact, it is a very difficult question; but it is quite patent that some form of remedy is an actual necessity, were it only for the sake of the Natives themselves, as we feel assured that the present high rentals and insecurity of tenure will not only keep back the progress of the place, but also have a great tendency to gradually depopulate it. What we ask for, therefore, is a diminution of rent and longer leases, with a right of continual renewal; but we freely admit that, whatever arrangement is made, it should be fair to the Natives as well as to ourselves, and, as this might be a matter very difficult to adjudicate, we would suggest that perhaps, upon the whole, it might be found most just and practical that the Crown should in the first place purchase from the Natives, at a reasonable price, and then resell or let the land to us at a fair valuation.

*Mr. Coates* would venture to suggest, if purchase by Government as mooted not feasible, that possibly it might be practicable to pass a Tenants Rights Bill, such as applies in Ireland, in order that the value of his improvements might be secured to tenant when lease expires, in event of Natives not wishing to re-lease. This would, however, only meet one aspect of the question, and the matter of excessive rental at present charged would still have to be met.