

65. Are there any minerals up in that district?—Yes, coal, which I am told by Mr. Cox and Professor Hutton is of very good quality.

66. Did you see the coal?—Yes; it has never been opened up, but it is in the creek, washed down in blocks three feet long. Professor Hutton and Mr. Cox think it is as good lignite as is to be found in New Zealand. The locality is just above Rural Section No. 21246. The coal crops out on both sides of the river.

67. What is the length of the proposed extension from the bridge to the Bowyer's Stream terminus?—Three and three-quarter miles.

68. By what road would the produce from near Pudding Hill come down?—It would go straight across.

69. What length of cartage would they have?—About seven miles from the North Ashburton Bridge.

70. That is not very far to cart?—No; the people would be quite satisfied with that, as they could do two trips a day.

71. How far is the nearest point of the bush from Methven?—The nearest point is eight miles, and the bulk of the forest is from ten to eleven miles from Methven. Where we have asked that the extension should go would be about four miles.

72. Then the distance from what we may call the "centre of gravity" of the forest to the present terminus is about seven and a half miles?—Yes.

73. Which way would they take agricultural produce from the middle of that area?—They would go direct.

74. Is there any other station below Anama?—Yes, Valetta.

75. Do you think that, as the district slopes to the sea, produce would be carted down hill towards Valetta, or up hill to the terminus you propose?—Most decidedly towards the terminus we propose, as the South Ashburton is such a bad river to cross—one of the worst rivers in the colony. To show you the injustice that is done to us I may state that the boundary of the Rakaia and Alford Forest rateable area is the terminus we propose at Bowyer's Stream.

76. But your district uses both railways indiscriminately?—We cannot help it; we do the best we can: we cannot use either of the lines at present so as to compete with other parts of the country in the way of timber.

Mr. JOHN HOOD, examined.

77. *The Commissioner.*] Have you been long in this district?—Yes, I have resided here about seventeen years.

78. You live here, at the Mount Somers Township?—Yes.

79. What is your opinion of the proposed extension?—do you think it would benefit the township in particular?—Yes, I think it would without doubt be a benefit to the township, although not in particular, because the extension as shown on the plan would go about three-quarters of a mile from the township. I think, further, that the extension would be a step in the right direction to make the Tinwald-Mount Somers line a paying one. If it remains as at present I do not think it could ever pay working expenses.

80. It does not appear to have much traffic at present?—No, not in comparison with the outlay.

81. Then what becomes of the produce of the country as shown by these statistics?—There would be a great deal more produced in the district if the line were extended. A large amount of what is at present produced finds its way to the market by other means. Besides, there are minerals which do not find their way to any outside market, and which would no doubt be developed to a great extent by the extension. I have been informed, that in a portion of the Alford Forest district hydraulic lime has been discovered, which would be of great importance in creating a traffic.

82. At present there is no mineral exported?—No; but I believe the coal would be sent to Ashburton.

83. How far is the coal from the end of the proposed extension at Bowyer's Stream?—The coal would be taken to another point on the line about six and a half miles from the coal.

84. Where is the coal being worked at present?—Up the south branch of the Ashburton.

85. You mean the Stour deposit?—Yes. No doubt others would be opened up eventually.

86. It does not appear that the railway is any further now from that deposit than it would be if that extension were made?—No, but it would be much more accessible if the railway crossed the river. I believe that in that case, even with the six and a half miles cartage, it could be exported so as to compete with the Malvern coal.

87. Is more Malvern coal used at Ashburton than Newcastle coal?—I do not know. The Malvern coal is sold at 25s. a ton at Ashburton. I believe some Malvern coal is used in the locomotive engines.

88. Is this coal fit for locomotives?—I believe they are constructed with fire-boxes specially made for the purpose of burning this lignite.

89. Is this township growing since the railway came near it?—No; there is no inducement, until the direction of the line is decided, for any one to settle here, who might have to remove; and, as it has been agitated for two years, every one has been expecting it to be settled in a reasonable time, and so no action has been taken.

90. And has the determination of this question influenced the settlers in this township?—Yes. I believe they would be very glad to see it, as being interested in the district.

91. What is the distance of this township from the Cavendish Station, the present terminus of the line?—About one and a half miles.

92. And the extension, when carried out as you propose, would pass within three-quarters of a mile?—I think it would be a trifle less than that.