

1887.

NEW ZEALAND.

REPORTS OF THE WASTE LANDS COMMITTEE.

(MR. O'CALLAGHAN, CHAIRMAN.)

Presented to the House of Representatives, Session I., 1887, and ordered to be printed.

THE OTAGO CENTRAL RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION AND EXTENSION BILL.

THE Waste Lands Committee have the honour to report that they have resolved to instruct the Chairman to ask leave to lay on the table of the House the evidence of Mr. McKerrow on the Otago Central Railway Construction and Extension Bill, and to move that it be printed.

31st May, 1887.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 27TH MAY, 1887.

Mr. JAMES MCKERROW, Surveyor-General, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] It is the wish of the Committee to learn—first, the quantity of land which would be affected under the concession-clauses of this Bill; next, as to the quality of the land and its availability for settlement—how much of it is agricultural and how much pastoral land; will you be good enough to make a statement on both these points, and afterwards answer questions that members of the Committee may ask you?—Yes; from this Bill I observe that it embraces that portion of the Central Railway from Taieri Lake to Lakes Wanaka and Hawea. The distance is about 110 miles. The Bill further states that all land within fifteen miles each side of the railway is to be considered in connection therewith. That includes an area of 1,820,000 acres, of which there are 170,000 acres of freehold and public reserves, leaving of Crown lands 1,650,000 acres. For the convenience of the Committee I have divided the line into two parts. It will be more convenient to do so, considering the nature of the land through which it passes. From the Taieri Lake to Clyde is a distance of sixty miles. Of Crown lands there are 1,030,000 acres. Of this area, 830,000 acres may be deemed pastoral, and 200,000 acres agricultural. Taking that portion of the land from Clyde to Hawea, a distance of fifty miles, there are of Crown lands, 620,000 acres, of which 570,000 acres may be deemed pastoral and 50,000 agricultural land. In both cases I estimate the agricultural land at £1 per acre; the pastoral land in the first division, from Taieri Lake to Clyde, at 12s. 6d. an acre, the division between Clyde and Hawea (pastoral land) I estimate at 10s. an acre. The whole cash value of both divisions, pastoral and agricultural, over the whole line, as above stated, is about £1,000,000 sterling. Next, as to the nature of the land. The railway-line begins at Taieri Lake, running through a large tract of level country called the Upper Taieri Plain, thence to the Ida Valley, thence to Manuherikia, thence through the Gorge to Cromwell, thence through the Upper Clutha Valley. These valleys are all very similar in respect to the quality of the land, being mostly of a gravelly soil, with a deeper soil along the margin of the mountain-slopes. Speaking as regards its suitability for agriculture, it might be described as possessing a light, sweet soil, that yields crops admirably in moist seasons; but, as the climate of all the interior of Otago is rather dry, there is always an uncertainty of gathering in the crops from year to year. But wherever irrigation has been resorted to and there is water available the security of crops is a matter of certainty. Wheat will grow in this district and ripen well, in good selected spots, up to an elevation of 1,800ft.; oats to an elevation of 3,000ft. But as all the level land, or that which is likely to be cultivated, is under an altitude of 2,000ft., that may be deemed to be the limit of cultivation. All land above that is purely mountainous country, being one succession of mountain ranges, the summits of which attain elevations of from 4,000ft. to 6,000ft. There is a considerable extent of mining going on over this district. Indeed, it may all be termed auriferous, because where there are not alluvial workings there are many quartz reefs, which will no doubt be worked in the future. One great drawback to the district and to its profitable occupation by pastoral tenants is the rabbit pest. This is being energetically coped with, but still there is no hope of the thorough eradication of the rabbit; so that a pastoral estate is likely always to be heavily handi-