

278. Do you think that Native Committees composed of independent chiefs would be likely to be able to define tribal boundaries and hapu boundaries, taking the necessary evidence in their own fashion?—I think they would be able to ascertain such things much better than the Native Land Court itself. I am speaking more particularly with reference to Taupo, where I know the people better, perhaps, than I do those living in other districts. During the long time the Native Land Court was sitting at Tapuaeharuru in 1886 and 1887 it was wonderful what an amount of work they did in voluntarily settling tribal and hapu boundaries among themselves.

279. Then, you think that, under proper restrictions, they would be likely to be useful and economical in settling tribal and hapu boundaries?—Yes, I think they would. I may, however, tell you, with reference to the King-country and the Taupo country, I think also that that sort of work is already done, and that, at any rate, there is very little of it to do now. Taupouiatia, comprising about a million and a quarter acres, is now subdivided.

280. In what respect do you mean?—All the hapu boundaries are ascertained, and now there only remains the matter of individualisation.

281. Then, supposing it became necessary to individualise the title, all that would have to be done?—Yes. I think the same statement applies to the greater part of the King-country, excepting in one section known as the Tuhua-Rangitoto Block.

282. In the Taupouiatia Block what would be the area of the hapu-holdings?—They vary. You might take 30,000 acres as the average. The Ngatituwharetoa, a subdivision of the Arawa Tribe, comprises about fifteen or eighteen hapus. These, again, are subdivided further into many smaller hapus, numbering in all about a hundred and forty-one, I think.

283. Are there large blocks of land fit for settlement of any sort in what you call the King-country, the interior of the Island—that is, between Taupo and the sea, or about Taupo?—In the South Taupo district there is a large area of country fit for settlement. It is bush-country. A large quantity of this will abut on the Main Trunk Railway-line to the north-west of Tongariro Mountain. Then it extends northward again as far as Otorohanga, and to the westward towards Mokau; thence extending northward again to the Pirongia Mountain. There is a large extent of land there suitable for settlement.

284. *Mr. Mackay.*] That country has passed through the Native Land Court?—Most of it.

285. *Mr. Rees.*] There are coves and harbours available on that part of the west coast?—Yes; I understand that fair-sized boats can get up the Mokau, and of course fairly-large steamers can enter Kawhia. I think these two are the only ones. Both Raglan and Aotea are outside the King-country.

286. Would there be any good land available for settlement at the back of Kawhia?—I have not been there, but I understand that the Kawhia Range would interfere with settlement. It extends in a semicircular form inside the harbour, and you would have to surmount the range.

287. Is there good country beyond the range?—I believe so.

288. In relation to the Native Land Court, do you think that if the Judges of the Court were settled in various districts, and each of them was confined to his own particular district, that that would be an advantage, and preferable to their being dragged to and fro between distant places?—Yes; I think it would be an advantage in this way: that they would be steadily employed, and would get through more work now than the tribal and hapu boundaries are settled. The complaint in Taupo and other parts is that the present system leads to the work piling up to such an extent that they cannot get it done.

289. *Mr. Mackay.*] That is as regards successions?—Yes, and subdivisions. During the last three years in the Taupo district alone the applications for succession and other things must have piled up very much. The appointment of a resident local Judge would keep the work down.

290. *Mr. Rees.*] In relation to the Native-land laws, can you give any idea as to whether there is any certainty in their operation at the present time—whether Natives or Europeans generally are acquainted with these Native-land laws?—I may say that only a very few people thoroughly understand them. I think that the Maoris know this one fact: that they are barred from any dealings except with the Crown. Beyond that I do not think they know very much about the subject.

291. The prevailing impression, then, in the Maori mind is that they are shut out from any dealings except with the Crown?—Yes.

292. Do they consider that fair, or are they pleased with it?—No; they do not consider it fair. They consider it hard in this particular direction, for instance: It has been necessary in the King-country and in the Taupo country to have surveys made for their hapu subdivisions, extending down to the Waimarino country—that is, on the Rangitikei side—and the result has been in most instances that they have had to give land for these costs. They have not been in a position to try and get a better price, being restricted to the Government one. This proves that these laws have not affected the Maoris beneficially. In many instances the Maoris have given away larger areas of land than would have been the case had the market been open to them, and in every case I think they would have obtained a better price than that allowed by the Crown.

293. Then you consider the operation of these laws to be oppressive to the Natives?—Yes, I think so. In fact, I have heard them complain in some instances. I might add that had the Administration Act been worked, which it never was, it would have tended to prevent this system of which I have spoken—paying for surveys with land—particularly in the year 1888, and in 1889 perhaps. The Act was passed in 1886, and I think it was in 1887 or 1888 that it was repealed. It never had an opportunity of being worked. It would have afforded a better opportunity to the Natives of getting fairer prices for their land.

294. Do you think, then, the Natives would indorse and support a law by which their lands were to be thrown open for sale or lease as they might determine—thrown open to public competition, and a title being given after ample reservations for their own use and sustenance by a