

The Commissioner stated that the information he mainly wanted from the Natives of the several settlements was a complete list of the several residents, to aid him in completing the other portion of the work connected with the inquiry into the condition of the people, more especially as regards the quantity of land owned individually. After further discussion it was agreed that the information needed should be furnished.

Commission adjourned till Tuesday morning, to enable the necessary lists to be prepared.

TUESDAY, 3RD MARCH, 1891.

Commission resumed.

Lists of names handed in and read out. After all this part of the work was completed, evidence was invited as to the sufficiency of the land held by the Natives for their support.

Tame Parata, M.H.R., stated that the areas held individually were small, and the land in many cases was not fertile. There was no room on the small areas for both cultivations and stock. Another inconvenience, and one that detracted from the value of the lands, was owing so its being held in so many scattered parcels in different places. Another obstacle to progress was the want of knowledge how to cultivate to the best advantage. Maoris did not understand how to work their land successfully like Europeans. In olden times, before the country was settled, the Natives did not need to cultivate much land as they obtained the principal part of their food-supplies from other sources; now all that was put an end to, and the result was that poverty prevailed amongst them. The young able-bodied men were able to procure work at shearing and harvest-time; during the summer months they earned a little money to clear off their indebtedness to the tradesmen, but the old people were unable to earn anything, and had to be supported by the others. The few crops they grew, together with the fish caught occasionally, enabled them to eke out a scanty livelihood. From Purakaunui to Kaiapoi the old people were unable to go to work, and had to be maintained as best they could. Very little wheat was grown now owing to the birds destroying the crops. Before the reserve was apportioned amongst the people a good many sheep and cattle were kept; but every one had discontinued to keep sheep but himself, as they had no room. The people who earned money by work were not reckless with their earnings, but paid off their debts to the tradesmen. Another source of expense to them, and one that proved very oppressive, was the heavy fees they had to pay to obtain the services of a doctor to attend to invalids. A doctor from Palmerston would cost them £5 for a visit, and from Dunedin from £7 7s. to £10 10s. It had cost him fully £300 at various times for medical aid. Many people died for the want of medical assistance, owing to their friends being unable to incur the expense. Government have been requested at various times to grant assistance, but have paid no heed to the application. Waikouaiti is one of the best reserves, but it does not support the people; this being the case, it is difficult to know how other people fare who have not the advantage of possessing good land. The rabbits are now becoming a nuisance, they breed on the asylum land in the bush and cross over on to the reserve. In the winter people kill them for their skins, but in the summer the skins are not worth more than 2d. per pound, and it takes six skins to make a pound. It costs £1 5s. a week to pay a rabbit-er; and it had cost him £10 during the year, outside of other expenses incurred personally.

John Millar, of Purakaunui, confirmed T. Pratt's statement. The land was worn out. Crops vary very much. Maoris did not understand how to cultivate the land to advantage. Could fish and procure other food-supplies in olden times if crops failed; now there is no chance of doing so. If land had been given before, it would have been much more serviceable. Rabbits were very troublesome now. Fifty acres of land was too small to gain a living on. The want of a doctor was another expense to them. It cost them from £2 10s. to £5 to obtain a doctor from Dunedin. Dr. Cunningham only charged £1 10s. a visit. Many persons die for want of medical attendance, owing to the heavy expense. The able-bodied men go to work at various employments, but the old people stay at home, and others who are incapable have to remain also.

Hoani Matiu corroborated the statements made by former speakers, that it was owing to being able to obtain employment that enabled them to live. Some made a poor living by cultivating the land, owing to the small areas. Maoris had no experience in cultivating the land. Could not say how the old people managed to live who were unable to obtain work; could not imagine how they obtained clothing. This is one of the causes that create a mortality among the Natives. The young people can work if employment is to be had, but the old people are unable to do so, and if they are ill, have no funds to obtain medical aid. The Natives were badly off and heavily indebted to the storekeepers; and when any of them die their relatives have to pay their debts. If the land was increased it would relieve the distress that presses heavily on the people. Many of the young people, who earn money, spend it unsuccessfully in trying to cultivate and improve their land. Cattle and sheep are the only things that pay, but it wants fully 100 acres to enable a person to keep stock to advantage. Cows do not answer, as few Maoris understand how to make butter. Some of the young people understand dairy work, but the old ones do not. Doctors' expenses are very heavy, and many die in consequence. It costs from £5 5s. to £10 10s. to obtain the services of a medical man from Dunedin, and £3 3s. from Palmerston. Some patients if not too ill can be taken to the doctor, but others cannot be moved. Do not know how a great many of the old people live, except by the hospitality of others (*te aroha o te Maori*).

Mohi te Wahi spoke about the insufficiency of his land. Hopa Ru made the same statement. Tikini Pahau would like to have land at Waiau, for himself and others, if obtainable. There were three of his family.

Commission adjourned to Otakou Heads.

OTAKOU HEADS, WEDNESDAY, 4TH MARCH, 1891.

Commission opened at 2 p.m. in the Runanga House. A large number of persons present from different localities.