

1294. Of course, the sort of land to which this would apply is different from those lands which are near, adjacent to European centres, where 100 acres would be as valuable as 10,000 acres far back?—That is so. I have spoken more particularly of Taranaki.

1295. You could not apply one hard-and-fast system, which would apply to a small block adjacent to New Plymouth and at the same time apply also to the whole of the Native lands in the North Island?—Certainly not.

1296. *Mr. Rees.*] We have taken a good deal of evidence this morning from Mr. Rennall and Mr. Smith, and one or two gentlemen, in relation to the particular wants of New Plymouth under these Reserve Acts, and the two classes of leases which you have mentioned. It has been suggested by my co-Commissioner (Mr. Carroll) that a law might be made for those cases in which at the present time fencing, road-making, leasing, and taxing are all uncertain—a law as mild as possible, yet just to the Natives, and giving the trustees absolute power to do these things?—That must be accompanied by what I urged should be done—defining clearly the title to these lands, and giving the power to somebody to let leases on such terms as would enable them to be taken up, and the land fenced, and rates paid for out of the proceeds.

1297. Supposing the Natives will not act, but are passive; then, in default of their action, do you think it proper that the land should be vested in a Board or a trustee?—I think that fairness to the European settler requires it.

1298. And to the Maoris also, because their children suffer?—Yes. With regard to these cases, I hope there will be no confusion, and that the Maori owners will not be blamed for not paying rates and fencing, when this was really the fault of the Government in not giving them a title, and power to sell or lease.

1299. That is the cause of their failing to act—that they have not a title?—Yes; no title, and no right of sale or letting.

1300. Are there many such cases?—Yes, a good many.

*Mr. Rennell* (Native Reserves Trustee): I think they have now been surveyed, and the Native Land Court has given them a title, which will be perfectly good as soon as the Crown grants are issued.

*Mr. Samuel*: If so, it must have been within a very short time, because I have been hammering at it for years past.

*Mr. Rennell*: Within the last six or eight months. I can assure you it is being done at last.

1301. *Mr. E. M. Smith, M.H.R.*: I have listened with very great pleasure to what Mr. Samuel has said, and I would myself like to make a few remarks upon some of the points he touched upon. Very likely some of the proposals that have been made will come before the House, and I shall then be called upon to support or assist in rejecting them. I quite agree with Mr. Samuel that it is advisable some Board should be appointed the same as he suggests, so far as Taranaki is concerned—that is, taking in the whole district from the Mokau to the Awakino. I think, myself, if the Commissioners were to recommend or would get a clause inserted in their bill on the lines proposed by Mr. Samuel, they would be doing what the country is not wanting—that is, crowding in another department into the Civil Service. I believe there are now some thirty-two or thirty-three different departments, and, as the colony is crying out for a reduction, the creation of this Native Land Board would be a step in the wrong direction. I have suggested to the Government, with the view of getting the law altered, that the Crown Lands Board of districts situated like Taranaki should be extended and remodelled. At present the members of that Board are all nominated. Now, I proposed to the Government that they should be partly nominated and partly elected; and if elected, and there was a fair representation on the Board of the councillors of the various counties and of prominent Road Boards, that the owners of the land in that district, no matter whether they were European or Maori, should be entitled to vote for the election of members to serve on that Board. We might even go further, and give the Maoris a member of their own on that Board. I think myself if that plan were adopted it would meet the case, so far as concerns the lands in this district. That seems to me preferable to having one Board composed of Europeans for dealing with European land and one Board for dealing with Native land. The plan I suggest is less complicated, less expensive, and, if carried out, would be in the direction of that which is so largely demanded by the people—of having one law and one way of dealing with both Maoris and Europeans. Of course, I am not speaking with reference to the King-country, where those very large blocks of unsettled land are to be found. So far as New Plymouth is concerned, what I have communicated would meet the views of the people in this district, and cash sellers would be suited.

1302. *Mr. Carroll.*] Would you be in favour of the Board having control of all private land?—No. When once the land becomes private property, they should have nothing further to do with it. They would only have to do with land that may be let on perpetual lease or sold on deferred payment, or with land that is acquired by the Crown.

*Mr. Samuel*: My suggestion as to the Board has reference and is limited to administering Native land that is at present administered by the Public Trustee. I think a Land Board such as that mentioned by Mr. Smith would be quite unsuitable to the requirements of the case. What you have to provide for is a body to look after the interests of the Maori owners of land, subject only to this: that their interests have to be secured consistently with the progress of settlement and the welfare of the Europeans. The first object is the interests of the owners. This duty is not met by the Waste Lands Board, which looks to the settlement of the lands of the colony and nothing else. The first interest of the Board, I suggest, should be the true interest of the owners of this land, of course subject to such interest not being secured by the sacrifice of the welfare of the European settlers. Therefore, I do not think that a Board of the description suggested by Mr. Smith would be suitable. Such a Board as I spoke of would not involve the creation of a new department, as Mr. Smith fears. It would really consist of some of the same persons who are now managing our Crown lands, with the addition of one or two (or