

146. You have had experience of the position of the local bodies?—Yes.
147. Is it a fact that they have been very much hampered in their revenue?—The Westland County has been “starved.”
148. It has no taxable area?—Very little.
149. Are the taxpayers so few?—Yes.
150. To what is that due? Is it due to the want of land for settlement?—It is due to the locking-up of land by the Midland Railway reservation.
151. Do you know of your own knowledge of people who have left the district?—Yes.
152. A few or many?—A number of young people have left the district, especially the Kokatahi district, and gone to the North Island or to other countries.
153. Is it because they could not get land to settle on?—Yes. Families grow up, and the young men of a family want to get land to settle on to start for themselves, and as they cannot get it in that district they go away to where they can.
154. You heard the evidence of other witnesses with regard to the disadvantage of the non-construction of the railway and its postponement for ten years?—Yes.
155. You have heard it stated by Mr. Michel and Mr. Byrne?—Yes.
156. What do you say? Have you formed an estimate?—With regard to the reservation of the land, I say that it has a very great effect upon my answer, because from the county point of view it has been a very considerable loss indeed.
157. If you have formed an opinion on that subject for the purpose of making an estimate will you give it to the Committee?—I think Mr. Michel’s estimate of a loss of a million is a low one.
158. You are taking into consideration the land in the reservation as well as the other land?—Yes.
159. Taking the two together, you think the estimate of a million is a low one?—Yes.
160. *Dr. Findlay.*] You have not gone into figures to show what the loss would be?—No. I speak from general knowledge of the country.
161. Have you gone into an estimate of what would be the loss under the different heads?—No.
162. It is merely a guess then?—Not altogether, because you have the areas given, and taking it at a very low calculation the loss would be very considerable.
163. You have not gone into any calculation?—No; it is a general idea.
164. *Mr. Bell.*] You have not estimated each different kind of loss, but have added them together?—Yes.
165. Have you endeavoured to form a judgment of the minimum amount of loss according to the best of your information and belief?—Yes.
166. *Mr. J. Allen.*] With regard to the loss of population, you say that some went out of the colony and others went to other parts of the colony. Can you give us from your own knowledge the proportion of those who went out of the colony?—No.
167. Would it be two out of three?—No, not that proportion; probably a half.
168. *Mr. Graham.*] What means have you of judging of that?—By knowing the people who went away.
169. You know where they went to?—Yes, mostly. We are not a large population there, and we generally know one another’s movements.
170. *Mr. Guinness.*] Can you give us an estimate under the different heads?—No; I have heard what the other witnesses stated.
171. I do not want you to give an opinion from what other witnesses said, but your own opinion as county clerk?—It is a loss to the local bodies and an inconvenience to the people generally from the want of roads. There has been a large loss of people there through the isolation of the district, and consequently there has been a great loss of prosperity. These are things which must be taken into consideration.
172. Do you think that the completion of the connection between the East and West Coasts would have had any effect in generally increasing the value of particular properties?—Yes. I take it the land would be thrown open, and there would be a rush for settlement, which is now impossible.
173. Could you tell us what percentage would be the increase in the rateable properties in the Inangahua, Grey, and Westland Counties?—I do not know the northern counties. In the north part of our county a lot of land is held under the 219th clause of the Land Act, and we get very little from that. If the land were under a better tenure it would in many cases increase twenty-fold.
174. *The Chairman.*] Do you know whether that applies to the other parts of your county?—Yes; to the greater portion of the county down as far as the Waiho River.
175. What proportion of that land is suitable for settlement?—Nearly all the railway areas down as far as the Waiho would be available for settlement. There would be a great rush for that land. I should say considerably over 100,000 acres would be very good land, and that would be taken up in a very short time.
176. *Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] You stated the condition of the Westland County finances is not satisfactory?—They are not.
177. You attribute that largely to the non-completion of the railway?—Oh, yes. If the land were available for settlement the rating-value would be increased immensely, and the revenue would go up by leaps and bounds.
178. Would the whole of it be valuable if this line were constructed?—The whole of the Kanieri land would be taken up, and a large proportion of the other land.
179. Who maintains the main roads there?—The Government.