

the surrender, and put the lease up again at a figure one could make a living at. If an extension of lease was given us there would be every inducement to us to improve our country. At present by the time you would derive some benefit from improving it you may lose the lease.

94. If you had the right of renewal at a reassessed value would that be satisfactory—that is, if you had occupation with right of renewal?—Yes; I should certainly grow grasses then. I should be inclined to subdivide even some of the present subdivisions and sow grasses in the gullies.

95. You would be prepared to do that if you had a guarantee of renewal at the expiration of your term?—Yes, I would, undoubtedly.

96. Do you think that would be satisfactory to the holders of leases?—I think it would be most satisfactory.

97. What term do you think would be satisfactory? If you had a lease of the run for fourteen years without revaluation, and could then take it for another fourteen years at a rent to be fixed, would that be satisfactory?—I am sure the country would be handed back to the Government as a valuable asset.

98. If you had a lease for fourteen years, with the right of renewal, would that be satisfactory?—Yes.

99. At a valuation to be fixed?—Yes; a valuation to be arrived at between the tenant and the Board.

100. My idea is that in fixing the value the Government should appoint one valuer and the owner another, and that an umpire should be called in?—Yes. Do you mean with compensation for improvements?

101. Yes?—Yes.

102. You will understand that there should be a reasonable limitation?—Yes. I think every one must admit that the present limitation is too low—three times the rental. It does not affect me so very materially at present, because in 1895 all the leases were grouped into one, and we hold them under one license. Three times my rental would come to about £1,700. So I am very much better off than a number of my neighbours, who might feel inclined to put improvements on a subdivision, but the improvements would very much exceed the rental.

103. With regard to the amount of rent that you are asked at present, do you consider it fair under ordinary conditions in an ordinary season?—Yes, I think the rental of £586 that we are paying at the present time is reasonable. When we had 36,000 sheep we were paying £3,040; but that rental never came out of the place.

104. How long have you been in occupation of the present run?—Since 1883—for twenty-one years.

105. Has the run gone back?—Very materially. There is no doubt that all central Otago is going back.

106. What do you ascribe it to?—The droughts, and possibly the feed being eaten down, and possibly overstocking. We have been trying to get the last penny out of the places. We have had very hard times.

107. You say you have attempted to make as much as possible out of the run, because at the end of your lease you do not know whether you will get possession again?—We cannot tell whether we shall get it back or not.

108. If you had the right of renewal you would feel disposed to nurse the run so as to keep its strength up?—Certainly. As an instance, I mentioned that I reduced the carrying-capacity by some four thousand when I got relief under the Act of 1895. Of my own volition I reduced it by four thousand sheep.

109. Assuming that you were a freeholder of this run, that you leased it to a tenant, and that he worked it at a loss, would you consider under ordinary conditions that he would be justified in coming to you and claiming the large sum that you are asking the State to pay you for the loss of sheep?—I do not ask for monetary consideration; I ask that the compensation be made in the shape of extended leases.

110. You would be satisfied with that?—Yes, and secured tenure.

111. *Hon. Mr. Duncan.*] What was your loss in 1895?—4,987 sheep.

112. Did you reduce the station by an additional four thousand after the Land Board had granted that extension of lease?—Shortly after that I reduced it. I have not got the numbers here.

113. What I want to get at is this: You surely must have been very much overstocked if you required to reduce the number by eight thousand?—I admit that the run was overstocked. Of course, that 4,987 includes the ordinary death-rate.

114. *Mr. Bennet.*] Would the rabbits have been at their worst at that time?—I have been keeping at the rabbits. They have not given me any trouble. I have always been able to keep them well in hand. They were certainly more numerous at that time than they have been lately; but it is a case of keeping at them all the time.

115. Did you try sowing Yorkshire fog in the gullies?—No; I have never sown any grass-seed on the run.

116. *The Chairman.*] I think you said there has been a falling-off in the grass and the carrying-capacity of your land?—That is so.

117. Can you give the Committee any idea as to how this could best be remedied?—I think, by light stocking and by sowing grasses on the country. Of course, nature must assist us to a certain extent with rain. Central Otago is a very dry part of New Zealand, possibly as dry a part as there is in New Zealand.

118. Is any allowance made, when the improvements are computed, for surface-sowing and the other steps that you referred to? Are they counted in the value of the improvements?—No; only fencing and buildings.

119. Do you think that surface-sowing and other methods of improving the run should be included?—That is what I suggested many times to the members of the Land Board down there.