

in the classification of land, to report upon the classification, and to suggest means by which the discontent in regard to this classification might be removed. It is obvious, I submit, that that is the ground of paragraph (a) of their report, the statement of which involves the necessity for expert knowledge on the part of the persons making it; I submit that, in the absence of evidence before this Commission showing that Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst had such expert knowledge, their recommendations on the subject cannot be received with so much consideration as would justify the Committee, as my friends on the other side have asked, in reversing the recommendation of the Royal Commission and the action of Parliament in giving legislative effect to that report. That, I submit, is a very pertinent consideration for the Committee, but it would not be becoming on my part to dwell further on the subject, although there is, I believe, nothing to show that Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst were possessed of the necessary knowledge. Now, paragraph (b) of their report says, "Many of the ratepayers whose lands are situated in the lower portions next to the river are doubtful of receiving any benefits, and have expressed themselves as desirous of having their lands excluded from the district; and even some of those whom it is thought would receive the greatest benefit from a drainage scheme have stated that if the dry lands are excluded they would like to be excluded also." Now, that is a very ingeniously expressed ground, and it conveys a great deal of meaning to one who, like myself, is familiar with all the ins and outs of the subject from having been connected with it all along. It will be noticed that at that time the representations made to those two gentlemen by the ratepayers who have joined in this petition, but who are owners of the wet lands, must have amounted to this: if the owners of the so-called dry lands are to be excluded from the district, then they should be excluded also. And that contention, I submit, has a considerable show of reason. It will be remembered that up to that time the fight had been almost entirely confined to the owners of the dry lands. Those of the owners of the wet lands who had given notice of appeal had really abandoned their appeals, and the whole fight before the Assessment Court was on the part of the owners of the dry lands. I say, upon the whole, that that was the case, and if I am not stating it fairly my friend will correct me. I have said that there were some objections on the part of the owners of the low-lying lands on the east side of the river, and I say now that my recollection is that, although notices had been given on the part of a good many of them, they were nearly all withdrawn, and a few were settled by arrangement with myself. Now, that is a very remarkable position, and conveys a good deal to those who know the ins and outs of the subject. In this petition we find that those owners of the wet lands have joined forces with the owners of the dry lands. How that is brought about I do not know, but this paragraph of Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst's report lets in light upon the subject. It is this: that the owners of the wet lands say, "Well, the owners of the dry lands are petitioning Parliament, and they may get out of the district. If they get out we must get out also." And the reason is this: that the East Taieri would then be so limited as a district, as members of the Committee have noticed by the questions that have been put to the witnesses, that the rating-area would be such that the necessary expenditure on any works, to be of any use, would be more than the district could bear. That is, I submit, a consideration that this Committee should take into account, that the owners of the dry lands are only hypothetical petitioners, and that the owners of the wet lands are merely contingent petitioners. The contention amounts to this practically: that, if the owners of the so-called dry lands are to be taken out, then the burden will be too great for us, and we should be taken out also. That brings the Committee face to face with the question: should the owners of the dry lands be taken out or should they not? I propose to discuss that in a few sentences. As I have said, that was practically the question that had been already judicially dealt with by the Stipendiary Magistrate after spending some ten days or a fortnight in taking evidence which it is impossible for this Committee to do.

*Mr. Reid:* You are suggesting to the Committee that they should take the Magistrate's report, and be bound by his judgment in the matter.

*Witness:* I am not doing anything so foolish. I am submitting this to the Committee: that the decision of the Magistrate, after spending ten days or a fortnight on the case, hearing a host of witnesses and also hearing counsel, is entitled to some weight and consideration, because not only the Magistrate but the members of the Royal Commission found it absolutely necessary before they could understand the business to traverse the whole district; and am I not justified in saying that the judicial conclusion of the Magistrate, after visiting the district, is entitled to considerable weight? Now I will go a step further with regard to the reasons why the owners of the so-called dry lands should not be taken out of the district. I am not even suggesting that the decision of the Magistrate is conclusive, nor do I go so far as to suggest that the conclusions of the Royal Commissioners are final and binding on the Committee, but I do say that I am justified in reminding the Committee of the measures adopted by both the Magistrate and the Royal Commission to satisfy themselves before they arrived at the conclusion stated. Now, we have in black and white the reasons stated by the Royal Commission, and I am not going to detain the members of the Committee by reading them. I submit, as reasons why this Committee should not reverse the decision of the Magistrate and the Royal Commission, that the evidence even of the petitioners shows, and our evidence will show still more clearly, that the relation between the so-called dry lands and the low-lying lands is this: that the dry lands which have been described as requiring irrigation more than drainage are now in a high state of cultivation, and the evidence shows also that those lands in their natural state were practically a swamp. They were made a swamp by the waters that are now formed into what is called the Silverstream, which emerged from the hills spreading itself over what is called the dry area. Now, we know even from the evidence of the petitioners that those lands have now been converted into a fertile plain by the creation of what is now called the Silverstream, which was in its natural state a meandering stream of water. We were told that away back before 1860 the early settlers had made a cut for themselves before the interference of the Provincial Government, and here I must correct an impression which may have