

been induced by Mr. Allan yesterday. I inferred from him that the Provincial Government had made the first cut; but that is not so. The evidence called by the petitioners shows that the first cut was made by the petitioners themselves; and on this point I might refer to the evidence of Mr. John Andrew given before the Royal Commission, which shows what the natural condition of the land was before this cut was made. His evidence and the evidence of the petitioners shows that this cut was originally a double cut of 6 ft. wide each. The Silverstream is now a river-bed from 15 ft. to 20 ft. probably in depth and from 3 to 5 chains wide at various points, but I shall adduce evidence from the engineer which will satisfy the Committee on the point. It will show that what was originally two cuts of 6 ft. wide each is now what I have described. Now, this is what converted the swamp lands which are described now as dry lands into cultivated fields; and the evidence will show that the gravel which has been gouged out by the waters brought down by those gentlemen to improve their lands was brought down on to the wet lands below, and it will be shown that at such a rate has this gravel been carried down that since the sitting of the Court in November—thirteen months ago—upwards of 10 chains of the bed of the Silverstream down on the flat has been filled up not merely to the level of the natural surface, but higher—because there had been artificial banks, and the gravel has been filled up to the level of the artificial banks, so that the gravel is now filled up higher than the level of the surrounding country. But that is not the full extent of the filling-up by the gravel, but a mile and a half of the bed of the Silverstream has been filled up in the same manner. Now, one can easily understand the petitioners in the higher lands asking to be taken out of this district, because they say, “We do not want drainage—we want irrigation.” To whose detriment have their lands been improved? Obviously to the detriment of the owners of the wet lands. There is one thing which is difficult to understand in paragraph (b) of Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst’s report, and that is how so many owners of the wet lands have combined with the owners of the dry lands. That is one thing which the Magistrate took into consideration, and which also influenced the Royal Commission in coming to a conclusion that the owners of the lands in the north portion should be included. Another reason is this: There are, as we know, besides the Silverstream, two other streams, one on the east side called the Owhiro and another on the west side called the Mill Creek, both of which drain the so-called dry lands—the lands of the petitioners who are asking to be taken out of the district. Now, under the Act those two streams, which are natural watercourses, are vested in the Board. They are not natural watercourses in the sense that they had well-defined courses through the swamp, but those courses have at various points been deviated both in the case of the Owhiro and in the case of the Mill Creek, partly by the early settlers, partly by the Provincial Government, and partly by the County Council. Members of the Committee must understand that, although no works have been done so far of that kind on the east side of the river by the Drainage Board, all works that have been done in the way of drainage were done by the County Council, and when no other drainage body is in existence the County Council is the proper authority. Every road requires to have along it drains necessary for the keeping of the roads clear of water, and into these roads the settlers have formed drains along their boundaries and their paddocks. Now, the creek is carried along Duke’s Road, and that is the only one case of deviation. I am justified in referring to this to show they have been deviated as natural watercourses. The control of those creeks and all drains made by the County Council is now vested in this new Drainage Board, and, as Mr. Gawn admitted to-day, the fact that the Mill Creek passes through the land is a great advantage to him. We know very well that for drainage purposes it is of the utmost importance, as the evidence before the Magistrate showed, that there should be some public body empowered and practically compelled to keep these two natural watercourses in order, and that is one of the reasons that enabled the Magistrate to come to the conclusion that the upper or dry lands should be included or retained in the district, or should not be removed into Class “D.” There we have two reasons which would probably not have occurred to people who have never seen the land, but reasons which, I submit, are entitled to a very great deal of weight when people come here who have derived in the past all the benefit from those works which have been carried out largely at the expense of other people, and ask that they should be charged with nothing of the cost. I am speaking of the drains that have been constructed by the County Council along the road-line, which have been carried out at the cost of the other people, and to a greater extent by the Provincial Government and the County Council. Those works are now vested in the Board. Now, questions have been put to the petitioners which would lead members of the Committee to infer that, because the works that have been done by this Board already—they have spent some hundreds of pounds—have done no good to the petitioners, and because the works they propose to do down on the wet lands cannot do any practical good to the petitioners, therefore they should be excluded from the district. I submit that the rational conclusion is that, inasmuch as they have derived advantage in the past to such an extent that the lands are converted into fertile plains, from the existence of those works which this Board is bound to maintain, that is a reason why these people should contribute to the cost. I submit, furthermore, that it would be iniquitous that Renton and other owners who have land on the flat, whose lands are converted absolutely into lagoons by reason of the filling-up by the gravel brought down by the Silverstream—that they should be put in the position, that they cannot hope to deal with this problem without assistance from those on the high lands. There is no question about that. That is one thing in which Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst are right. It would be hopeless for the owners on the low lands to expect to do that work themselves. Now, seeing that it is plain that the owners of the high and dry lands have benefited from this work, and not only that, but that the owners of the low lands are almost ruined—and I am not using any hyperbolic language when I say that, and Mr. Renton’s evidence will satisfy the Committee on this point—it is a fact that two or three thousand acres of land have been rendered almost worthless by the silting-up. An attempt has been made to prove that nowadays this gravel does not come down from those lands, but that it came from away up in the mountains. Evidence will be adduced to show that that is