

69. All the evidence that has been led during the sitting of the Committee has been in regard to the effect of the Silverstream on the low-lying lands?—Yes.

70. That is the only reason by which you can bring in the land on the higher levels?—That is so.

71. That is on account of the damage which has been done by the Silverstream to the low-lying ground?—Yes.

72. How much of the low-lying ground is affected by the gravel that is spreading over the land?—I should say, roughly, somewhere about 4,000 acres actually affected by the Silverstream—perhaps 8,000 acres.

73. The gravel itself has not left the bed of the creek?—No, the effect is this: the gravel has retained the bed, and the water has left it.

74. Are all those people in that 4,000 acres with you for the retention of the eastern side?—I would not say that. The opinion has been expressed locally that if the higher grounds are taken out they also desire to go out, but as against that we have their request to have steps taken to form a drainage-area.

75. They would sooner go out and put up with the damage done by the flood-waters than belong to a Board with the upper portion of the district cut off—is that the position?—Yes.

76. They think there would be less loss to them by the flood-waters than by the extra rates if the higher end was cut off?—That is so. Their position is this: that it would be absolutely impossible for them to do any permanent work for their own relief without some control of the higher reaches of the stream, because, on the assumption that the damage comes from the higher lands in the matter of gravel travelling down, they would naturally, of course, be confined to their own area. That is on the assumption that they formed a smaller district. Then this silting process would continue, and they would not be able to control that.

77. Without a Drainage Board would it not be possible to compel the people in the top end to make some provision?—No.

78. Under the Act can you not do that?—No; that is the weakness of the position. You cannot do anything unless you have them under the control of a public body.

79. There is a public body operating in the shape of the County Council, is there not?—Yes.

80. Would they not have the power?—No, they have not that power.

81. They have not the control of this waterway?—That is a legal question. I think the position is this: A section of the ratepayers by petition can demand the County Council to act as a Drainage Board, but that would not take in the people in the higher reaches, because such petition must carry three-fifths of the people of the district. The objectors would kill such a thing being carried.

82. The people on the eastern side seem almost unanimous in their desire to be severed from the western side, and when there are so many both on the lower ground and on the higher ground wishing to be separated, do you think it is a fair thing to compel them to stay in against their wishes, as a matter of justice?—Well, of course, I am looking at it from a different point of view. No, I would not, if that were their only reason, but they are asking, as all the witnesses have pointed out, for complete immunity from rating.

83. We have had evidence here from witnesses whose land is under the classification which has kept them free of rates, but who wish still to be outside of the classification altogether and not to be under control?—Yes.

84. So we must assume that their wish is to get clear altogether of any liability?—Yes.

85. *The Chairman.*] There were a number of witnesses who gave evidence who were affected by this silting-up, and they wished to be relieved of any connection with the West Taieri?—Yes.

86. Now, if you were residing on the east side instead of the west side, with all your interests there, would you object to this petition to get relief?—On which part of the east side?

87. Any part that is within the portion we are discussing. There are some here who have given evidence that they have no trouble with the silting?—If I were living in the lower lands I certainly should object to severance from the control of the Taieri Drainage Board.

88. But if you were on the higher lands—land which is from 20 ft. to 80 ft. above the flood-level, what would your opinion be then?—If I were living on the higher lands, I have no doubt I should take up this position: that I have all the drainage that I require, my lands will be safe from what I have done in the past; and it is human nature to a certain extent to be selfish, and I should perhaps take the same stand as they are doing.

89. *Mr. Allan.*] You have admitted that you have changed your mind on this subject of a united district?—I have, under altered conditions.

90. Not very long ago were you not the principal opponent of a united district—a matter of a couple of years ago?—No, certainly not. The only expression of opinion on that point that I ever gave was before the Royal Commission.

91. Do you remember a meeting that was held in Dunedin before the Royal Commission sat in the Taieri?—What meeting do you refer to?

92. A meeting in the Crown Lands Office at which you were present?—I remember being there at one meeting.

93. I think it dealt with the amalgamation of the West Taieri Boards as well as the others. Is this statement of Mr. Barron, the Commissioner of Crown Lands correct: "The Commission, he added, was the outcome of a meeting held in Dunedin some time ago, when a proposal was made that the whole district should be amalgamated for drainage purposes. Mr. J. T. Gibson was the principal objector to that proposal at the meeting"?—I do not think so. I think we had several meetings.