

## SAM HEATH examined. (No. 34.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a farmer, residing at Tutamoe.
2. How far do you reside from the Mangakahia Valley?—Twenty-one miles, near the junction, at Paraheia, of the Mangakahia and Awaroa Rivers. I am living on the range that bounds the western part of the Mangakahia Valley. I have been resident there for fifteen years.
3. Will you make a statement to the Commission in reference to the matters we have under consideration?—I wish to indorse what Mr. Harding has said regarding the land between Pakotai and Kaikohe. The districts that would be served would be Opouteke, and along the Mangakahia to Waiotekumurau, Waimatanui, and towards Tutamoe. The class of country about Opouteke carries three sheep to the acre. At the lower end of the Mangakahia Valley the land would be about the same, and from Waimatanui the average would be about two sheep and a half to the acre. There are about thirteen hundred head of cattle and a thousand sheep in the Opouteke Valley, three thousand head of cattle, and about the same number of sheep in the Mangakahia Valley and up towards Tutamoe, and the natural outlet for most of this land would be the Main Trunk by way of Mangakahia to Kaikohe. Last year it cost the settlers at Waimatanui 8s. 6d. per hundredweight, and in some instances as much as 10s. per hundredweight, to get their goods from Kaihu. This road is much better this year. We have been retarded in getting the cream-cart round, because of the state of the roads. In course of time feeders of this Main Trunk will run through Tarawhati to Pakotai, and another feeder up the Waima River from Kaihu over the saddle of the Tutamoe, down to Waiotekumurau and Mangakahia to Paraheia, or from Kaihu up the Waima River, crossing a low saddle about three miles west of Tutamoe running along west to Taheke and Opanaki Road, tapping the Waipou Forest of 100,000 acres, on to Wekaweka, and through the Wekaweka Hill, out at the Native settlement at Taheke, and on to Kaikohe. The settlers are decidedly of opinion that the Main Trunk from Auckland to Kaikohe, through the Mangakahia Gorge, should be put through before any branch lines are made.
4. *Mr. Evans.*] How long does it take to clear land in your district?—You might get it clear in a year, but it might take longer. It took me a great many years to get my first clearing.
5. How long is it since you got your land clear?—I have had grass all along, but not the grass I have now. I got a burn the first year, and then I felled again, and had to wait a second year. I got no good burns until three years ago.
6. You were twelve years on the land before you got a really good burn?—That is so, and then it burned the bush on 200 acres that had never been felled. In fact, it cleared the bush better off the land that had not been cut than from the land on which it had been felled. We made the mistake of felling the bush. We should just have underscrubbed it and let the fire go through.
7. How many sheep and cattle to the acre can your land carry after fifteen years?—I have one hundred head of cattle and ten horses on my land now. I have 500 acres, of which 300 are in grass. It is not half-stocked.
8. What products do you send from your farm?—Butter. I milk twenty-three cows. I also send away young stock.
9. How many settlers are there in your district?—About fifty from Kaihu to Waimatanui.
10. What amount of land would they hold between them?—About 25,000 acres—an average of about 500 acres apiece.
11. Have many got their timber down?—There are big clearings at Waimatanui.
12. Are they as far advanced as you are?—Farther.
13. What is the value of the land in your district?—A section has just been sold six miles from me towards the railway-line. A man took it up, a 250-acre section, six years ago. He has got it all ring-fenced and in grass except about 50 acres of bush. Last year he wintered over one hundred head of cattle, and he sold beef in the spring. He was asking £5 10s. an acre for the land, but I do not think he quite got that. He appeared to be quite satisfied with his price.
14. *Mr. Coom.*] What had he spent upon it?—About £1,000, excluding first purchase of stock. He had four hundred and fifty pounds' worth of stock on it at time of sale.
15. An impression has got abroad that it takes something like fifteen or sixteen years before property in your district can be brought into use?—It can be brought into use in twelve months now. The land has been burned and all the heads of the trees have been burned.
16. When do you sow the grass-seed?—I sow in February.
17. How soon after a burn?—If I could get the seed I would sow the next day.
18. When would it be fit to carry stock?—We can put young stock on it in three or four months.
19. Within twelve months after felling the bush you can carry stock on the land?—Yes.
20. Not in fifteen years?—No.
21. Are there any means of breaking in the country except by burning?—Not that country.
22. Are there no means of breaking it in by cattle?—Most of the land I have got in grass is burned bush, and never had an axe or a slasher on it.
23. What do you estimate that it costs you to get that country into grass?—About £2 an acre.
24. Burning without underscrubbing is not general, I suppose?—Yes, it is now.
25. Will the scrub burn green?—Yes.
26. Then, you cannot have a big rainfall?—Not now.
27. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] Have the settlers about your district any marketable timber on their properties?—Yes. The only way they can deal with that timber is to burn it. It pays better to grow grass than to keep the timber, because there is no way to get it out.
28. Have the settlers destroyed much timber?—I estimate, with regard to my own place, that if I could have got 6d. per 100 ft. I would have made £5 or £6 an acre from the timber alone.