

addition to the cost of felling and grassing. Would you recognize that? Either the timber will rot and disappear, and there will be an improvement in that way; or else there will be a visitation of fire, which will cause immediate loss but will improve the land afterwards. That, under the present system of valuation, is not taken into consideration. I have tried to fight it out in the Assessment Court, but it has not been allowed. My land has been cleared for a number of years, having been visited in this way with fires, and I have been allowed £2 an acre for grassing and felling; and another man, who has felled the year previously and has the timber lying over his section, is allowed exactly the same for improvements in that way.

61. What better system could you devise, other than to appoint yourself arbitrator?—Well, we do not know whether you will adopt the Government schedule of improvements and be bound by that.

62. *Hon. Mr. Ngata.*] Could not the provisions of section 264 of the Native Land Act, 1909, be applied, under which improvements are to be recorded from time to time by the Maori Land Board in the same manner as improvements on Crown leaseholds?—Yes; well—

63. That provision is taken word for word from the Land Act. It was enacted subsequent to these Ohotu leases being entered into?—I just mention this to indicate that valuation is not given for improvements. I contend that whether it is a time improvement or whether it is caused by fire clearing the land, the lessee is entitled to valuation for it, but so far he has not received that. Time will prove whether we shall be allowed for it in Ohotu.

64. *Hon. Sir J. Carroll.*] What system would you advise in preference to the one that obtains now, in order to secure what you consider fair valuation for improvements?—It might be done by competent valuers who are able to recognize what are improvements.

65. Is there any danger of your not appointing a competent valuator, or of the Board appointing an incompetent valuator?—The valuator we may appoint may be bound down by a cast-iron schedule of what are considered improvements. He may not be allowed to go beyond that: we do not know. The only safeguard is the freehold: then a man knows that in whatever way he improves his property, or in whatever way it is being improved, he will get the benefit of it. But as the law stands at present we are working for the landlord.

66. *Mr. Newman.*] What state was your land in when you took it up? Was it covered with standing bush?—My section was entirely bush.

67. Was there a road to it?—There was bridle-track access.

68. And the rent that you pay for that land is 1s. 9d. an acre for a portion of the twenty-one years, and then 2s.?—No; 1s. 9d. for one section, and 2s. for another section held by Mrs. Pemberton.

69. It cost you £2 an acre to fell the bush?—Not all through. I have had some felled at £1 10s. There is another point: In Government valuating they allow you nothing whatever for surveying or supervision of bushfelling. They allow up to £1 10s., and no more. I have paid £1 10s. and done the surveying and the supervision, which brings the cost up to considerably more than that. I have just paid for 154 acres £2 an acre.

70. You say you can grass the land for 10s. an acre?—Yes.

71. I wish you would come and grass a few acres for me; it has cost me 15s. and £1?—Of course, it all depends on the quantity of seed put in.

72. The felling of the bush would cost £2 an acre, roughly; the rent is approximately 2s. an acre: that makes 4s. in interest and rent. Grassing and fencing and buildings will bring it up, I suppose, to about 6s. an acre for rent and interest?—Yes.

73. Now, you have a lease for twenty-one years, with right of renewal for twenty-one years—that is forty-two years; and then you walk out, do you not?—We do not know.

74. The point I want to make is this: supposing you go in as a boy of twenty-one; you spend the whole of your life improving this land, and then at the end of forty-two years you walk out with nothing. Is that so?—We are not sure whether we get valuation for improvements or not.

75. Are you prepared to pay a fair price to the Natives for this land?—Certainly.

76. Would you have taken up this land if you had known the difficulties you would have to overcome?—No. I thought it was going to be roaded. When I took it up the roadmaking was going on so briskly that I thought it would be roaded. Where they made these bridle-tracks they made the culverts of sufficient length for a dray-road, and we understood they were going to make the dray-roads afterwards.

77. You had reason to understand that this land would be roaded in the same way as other Crown land?—We understood so.

78. *The Chairman.*] Are you a practical farmer?—I am.

79. Have you had much experience?—I have had twenty-six years in bush country.

80. Have you been asked to represent other petitioners in regard to these matters, or do you come alone?—I was asked to come down by Mr. Duigan.

81. Your chief objections, and those of the other petitioners, are in regard to roading and non-recognition of improvements?—Those are my chief objections. There are others.

82. *Hon. Mr. Ngata.*] What is the carrying-capacity of the average Ohotu land?—I should say, two sheep to the acre.

83. And the ordinary proportion of cattle, I suppose?—A limited number of cattle—not very many. I have had slightly under two sheep to the acre this winter, and I have been quite sufficiently heavily stocked. This was on 950 acres, and I had about forty head of cattle, and the cattle had the advantage of small portions of bush.

84. Have you grown turnips on your bush burns?—No. I have grown them in a favourable season.

85. Do you find difficulty in burning off your bush?—We have had difficulty at times. I have about 150 acres of badly burnt bush.