

REPORT.

To His Excellency the Right Honourable John Poynder Dickson-Poynder, Baron Islington, Privy Councillor, Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, the Governor of the Dominion of New Zealand.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

We, the Commissioners appointed by Your Excellency's Letters Patent of the 6th day of April, 1912, to inquire into the several matters and things hereinafter mentioned and referred to, that is to say,—

1. On what terms and conditions the lessees of lands held under the provisions of the West Coast Settlement Reserves Act and its amendments, or any of them, should be permitted to surrender their present leases and obtain new leases in lieu thereof under section 8 of the West Coast Settlement Reserves Act, 1892.
2. Whether any of the said lessees have been misled by any act of the Public Trustee or any other officer of the Public Trust Department, or the form of the lease issued, or the regulations made under the West Coast Settlement Reserves Act, 1881, or its amendments, into believing that there was no limit to the amount of the compensation to which they were entitled under their leases, and in consequence of such belief made on their leaseholds or purchased from other lessees improvements in excess of five pounds (£5) per acre.
3. What areas of land now leased under the West Coast Settlement Reserves Act, 1881, and its amendments, may hereafter be required by the Native owners for their use and occupation; and, having regard to their particular interests therein and their individual fitness for profitably using such lands, which of the said leases, if any, should be allowed to remain under the present tenure in order that such Native owners may, on the expiration of such leases, compete for the possession of the lands held under them.
4. What provisions should be made to enable such Native owners to get financial assistance from the Government to enable them to work their farms, should any of them become tenants of such leaseholds,—

have now the honour to report to Your Excellency as follows:—

The scope of our inquiry necessitated our visiting Hawera, Opunake, and New Plymouth. The inquiry was held in the Courthouses of these townships, and the Press and public were admitted to the sittings of the Commission, the arrangements having been advertised in the local newspapers. A few of the lessees appeared in person, and forty-four were represented by Mr. R. D. Welsh, of Hawera. Mr. W. H. D. Bell, M.P., of Wellington, appeared for all the Native owners.

We began our sittings on the 10th day of May, when Mr. Welsh opened by stating the case on behalf of the lessees, and called evidence in their support. At the conclusion of this evidence, Mr. Bell opened the case for the Native owners, called his evidence, and summed up. He was followed by Mr. Welsh in reply. The hearing was concluded on the 4th day of June. A considerable amount of evidence was called, and we feel it is only our duty to commend both counsel on the able and amicable manner in which they represented their respective clients. Their keen appreciation of the points at issue materially assisted us in our consideration of the matters intrusted to our inquiry, as also did the production of documents by the Under-Secretary for Native Affairs and the District Manager for the Public Trust. The Public Trustee also visited Hawera, and made a statement in reference to the attitude of the lessees and the position of the Native owners.