

6. Your petitioners suggest the following prices could be allowed until 1915, hence an increase in prices annually, as kauri-gum will be decreasing: For kauri-gum—A1, hard range, white, 250s. per hundredweight; W1, hard white, 155s.; W2, half-and-half white, 80s.; PW chalking, white, 55s.; WC scrapings, white, 60s.; SB bold black, 150s.; B1, hard black, 100s.; B2, half-and-half black, 65s.; BC chips, 45s.; BC scrapings, 50s.

7. Your petitioners say that under the existing conditions the kauri-gum diggers are at the entire mercy of brokers and their buyers, who act in their own interest with a view to making as much profit for themselves as possible, and that the kauri-gum diggers are compelled to resell the gum at a price which barely gives them a living, and if some steps are not immediately taken to alter existing conditions great distress will be brought to many kauri-gum diggers.

8. Your petitioners pray that, if your Government should decide to control the said industry, a representative of the kauri-gum diggers selected by the said diggers should be allowed to value and classify the gum in conjunction with the Government officers, and to look after the interests generally of the kauri-gum diggers, many of whom cannot read or write English.

And your petitioners will ever pray.

MR. G. E. ALDERTON, CHAIRMAN OF DIRECTORS, PARENGA GUMFIELDS COMPANY (LIMITED), ON SOME ASPECTS OF THE KAURI-GUM INDUSTRY.

From the captious criticisms of the work of this Department by the gum trade of Auckland it is pleasing to be able to quote a contrary point of view expressed by Mr. G. E. Alderton, Chairman of Directors of the Parenga Gumfields Company (Limited). In the course of a graphic article recently published dealing with the possibilities of the kauri-peat oil industry Mr. Alderton says,—

“The Auckland Province has exported £20,000,000 worth of kauri-gum, and because of it the land from which it was taken was acclaimed to be poor—the “poor gum land”—and all associated with the industry known as gum-digging had in the popular mind the brand of the derelict and something out of the ordinary pale. The Government had set aside some hundreds of thousands of acres of gum lands as gum reserves for those who had failed in other avocations of life to follow at their own sweet will the simple and independent life of the gum-digger. They were free to use the land in any way they liked—burn it, pothole it, and generally destroy it to their heart's desire—and this immense estate was practically made a present to all and sundry to exploit it as they pleased. The State received no return, no royalty or tax was levied on this wealth taken from the land except a nominal license fee, and everywhere the roads used for the industry were more or less rendered unfit for ordinary settlement purposes. Any attempt to tax the industry or make it bear its share of the country's upkeep was met with a howl that if it were interfered with the industry would be ruined, because other countries could produce cheaper gums. And so the industry drifted on, without any direction or control, with the consequent result that no one bothered very much about it, and its development to-day is about as primitive as one would expect to find in some Mexican or Spanish country where things remain as they did in the year one. Fortunately the Government has now set up a Department to supervise in some way this industry, and better results may be expected, but much opposition will be encountered from those accustomed to the old regime. The gum trade has been a very close corporation, and any one daring to even suggest anything to alter or improve the industry may expect to be assailed by the dreadnoughts of the trade. However, the war has altered things, and the primitive methods of the past must give way to system, organization, and scientific development, and it is the call of every man who has one atom of patriotic impulse to assist and not belittle the efforts of those who would strive by research and scientific inquiry to develop, improve, or advance any of our industries or latent wealth.”

SALES AND PURCHASES OF KAURI-GUM.

During the year kauri-gum to the value of £10,736 12s. 4d. has been purchased by this Department, while the sales amount to £26,882 1s. 10d. The whole of the gum was sold in the United States of America, for owing to the disorganized state of the varnish and linoleum trades in Great Britain, and the difficulty of obtaining shipping-space, there has been very little demand for kauri-gum. On this account no serious effort has been made to open up a market there, but when the war is over this matter will have to receive prompt attention. In the meantime samples of the various classes of gum as graded by the Government are on exhibition at the High Commissioner's Office in London. The value of gum exported during the previous year was £10,889.

Although the Department began advancing to the diggers in November, 1914, it was not until October, 1916, that the first sales of gum were made in America. Since that date, however, a steady increase in sales has taken place, and the Government grades of gum are now fairly well established in the American market.

Full details of the expenditure under the various headings is given in another part of the report. The Act of 1914 authorized the Minister to raise the sum of £50,000. Up to the present time a sum of £47,000 has been so raised. On the 31st March, 1917, the cash in the Public Account to credit of Kauri-gum Industry Account was £11,178 2s. 2d., and at the 31st March, 1918, the amount was £20,755 8s. 7d.

The whole of the preliminary work of the Department and matters relating to the administration of the gum lands, also matters affecting the industry generally, as well as the cost of the Superintendent's visit to America, have been charged to the Kauri-gum Industry Account. No interest is allowed on the cash in the Public Account to the credit of the Kauri-gum Industry Account, but interest is chargeable on all debentures raised.

KAURI-GUM EXPORTED.

Up to the 31st March, 1918, the value of kauri-gum exported was £18,224,107, and of this large sum perhaps fifteen millions would represent money expended in labour.