

SESSION II.  
1921.  
NEW ZEALAND.

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# UREWERA LANDS CONSOLIDATION SCHEME

(REPORT ON PROPOSED).

*Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by Leave.*

To the Hon. D. H. GUTHRIE, Minister of Lands, and the Hon. J. G. COATES, Native Minister,  
Wellington.

DEAR SIRS,—

Wellington, 31st October, 1921.

We have the honour to submit our detailed report on the Urewera lands, and the proposals for the consolidation of the interests acquired therein by the Crown and of the interests of the Native non-sellers.

## 1. HISTORICAL REVIEW.

For a better understanding of the position at the 1st August, 1921, when we met the Natives at Ruatoki pursuant to your instructions, we desire to give a brief review of the circumstances which led up to the special legislation affecting the Urewera country, of the history of land-titles in that territory, and of the purchases carried out by the Government therein.

Prior to the year 1896 it may be said that the Queen's writ did not run in the area which the Legislature in that year defined as the "Urewera District Native Reserve." The tribal lands were unsurveyed, the Native Land Acts were inoperative, and Native customs and institutions were dominant. But already there were signs of dissatisfaction with the existing state of things, serious quarrels arising out of land claims, and a demand for a tribunal to investigate the same and determine the matters in dispute. These and the desire of the Government to bring the Urewera Tribe and their titles within the pale led to a Ministerial tour of the territory, undertaken by the Prime Minister (Mr. Seddon) and Mr. (now Sir James) Carroll. The negotiations between them and the Ureweras resulted in the passing of the Urewera District Native Reserve Act, 1896. That Act—

- (1.) Constituted and defined the boundary of the Urewera District Native Reserve, containing approximately 656,000 acres.
- (2.) Empowered the appointment of seven Commissioners (two Europeans and five Urewera Natives) to investigate and determine by sub-tribal areas the ownership of Urewera lands according to Native custom and usage; the Government at its own cost providing the sketch-plans as the basis of the investigations.
- (3.) Provided for the appointment of Local Committees (one for each block), from which would be elected a General Committee "to deal with all questions affecting the reserve as a whole, or affecting any portion thereof in relation to other persons than the owners thereof." The powers of these committees were very vaguely defined, and were left to be prescribed by the Governor in Council. One power, however, was defined beyond dispute, "that the General Committee shall have power to alienate any portion of the district to the Crown, either absolutely or for any lesser estate, or by way of cession for mining purposes."
- (4.) Provided that the Government could take not more than 400 acres (except with the consent of the General Committee) for accommodation-houses, camping-grounds for stock, and other public purposes; and could lay out roads and landing-places.

The Act of 1896 also provided that the findings of the Commissioners were subject to appeal to the Native Minister, who had power to finally dispose of the appeals upon such expert inquiry as he might direct.

The preparation of sketch-plans took some time, and the Commissioners did not begin work till the 1st February, 1899. In 1900 an amending Act (the Urewera District Native Reserve Act Amendment) was passed which brought the Ruatoki Block under the jurisdiction of the Commissioners, and empowered the Native Minister on behalf of the owners to lease such portions of the Urewera District as were not required for immediate settlement. It was provided that the land should be leased under Part V of the Land Act, 1892. Nothing was ever done under this provision.