

*Hon. Captain
Fraser.*

8th August, 1872.

with the Wakatipu district. He knew the Clyde, Dunstan, Cromwell, and in fact all the country between the Wanaka and Naseby. He was interested in several runs in the Dunstan and Cromwell districts.

142. *Mr. Studholme.*] Are you acquainted with the agricultural land in this block?—No. I am of opinion that all land in the Otago Gold Fields under 1,000 feet may be considered agricultural land, if not too rocky nor too steep. In the report furnished by the Surveyor, Mr. McKerrow, to the Department of Lands and Survey in Otago, he states—"The front line of the block will be about 1,000 feet above the sea level and the back line over 2,000 feet; the whole area being of a general elevation between these two altitudes." That is very indefinite. However, all I have got to say is, that I learn for the first time that the altitude of this land is anything like 1,000 feet.

143. Do you know Mr. McKerrow?—All that I know about him is, that there was a lake discovered by Dr. Hector called after him, which should have been called after Dr. Hector.

144. Do you consider 20s. an acre the value of the land?—I would refuse to give it. I would be very sorry to give £20,000 for this block, unless collateral advantages were to be gained by it.

145. *The Chairman.*] Such as the back country?—Yes.

146. Had the land been sold in vertical blocks, do you suppose it would have brought the same price?—No; I do not think it would have sold at all.

147. Whether is the back country inferior or equal to the front?—I can't say; but it is always my opinion that good land should be made to sell the bad.

148. Do you know that all the land in this district is more or less auriferous?—I know the district to be auriferous.

149. And is it not quite possible that a lead of gold may be found at any time running through this block?—Yes, quite possible.

150. *Mr. Studholme.*] Would it be possible for the Government to sell land of this particular character in small blocks?—At a late auction sale, small blocks situated on the other side of the river were disposed of, Mr. Clarke being purchaser of the whole.

151. What prices were obtained?—I heard that £2 per acre was realized.

152. *The Chairman.*] In your opinion, is this sale injurious to the Roxburgh district?—Of course Clarke's purchase must be prejudicial.

153. *Mr. Luckie.*] If the land is 1,000 feet high in the average, would that not tend to prevent agricultural settlement in small quantities?—The men who would buy are men located in the district, and who combine agricultural and mining pursuits together.

154. *Mr. O'Neill.*] The miners in this district are in the habit of making water races for a long distance, are they not?—Yes.

155. Would the sale of large blocks not interfere with these operations?—Yes. When I was Acting Superintendent, so much was I impressed with the necessity for protecting these water rights, that I got the whole of the watershed of the tributaries of the Molyneux included within the gold fields.

T. L. SHEPHERD, Esq., M.H.R., in attendance, and examined.

*Mr. T. L. Shep-
herd.*

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156. I am a Member of the House of Representatives, and have been a Member of the Provincial Council of Otago for the last six years. I consider the policy of selling large blocks of land on the Gold Fields, without compensation, to the pastoral tenants, or to any one else, most disastrous to the interests of the gold fields and of the Colony, both as regards agricultural settlement and mining. In the first place, blocks would naturally be selected by the pastoral tenant in such a form as to secure large tracts of back country, as has been done by Messrs. Cargill and Anderson. I do not think that they would purchase these blocks of land at 20s. an acre, unless they believed that it would be required for agricultural purposes. There is no doubt but that the pastoral tenants have been induced to buy these blocks in order to prevent hundreds being declared. I consider the agricultural leasing system the very best system for the gold fields. The Wakatipu is one of the most thriving of the gold fields districts in Otago, in consequence of the Agricultural Leasing Regulations in force there, and free selection, with grazing rights over the unoccupied portions, being in operation there. Had that district been sold in large blocks to the runholders, it would have been covered for the most part with sheep, where farms and extensive settlements now exist. I consider that the sale of large blocks of land will prevent prospecting for gold, and thereby prevent the development of the auriferous resources of the Colony, as it is very much against the interests of the runholders to permit prospecting or mining on their purchased land. I consider the sale of this block to Messrs. Cargill and Anderson will be prejudicial to the interest of the Teviot district, especially in consequence of 50,000 acres, situated on the opposite side of the river, having been sold in one block to Mr. Clarke. I am aware that a great demand for agricultural land exists in this district. I consider the Waste Lands Board, in selling large blocks of land in this way, is acting against the spirit of the law, although not its letter, as the clause under which the sale takes place was passed to enable small farms to be acquired on the gold fields with the consent of the pastoral tenant. Mr. Reid, in his evidence, stated that a large block of land had been sold to Mr. McKellar. The circumstances of the case are different from those of the sale made to Messrs. Cargill and Anderson. McKellar's run was thrown into the hundreds and surveyed in small blocks, and advertised for sale. The public had an equal chance of applying for any section in that hundred with McKellar. No one applied but McKellar, and the consequence was McKellar carried off the best land in the hundred, he having applied just before 4 o'clock on the first day the land was legally open for selection. If the law remains as it now is, there is nothing to prevent the Waste Lands Board selling all the waste lands of the Crown situated within the gold fields of the Province of Otago to the pastoral tenants. This power, in my opinion, should be withdrawn, and the intention of the Act given legal effect to, and no sale should be permitted to any one person beyond say 500 acres. There are, so far as I know, only two cases on record of land having been sold in large blocks without competition—namely, the sale to Clarke, and the sale of 20,000 acres to Cargill