

If the suggestions I am about to make are carried out, it will enable me to be prompt in all transactions with the Natives, and I feel sure that it will enable me to purchase, survey, and pass through the Court from 500,000 to 700,000 acres of the best land North of Auckland, before the end of this year, at a great reduction on first cost and expenses.

Although it is a pleasure to be able to report satisfactorily of the operations conducted by me in the purchase of Native lands, yet the matters to which I have just referred have and are likely to have a prejudicial effect by retarding the progress of negotiations, and causing the Natives to entertain an unfavourable opinion of the Government as purchasers of land.

The first of the matter is in connection of the surveys of lands which are acquired and are being negotiated for. Under the present system, an indefinite delay frequently takes place before the survey of a block is undertaken and completed. As land is in most cases purchased by the acre, surveys are necessary to ascertain the contents of the block; many months elapse before this is done, and the Natives are kept during that time in a state of suspense and anxiety about the payment of the balance. This causes discontent and grumbling. They contrast the Government dealings with those of individuals who purchase on private account, when the money is generally paid down at the time of sale: the Government suffers by such comparison. On several occasions I have found this circumstance has induced them to regard overtures for the sale of land to the Government with disfavour. I venture to submit that every exertion should be made to enable the surveys to proceed almost contemporaneously with negotiations, so that the Government transactions could be vigorously carried on and promptly closed. This would give the Land Purchase Department a name amongst them, which would tend very much to facilitate the acquisition of country, and strengthen the hands of the officers against private speculators.

In the cases of the purchases made by me, I am prepared to undertake the duty of procuring cheap and accurate surveys of each block within a short time after the payment of deposit, and to answer for the perfect reliability of the work done. I would earnestly recommend this proposal to the favourable consideration of the Native Minister, and will, if instructed to that effect, be ready to undertake the duty at once. The cost of survey would be less, I think, than if undertaken by the Government in the ordinary way, and it would enable the Government to throw the lands open for settlement at an early date.

Of course it would be understood that all surveyors employed by me would be persons of whose professional fitness the Inspector of Surveys should be fully satisfied, and all work done by them be submitted to him for examination and approval before payment.

This, I submit, would leave the Survey Department the fullest control, and be a guarantee for reliable surveys.

The other matter is in regard to passing lands through the Court. The large nature of Government transactions, the fact that the Government is purchasing on public account and in the interest of the whole colony, renders it a not unreasonable demand that blocks handed over by them for investigation by the Native Land Court should not be governed by the cast-iron rules which are applied, and properly applied, to private purchasers. The technical requirements of the Act are, in many cases, hard to fulfil, and, the administrative arrangements being yet incomplete, difficulty is experienced in inducing the Native Land Court to undertake the investigation of titles. I would suggest that the Judges be requested to give the utmost facility to the passage of Government blocks through the Court, and to waive the enforcement of technical rules in such cases. The Government might agree to indemnify the Judges against any departure from the strict course of procedure required by the Act. Such an indemnification has, I understand, already been given in the case of certain blocks which are now in the course of investigation in the Land Court of the Province of Auckland.

It may be worthy of consideration by the Native Minister whether it would not be desirable to introduce in the Native Lands Act Amendment Bill, now before the House, a clause dispensing, in the case of public purchases, with checks and restrictions which the Act at present imposes upon all transactions, either public or private.

I am convinced the adoption of the recommendations which I have ventured respectfully to point out would wonderfully increase the prestige of the Land Purchase Department amongst the Native people, greatly shorten the time to fully complete purchases, materially reduce the cost of land in every way, and, in a short space of time, would put the Government in possession of a very large landed estate, and almost entirely exclude private speculation.

I desire also to bring under the attention of the Native Minister a subject of some importance as affecting the relations between the Government and the Rarawa and Ngapuhi, who are the largest landowners in the North. I refer to the case of Te Wake, the half-caste, in respect to which I formerly addressed some remarks to the Native Minister. It is known by the Natives that the Government are prepared to grant him a full pardon, upon the condition that he should surrender himself to the authorities at Auckland. Te Wake, though willing to give himself up to the Resident Magistrates at Hokianga or the Bay of Islands, has hitherto declined to come to Auckland for this purpose, for reasons which the Native Minister will readily understand. I am glad, however, to be able to report that, from personal conversation I had with Te Wake, I am positive the conditions which the Government has properly attached to the pardon will be accepted, if I am placed in a position to assure Te Wake the pardon has been issued, and awaits his arrival at the Mount Eden Gaol, Auckland. I would suggest that the pardon be issued and forwarded to the governor of the gaol, to be presented to Te Wake upon his rendering himself to the custody of that officer. By this course, the only ill feeling at present existing on the part of those Natives towards the Government will be removed.

Wellington, 3rd August, 1874.

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