

No. 6.

Mr. S. LOCKE, R.M., Napier, to the UNDER SECRETARY, Native Department.

SIR,—

Napier, 18th May, 1877.

I have the honor to forward the following report on the present position of land purchases on the East Coast:—

This district up to the end of last year was divided into three—viz., Hawke's Bay, under charge of Mr. J. P. Hamlin; Poverty Bay, under charge of Mr. J. A. Wilson; and Waiapu, under charge of Captain Porter. On the 31st December last Mr. J. A. Wilson ceased his connection with Government, and a short time after I was requested to take the general supervision of all the Government land-purchase negotiations on the East Coast. Before entering into the present state of the lands under negotiation, I would, in a few words, state how the question stood on the 1st of January. In Hawke's Bay, negotiations were in a forward state for the purchase of about 20,000 acres on the banks of the Mohaka, the Rotokakarangu Block, and 100,000 acres of land situated between Wairoa and Poverty Bay, on the inland road, known as the Hangaroa Block; also considerable advances had been made on the Mangatainoko Block, at the Wairarapa end of the Seventy-Mile Bush. At Waiapu, the Waitahaia Block, of 50,000 acres, had been acquired by Captain Porter, besides several blocks of smaller extent. In Poverty Bay, by the return furnished me, there were stated to be fifty blocks of land under negotiation, thirty-eight of which were stated as for purchase; this includes the Waikohu-Matawai, and Motu, 111,461 acres (these two blocks also appear under head of leases); and twelve for lease, the aggregate acreage under head of purchase, including the two above blocks, amounted to 438,000 acres. Of these, the title for one block only, containing 248 acres, the Tologa Bay township site, acquired by Mr. Wilson from Captain Read, was actually complete; another block, containing 180 acres, Karamumono, returned as complete, required the signatures as consenting parties of some of the husbands of the grantees, as did also some of the other deeds partly signed. Fifty thousand acres in that return are situated in the Bay of Plenty District. About 50,000 acres Mr. Robert Cooper sets a claim to, although caveats have been filed in this case, those lands having been proclaimed under the 42nd clause of "The Public Works Act, 1871." Seven thousand four hundred acres had been acquired by a private speculator, leaving only about 47,000 acres in a position to proceed with negotiations, barring the Motu and Waikohu-Matawai Blocks; there remaining some twenty-five blocks, containing about 182,000 acres, still to pass the Court, and consequently to be negotiated for. The majority of these blocks had not been gazetted, and many not applied for hearing by the Land Court. Advances had been made as instalments on the above blocks of lands, varying from 1s. 4d. to £2000. Of the twelve blocks stated as for lease, estimated at 237,000 acres, the title to one block, the Motu only was completed, the signatures of Arapera and Wi Pere having to be obtained to complete the title of the Waikohu-Matawai. None of the remaining blocks had passed the Court, and 100,000 acres in two blocks, on which an instalment of £142 had been paid, had not been surveyed. There are now 175,700 acres, including the above, yet to pass the Land Court. It may be argued that, as a number of signatures had been obtained to some of the above blocks under the head of purchased lands which had passed the Court, an acreage in proportion to the number of signatures obtained had been acquired, therefore that things were so far completed. Were the memorials of ownership or grants under joint tenancy such would be the case, but "The Native Lands Act, 1873," clauses 59 and 62, is very explicit on the point that all parties must sign before a purchase or lease can be considered complete. The few last signatures to a deed are found in practice the most difficult to obtain, and if not obtained, the expense, delay, and trouble of a sub-division is necessary. During the month of February I was principally employed in the Poverty Bay District obtaining information in regard to the lands under negotiation, this being necessary, as very few records of what had been done were left in the offices there; and also in seeing to the passing through the Land Court of the four blocks situated between Wairoa and Poverty Bay, known as the Hangaroa Blocks, containing 100,000 acres; and subsequently in arranging the price of those lands with the owners. During March I attended the Land Court at Waiapu, and in company with Mr. Baker, District Inspector of Surveys, and others, inspected the lands under negotiation to the North of Poverty Bay, towards Waiapu. During this trip signatures were obtained sufficient to nearly complete the few blocks in that part of the country in a position to treat with through having passed the Court; signatures of the husbands of grantees who had previously signed deeds were also after much trouble obtained. During the late sitting of the Land Court at Waiapu all the lands being negotiated for by Captain Porter for Government passed the Court, and are now on a fair way of being concluded. All the lands in the Hawke's Bay District under negotiation by Government have also passed the Court, and are being pushed on towards completion, the Poverty Bay District alone being left in such a backward state in regard to these important points. This backwardness is to be attributed to a considerable extent to not having had applications sent in for publication by the Land Court as soon as negotiations for the purchase or lease of any block of land had commenced. Had this been done at the time, all the cases for hearing would have been gazetted and heard by the Court as opportunity offered. I would now beg to urge on the Government the necessity of having these lands gazetted, and that a Court be held in the district without delay. I would state, in regard to the quality and means of opening up of these lands, that a great portion of the country is fully up to the average grazing country on the East Coast, and could be opened up by roads at no great outlay; to accomplish this end careful exploration would be necessary. I have stated in previous reports on this district that a dray road could be made by way of the oil springs, from Poverty Bay to Waiapu, which, with branch roads to the coast, would be the means of opening up these lands for settlement. A bridle road has been made from Poverty Bay to Wairoa through the lands being purchased, of such a grade that at not a great expense it could be turned into a passable dray road. I would point out one great difficulty, besides the important question of minority, to be met in dealing with lands passed under "The Native Lands Act, 1873,"—namely, the number of persons to be dealt with in the memorial of ownership in some cases amounting to over 300, of all ages and sex, and without proportionate shares having been allotted. This is also most unfair