

TUESDAY, 2ND OCTOBER, 1877.

Mr. WILLIAM HENRY GRACE examined.

172. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation, Mr. Grace?—I am a licensed Native interpreter.

173. In what district?—In Napier.

174. Have you any knowledge of the Thames District?—Yes, I know the Thames District very well.

175. Do you know the Waitoa District?—Yes.

176. Do you know the land claimed by Mr. Whitaker on the Lower Piako?—Yes.

177. Extending to about 14,000 acres?—I should say quite that.

178. Are there no Natives residing on that land just now?—There are on some parts of it on the Piako side.

179. Had Mr. Whitaker any difficulty in occupying this land?—I believe it must have been only within quite lately that he got a proper title. I know that until within twelve months ago the title was not complete.

180. Do you know the reason of that?—The land, I believe, was not passed through the Court. The Maoris say Europeans have got it. I suppose they mean Mr. Whitaker and others.

181. Have the Natives an attachment for that Maukoro Block?—Yes, because I have heard them say they want to exchange another block for that.

182. Have you heard whether any exchange has been made by Mr. Whitaker with those Natives?—It has been talked about. I am not positive whether it has been carried out. There are some Natives at Shortland who claim the piece of land. They have offered to exchange Te Punga with Mr. Whitaker. That block was passed through the Court lately, and, through some cause, one or two Natives who ought to be in the Crown grant are left out. They have applied for a rehearing, and the other Natives are trying to prevent that, because they think that if they got into the grant there would be a difficulty in making the exchange. They consider the other block better than the Punga Block, because it is nearer their old settlements.

183. Are you aware that the Natives made it a condition of selling any land to the Government, that Mr. Whitaker should surrender this Maukoro Block in exchange for the Punga?—I never heard.

184. From your knowledge of the Natives, do you think it possible for the Government to have bought land from the Natives without making it a condition to get a certain portion in exchange?—I think the sound of that kind of thing appears more to come from the Europeans than the Maoris.

185. Do you think there would have been any difficulty in the Government acquiring this land, if they had not agreed to give the Natives this block in exchange for the Punga?—No difficulty. From my experience in the Thames District, I notice that private individuals seem always to get the pick of the land, and the Government is palmed off with the bad land. Mr. Whitaker is high up in the interior, and the Government are buying all the land flooded by the rivers.

186. Do you know any dry land on that block which the Government are trying to acquire?—Only a little. I wrote some letters which I published in the *Thames Advertiser* about this subject. I inquired what the quality of the land was, and what the Government were paying for it, saying that this country was a sea and perfectly useless for anything. There must be ten or twelve feet of water over it in the winter time.

187. This adjoins the old claim of Mr. Whitaker's, which has been returned to the Natives?—Yes.

188. And you state that the land which Mr. Whitaker has to get on Te Punga is good land?—A great deal of it is good flat land.

189. Mr. Mackay stated in evidence that the eastern half of this Punga Block belonged to different tribes, and therefore it was not in the power of the Natives to give that in exchange?—The Ngatitamatera tribe claim a portion of it, and I should think the Te Aroha Natives might have a claim.

190. Then is this part that the Ngatitamatera own the best land in the Punga Block. The Ngatitamatera land is all good land. You get out of wet country and get on to dry at Te Punga.

191. Do you think the Government could have bought this Punga Block without making any exchange with Mr. Whitaker?—Well, I suppose that if the Government chose to go about buying it, they could have.

192. Are you aware whether this country was proclaimed under the Immigration and Public Works Act?—All this country was proclaimed under that Act, and private individuals were precluded from buying. That is what the land agents and Natives complained about. I do not quite recollect how the boundaries go at this part.

193. I should like your opinion as to the dry land of this 200,000-acre block. Is it of any value?—When you get down there [points to map], it is hilly country. The land gets inferior as you get there. It is a yellow clay underneath. Directly you get on the hilly country it is not good land. I should imagine it is kauri gum land, but I have only looked at it from a distance. A steamer used to go up here [points to map].

194. From your knowledge of the country, what would you estimate the comparative value between the Punga land and the balance of this 200,000 acres?—I would not take a lot of that Government land at a gift.

195. What would you sell Punga for now, if you were selling to Europeans?—When Mr. Mackay sold his land I believe he got £7 and £8 an acre for it. That is the current report. Mackay's land is just on the opposite side of the river. I should consider all the land about here is worth at least £1 an acre.

196. And you think it is available for settlement?—Yes.

197. And this other land not?—Most of it is not; it is not drainable. Then the dry land is inferior.

198. I should like to ask you about the block bought by Morrin Brothers?—That is good land.

199. Would it not have been possible for the Government to have bought that?—Most of that land could have been bought by the Government, because these people have only come in within the last few years.