

392. Well, judging from the figures you give us, I suppose wool would require to go up 3d. a lb. before you could pay working expenses, without taking into consideration the interest on the money at all?—Wool would have to go up very much.

393. About 3d. a lb.?—Yes; quite so.

394. Your average clipping is 6 lbs.?—5½ lbs.

395. Well, of course, unless wool goes up materially, it means certain loss?—Yes.

396. Is not your case analogous to that of all the other Crown tenants?—To a great many of them.

397. To a majority of them?—Yes.

398. You are strongly of opinion that this arbitrary and capricious method of dividing the country has been very prejudicial?—It has not been prejudicial to us in these two instances, for we got most of it back, but we had to pay for it.

399. It puts the bidder at a disadvantage at auction sales?—It puts the holder at a disadvantage.

400. The bidder also. He does not know, in bidding for one section, what he has to give for the whole?—Yes, that is so.

401. Do you consider the mapping out of the country in this arbitrary way as being prejudicial?—Yes, it is prejudicial.

402. *Mr. Brown.*] I suppose these petitioners have met together prior to petitioning?—Yes; we had a meeting in Dunedin.

403. Can you give the Committee any information as to what kind of relief would best suit them?—Of course practical relief would be reduction of rents. How that is to come about is more than I can say.

404. Have you anything to suggest to the Committee?—My own idea is that each case should be taken upon its merits. We have got some runs in our part of the country in which the rents are very fair, and on which I do not object to paying the rental. We are not making money on the runs, but we hope to make it if wool goes up again. The rental is fair.

405. In other cases, would half the present rental be a fair rental?—Yes.

406. That would now be a fair rental?—I think so; but this is an exceptionally bad year.

407. Messrs. Boyd are petitioners—are they suffering any great loss?—They are not our constituents; I cannot tell you.

408. I see several names of reputedly wealthy men who have made a deal of money?—I should think they have.

409. Have made their money by grazing stock?—Yes.

410. So that you are only able to speak, I suppose, of those cases in which you are the attorneys?—Yes; those with which we are intimately acquainted, and no others.

411. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] If there had been no subdivision, the occupation of the runs would have been confined to a very few people?—Yes.

412. The subdivision tended to bring in competition on the part of smaller people?—Yes.

413. Do you think the upset price for the subdivided land was excessive?—No, not all round. I do not think you could take any one subdivision and work it by itself.

414. You think the Morven Hills Run exceptionally situated in respect of subdivisions?—Yes.

415. *Mr. Whyte.*] You said they were not capable of being worked by themselves. Had the subdivision the effect of running up the prices and increasing competition?—It did increase the competition for the adjoining blocks required to work the other blocks.

416. In fact, you could not work the blocks by themselves separately, as they were distant from each other?—Yes, it was impossible to do so.

417. *Mr. Lake.*] In speaking of remedial measures proposed just now, do you not think that the State as landlords should contribute a certain share of the cost of rabbiting, and, if so, would not that be a considerable relief?—I think they should. We are keeping down rabbits that come out of Government land.

418. In fact, you are keeping down the rabbits and increasing the value of the Government land in view of the next letting?—Yes. All this land belongs to the Government now. There are rabbits on it; they come through the fences, and we have to keep them down.

419. *The Chairman.*] The suggestion you make is that each case should be taken on its merits, and reduction made according to the non-paying quality of the runs?—Yes; that a Commission should be appointed to inquire into each individual case, and take evidence upon it.

420. *Mr. McKenzie.*] There was something said about a sliding scale—that the Government should reduce the rents at the present depressed time, and should the price of wool go up again the rents should be increased. Would you consider such a system as that advantageous?—If the rentals were on what I call a fair basis it would; but in these two cases we never could pay the present rental.

421. The fact of the matter is, it never paid you since 1882?—No, it never paid us.

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Mr. JAMES HENRY PRESTON in attendance, and examined.

422. *The Chairman.*] What locality are you in?—Maniototo.

423. Will you make a statement to the Committee regarding the run, and the statements contained in the petition?—The run is No. 203A, B, and C. There are three runs for which I pay an annual rental of £1,005. The area is 21,000 odd acres. I find that the rent is more than I can now take out of the land. In fact, I am in arrears in payment of one of the leases at present. I asked the Government to allow me to surrender this run, upon which I have not paid the last half-year's rent. They refused to accept my surrender, and informed me that if I did not pay I should be sum-