

quantity being increased, that it would pay the Government very well to purchase the line. It is clearly an extension of the main line. I should not like to say that it should be continued further but I do not think it is likely that it will be ever contemplated to continue it from the end of the Nightcaps section.

3. *Mr. Montgomery.*] What is the distance along the Government line that this wool has to go to the nearest shipping-place?—It is about forty-five miles to the Bluff.

4. The line is two to three miles long, and then the wool and grain has to be carried forty-five miles to the Bluff?—Yes.

5. If there were no Nightcaps line would not the wool and grain go by the Government line all the same?—There would be so much further to cart it, and probably a good deal of it would be delivered at Otautau, instead of Wairio, because there are no roads to Wairio.

6. It would go by the Government railway to the shipping-port, in any case?—Yes. I think, in some cases, so far as wool and crops are concerned, instead of their being brought to Nightcaps they would be brought to Otautau, and, of course, the railway would lose so much mileage.

7. It would go a shorter distance on the Government line?—Yes.

8. So that the branch line to Nightcaps probably causes more traffic on the Government line than if it were not there?—Yes, it does—it attracts traffic to the Government line.

9. *Mr. Cowan.*] Is it your opinion that the branch line to Nightcaps should be taken as an extension of the main line?—Yes, I think so.

10. We have it in evidence that this terminus at Nightcaps serves fifty thousand acres of agricultural land: do you corroborate that?—I estimate it at more, because there are seventeen thousand acres in the hands of men that own from 160 to 200 acres, and forty or fifty thousand in the hands of larger owners. No doubt, in time this would be cut up. Half of the deferred-payment land is not broken up yet, so that there would be a large increase in the grain-traffic.

11. We have it from the railway returns that 355 tons of grain were despatched from Nightcaps last year: do you consider that to be an increasing quantity?—I should think so, for the reason I stated before—that the land is not all broken up, and also that we had a very bad season last year.

12. Do you know anything about the permanency of this coalfield?—There is any amount of coal there. I suppose the seam is 25ft. or 30ft. thick.

13. Can you say, of your own knowledge, if there is any likelihood of this coalfield collapsing?—I do not think there is any likelihood of it.

14. Therefore the coal-traffic is likely to be permanent?—Yes.

15. Can you tell the Committee where is the nearest supply of coal that competes with the Nightcaps coal?—The Orepuki coal competes with it. That is about the same distance from Invercargill as Nightcaps is. No other coal competes except Kaitangata, which is a very much greater distance away—I suppose 110 or 120 miles.

16. Do you know that the coal company receive any consideration for this large traffic carried on this branch?—No; the Government take all receipts.

17. Looking at it from an equitable point of view, is it your opinion that the line should be purchased?—I think so. I think it is part and parcel of the Government line. They work it just the same as the other lines, and the coal company pays for the carriage of the coal as if it was a Government line. I think the Government should purchase it.

18. Are you aware of the offer that has been made to the Government?—I know it has been offered, but I could not say the price: about £7,000, I think.

19. It is about £7,224. Four per cent. on that amount would be £288. Do you consider that an excessive amount for the Government to take over the line at?—No, I do not think so.

20. Can you give the Committee any idea of the number of settlers this Nightcaps terminus serves?—There are in the riding 330 settlers, and nearly two-thirds of them are served by the Nightcaps line.

21. You have been Chairman of the County Council?—Yes.

22. In the matter of saving money for roads, is this branch line a consideration?—There is no doubt about that. There has not been any money expended on the main road, owing to this railway being there, and all the outer roads leading to the Nightcaps have been made, thus making two distinct roads, one north-west and the other south-west.

23. You consider that the possession of this line by the Government would be tantamount to a saving of public money to the ratepayers in the way of road-making?—There is no doubt of that. If the company shut up the line the county would have to make the main road to Wairio Station, and it is parallel with the railway.

24. *Dr. Newman.*] Are the people in the district anxious that the Government should buy the line?—I can state that I presented a petition from 180 settlers there, asking for accommodation at the Nightcaps, and if it could not be granted that the Government should buy the line.

Mr. MAXWELL examined.

1. *Mr. Dargaville.*] There is a question I should like to ask with reference to the Whauwhau line—Were you in your present position when that line was constructed?—Yes.

2. Are you aware that the Government proposed to construct it under the supposition that it was less than one mile long, and that they could have constructed it without any special legislation?—No, I am not aware that that is the case. I believe the company had some difficulty about the land, and that was the reason for constructing it under Act.

3. Was not Mr. Vickerman sent by the Government to make a survey of the line?—I should only be speaking from hearsay if I answer that; but I believe the Government had sent an engineer, and that the line was constructed by the Government for the company. That is what I understood.

4. And you cannot say whether or not it was upon finding that the line was more than a mile long, and that they could not construct it without special legislation, that they then required the