

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 18TH JULY, 1888.

Mr. J. D. ORMOND, M.H.R., examined.

*Mr. Ormond* : I wish to give evidence chiefly because I have been requested to do so by the settlers who have petitioned the House against further expenditure upon the Gisborne Harbour works. The settlers—I refer to those living in the north part of Cook County—who have petitioned the House say in that petition that when the loan was raised for the harbour at Gisborne, and they were made parties to the rating district, it was with the intention, as set forth in the Bill, of making a harbour which would be of value to them as well as to the other parts of the district ; that the plan which was then approved, and, under the Bill, was to be carried out, has been entirely departed from ; and the works now going on, if carried to the extreme limit recommended by Mr. Higginson in his report, would be of no value at all to the petitioners. They would have no interest, direct or indirect, in such an expenditure, and they would be taxed heavily for a work in which they are not interested. These are the grounds they submit. If, as recommended by Mr. Higginson in his report, another £40,000 were spent upon this harbour, granting that all would go well, it would only admit of a small vessel of the size of the little steamer “Australia” going alongside. This same steamer, the “Australia,” calls at all ports north of Gisborne, which these settlers use. She calls at three different places—the centres of the district in which these settlers live. Therefore it will be manifest to the Committee that they can have no possible interest in this work. That puts, as shortly as I can, the case of the petitioners. I would wish to say that, although I have not signed the petition, on account of my being a member of the House, I am one of the people who have an interest in this district. I have a piece of property there. I believe the petition has been signed by every person who is in that rating district. I may say they did not raise any protest at the time the loan was raised for the reason already given, because the work which was projected was of a different character altogether. Had the original work been carried out, the wool-vessels, which would have been the only benefit gained by these settlers by the carrying-out of this work, would have been enabled to get alongside the wharf or under the shelter of the work. It is not pretended that the extension of the present work will enable wool-vessels to get alongside.

1. *Mr. Ross*.] Can you explain why the original plan was departed from?—I cannot. I only know that the work has been shifted from the place originally intended, as set forth in the preamble of the Bill. The preamble of the Bill of 1884 distinctly sets forth that the Gisborne Harbour Board “are desirous of constructing certain harbour works, to afford accommodation generally to shipping of a large tonnage, and to form a harbour of refuge for the East Coast.” If the Committee would allow me I would put briefly before them the monetary position of the Gisborne Harbour Board at the present time. The Board was authorised to raise a loan of £200,000 ; that loan was raised, and the money came into the hands of the Board. From that money immediately was deducted a sinking fund of £25,000. I do not know whether that was authorised or not ; at any rate, it was done.

*Mr. Graham* : Yes ; it was authorised.

*Mr. Ormond* : It was authorised afterwards, I believe, by the Act of last session. That Act also authorised an amount of £14,941, which was some debt or overdraft of the Board, for other purposes than those for which the loan was raised. I will support my statement by Mr. Higginson’s figures. On page 5 of his report, in section 2, he says, “The amount of the loan set apart for works being £175,000, as £25,000 was reserved on account of a sinking fund. The amount set apart for the work has also been reduced by the sum of £14,941 6s. 8d., which has been charged to loan, as provided in the Amendment Act, 1884, leaving available £160,058 13s. 4d.” Thus, after deducting the two sums mentioned, there is a balance available, as Mr. Higginson states, of £160,000. Then, on the same page, a little above, you will see what Mr. Higginson says as to the amount that will require to be expended before the works will be of service to shipping. “The steamship ‘Australia,’” he says, “which is a regular trader to the port, draws 11ft., consequently would require 15ft. alongside the pier. In order to obtain this the work must be extended another 1,000ft., where there is 13½ft. to sand and 17ft. to rock. It is possible that the tidal scour will increase the depth, so that at that distance 15ft. would be available. The Engineer estimates that the cost of the work up to this point will be £101,000.”

2. *Mr. Ross*.] The amount expended already is £60,000, I think?—Yes, £60,000. That would leave a balance unexpended, supposing these works were authorised, of £59,000. Then, Mr. Higginson, in the instructions given him, was directed to report as to the ability of the district to pay interest on the loan ; and if the Committee will turn to page 7 of his report, which is, I think, a fair one, they will see what he says on the subject. The estimated expenditure for this year he sets down at £13,678, and the estimated receipts—port charges and dues, and interest on balance of loan—at £8,465, leaving a deficiency of £5,000. This deficiency will be made up—at least, not quite—by the rate of 1d. in the borough, and ½d. in the county, which is being levied at the present time.