

126. *Mr. Ormond.*] A very important question was put to you by the Minister of Lands, and, in reply to him, you said there was generally sufficient land kept open in Otago for settlement purposes?—Where land was available for settlement, it has been continuously under survey for settlement.

127. *Mr. J. McKenzie.*] Is it not a fact that the Otago Land Board, in February last, had been petitioned by people in Shag Valley, asking that a run to be sold should be retained for settlement purposes?—There was a petition in connection with opening some land in the Shag Valley, and that petition was not complied with. The request of the petitioners was not complied with.

128. Can you state to the Committee if there is any land in that locality open for settlement at the present time?—I do not think there is much; in fact, there is little or none.

129. Is that the very district in Otago where the land has always been readily taken up for settlement—Shag Valley and the whole of the country about there?—There has been a large area of land taken up for settlement of one kind or another there. It is a very poor district, I think, in some parts.

130. Notwithstanding that, the land has always been taken up?—Yes; but we have still some sections lying vacant.

131. Not near?—Oh yes! in Dunbuck.

132. Will you give us a return of the number of sections you have in that country for settlement?—I would require to get a note of those matters you require a return of.

133. You said you had sufficient power under the Land Act of 1885 to inquire into dummyism?—Yes, as far as dummyism upon land taken up under conditions of settlement is concerned.

134. You have stated that there were no applications made for speculative purposes, to the best of your knowledge?—I said generally that it was a mere bagatelle what were taken up for that purpose.

135. How did you come to know that?—Well, you can generally judge very well. Almost all the sections, as far as I can see, are applied for by settlers in the country. The great majority of the applications are put in by settlers who have already land in the country, and who desire to increase their holdings.

136. You have stated that you cannot say what the New Zealand and Australian Land Company were going to do with their land: how could you say so in that case and not state the same in regard to other land?—They bought the land for cash; there were no conditions at all attached to the holding of it.

137. Your general answer is that you have sufficient power to prevent dummyism and inquire into it?—Yes, to inquire into dummyism in connection with the applications for land under settlement conditions.

138. Are there any recommendations you could make to this Committee which would be the means of stopping any dummyism that exists?—I do not know that I could suggest the Board being vested with greater powers than they have at present; they are very large and complete.

139. But in the case of proved dummyism, are there no other penalties that might be applied?—No; the penalties are very grave as they stand. Making a false declaration is made a misdemeanour, and the person guilty of such an offence is liable to eighteen months' imprisonment.

140. But there seems to be no person to take notice of these false declarations: is not that a fact?—The Board takes notice.

141. It is not part of the Board's business?—The Board has never suggested criminal proceedings; it has satisfied itself with forfeiture.

142. Do you not think it would be a good thing, when people are known to make false declarations, to have them punished publicly for it? Would not that assist in preventing dummyism?—It would, possibly.

143. Here is a letter from one of those people who made oath before you at the Land Board in Dunedin—Gilliand—in which he stated that he had applied for this land for his own use and benefit. He afterwards stated on oath in the Supreme Court that the evidence he gave on that occasion was false: well, he must have made a false oath in the Supreme Court, or else he must have made a false one before the Land Board?—I think so.

144. Is not that a case which the Government should inquire into and punish the man who made that false declaration?—I would not take upon myself to say how far the Government is required to take proceedings against him. He appears to be a man entirely unworthy of credence; you would not know which end to begin at.

145. If the law provided that this man should now be punished, would it not deter others from doing the same sort of thing?—I think, if a man has stated what you say he said, he certainly does deserve punishment.

146. Would not that deter others from doing the same thing in future?—It might.

147. *Mr. Smith.*] Have you any suggestion to make to this Committee that the applications which you admit are made for several sections by several persons cannot be stopped?—You might mitigate it. The great matter would be to minimise the temptation as far as possible; that would be the first thing.

148. *Mr. Ormond.*] How?—Well, I would open land surveyed into areas suitable to the character of the land, so that if a man got one section he would be satisfied, and not want to get a chance of a lot of other sections. If inferior land, it could be cut into large sections, and applicants might be confined in making their applications to the area which by law they were entitled to take up. I think that would be a good thing to do. At the present time a man may make application for sections all over a block, and that he does so is a matter of fact.

149. *Mr. Smith.*] Can you amend the law so as to prevent this?—You can amend the law so as not to allow a man to apply for more land than he is entitled to take up. At present there is nothing to prevent him from making application for any number of sections.