

Statement respecting the Reserves between Tirotiromoana, near Hawera, and the White Cliffs, of which Portions have been leased by the Public Trustee.

When "The West Coast Settlement Reserves Act, 1881," was introduced, it was intended that there should be only one trustee of the reserves, under the designation of "The West Coast Settlement Reserves Trustee," who was to have the entire control and management of the reserves; but before it finally passed the House of Representatives there was a crude amendment made in section 8 appointing the Public Trustee to have the control in question, and the Reserves Trustee to be his deputy. This will be seen by the confused definitions of their relative positions as set forth in the Act in question, and which had to be set right (1) by section 9 of "The West Coast Settlement Reserves Act 1881 Amendment Act, 1883," and, (2) when that Act was repealed, by "The West Coast Settlement Reserves Act 1881 Amendment Act, 1884" (*vide* sections 3, 5, 6, and 7). It will be further seen by the last-mentioned section (7) that the West Coast Settlement Reserves Trustee had special duties devolving on him in the administration of the reserves.

Early in 1882 I was appointed, under section 8 of "The West Coast Settlement Reserves Act, 1881," the Reserves Trustee, and my special business was to carry out the provisions of sections 8, 9, 11, and 12, and the regulations to be made under section 4 of the said Act. In order to carry out the instructions contained in the latter part of section 8 as to consulting the leading Natives regarding the lands to be leased of any reserve, I had, as soon as the survey staff of the West Coast Commission had completed the block survey thereof, a plan enlarged to the scale of 10 chains to the inch, and lithographed (see attached specimen marked A), which I transmitted, along with a circular in English and Maori (see attached copy marked B), and a copy of the Act of 1881 in Maori (see attached copy marked C), to the principal resident chief of the hapu to which such reserve had been granted. After giving him and his people sufficient time to discuss amongst themselves the questions referred to in the circular, I visited their settlement accompanied by my interpreter, and in every case between Tirotiromoana and Stoney River—in all, twenty-three reserves—I succeeded in getting the Natives to agree to the leasing of certain portions of their lands, they retaining mostly one-third, and in several cases much more, of the best for their pas and cultivations. I also got agreements signed by the principal chiefs in the form attached (marked D), as well as got them to mark on the plans the exact position of the lands they wished to reserve for themselves, and what they wished to lease. These plans formed the basis for the survey and subdivision by the Survey Department of the lands for leasing, as well as for the portions the Natives had reserved for themselves, coloured respectively pink and yellow, as shown on the attached specimen plan marked E. As soon as these plans were ready the several sections comprised in each (coloured pink) were inspected and classed by me, then assessed at an upset rental, and advertised for leasing under the directions contained in the regulations of February, 1883. The first batch of leases were tendered for in April, 1883, and so great at the time was the desire of many persons to become lessees of the various sections which had been advertised that there were a number of cases of six and seven tenderers for one section at considerable advances over the upset rent. In three cases where the upset rent was put at 10s. for first-class land, tenders ranged from 10s. 4d. to 16s.* (see schedule of the tenders now exhibited to the Committee). Appended is a schedule showing the disposal of the lands of the several reserves between Tirotiromoana, near Hawera, and the White Cliffs, which shows that out of a total acreage of 151,564, granted to 3,237 grantees, 34,122 acres have been leased by the Public Trustee, 14,877 acres advertised but not leased, and that 102,565 acres remain in the hands of the Natives. This should dispose of the allegations made in the Native petitions that numbers of them "have been left landless." Further, the aggregate number of the grantees of the several reserves is no criterion that they are distinct individuals, as there are many instances of names being down on one or more grants, as well as superfluous names—in fact, if there were a strict census taken of the names on every grant, it would be found that out of a total of 5,289 grantees, two-fifths would be composed of persons who had, strictly speaking, no title whatever to be placed on any grant—see the following particulars respecting the position of the grants:—

When the West Coast Commissioner, Sir William Fox, requested the leading Natives of the several hapus for whose benefit reserves were to be set apart under section 4 of "The West Coast Settlement (North Island) Act, 1880," to send in lists of the several persons whom they considered were beneficially interested therein, these leading Natives, being under the impression that, as "The Native Land Act, 1873," section 24, provided "that reserves made under that Act should be equal to an aggregate of 50 acres per head for every Native man, woman, and child resident on the land to be reserved," they would get a larger block reserved for them than they were strictly entitled to if they would swell out the lists in question, hence they put down not only the names of those who were properly entitled to be on the lists, but, in addition, the names of others, some being distant relatives of the leading Natives, but not resident on the land to be reserved, and others friends who might be on a visit at their pas on the days such lists were being discussed and made out. This, as well as the names of several of these three classes already composing the lists of one hapu being also for the same reason put down on more than one of the lists of neighbouring hapus, had the effect of swelling out many of the lists in question much beyond the legitimate numbers that should have been placed on them, and will account for the aggregate number of grantees on almost every grant being so much greater than the actual aggregate population of the relative hapus for which such grants have been issued. It so happened, however, that the basis of calculation they expected would be adopted was not taken into account at all when the respective acreage of their reserves were decided on. This has led to a great deal of disgust amongst them—

* NOTE.—The rents of the sections alluded to have been since temporarily reduced, and at present they are subleased, it is understood, for a term of years at 10s. an acre, being the original upset rent placed on them by the writer.