

HENLEY, THURSDAY, 26TH FEBRUARY, 1891.

Commission opened.

The Commissioner explained the object of the inquiry, and requested the parties to furnish a list of names of the present residents, to enable the information to be compiled relative to the sufficiency or non-sufficiency of land possessed by them. The people were also informed that the inquiry relative to the Otakou Block would be held at Otakau Heads on the 4th March next. Lists of names furnished and read out.

Tieke Kona and others spoke of the insufficiency of the land allotted to the half-castes, who were unable to obtain a living on it, but were compelled to earn a livelihood by obtaining work from the European settlers at shearing and harvesting. The Taieri Reserve was very inferior land, and a great deal of it was too precipitous to be used. Part of the block was let at a low rent to the Henley Company. The only part fit for cultivation was the few acres around their dwellings. The Natives were debarred from eeling in the River Taieri, owing to its being stocked with trout. Had no eeling-place. A lagoon towards Waipouri, where they used to go, was now hemmed in by European holdings, and if they went there they were turned off. Were badly off for fishing-places. Could not state whether the people found at Taieri by Mr. Mantell in 1853 had a right to the Otakou Block. Had heard that these people had formerly migrated from Kaiapoi. Believed that Hakaraia te Raki had a right through the *tuku* to him, and that his relatives had settled down alongside him. The only persons unable to get a living by their own exertions were Martin Koroko and Tom Brown. The latter was afflicted with asthma, and unable to work. The others were just able to live, and that was all. Were much inconvenienced for the want of medical attendance. Nearly all the people were indebted to the tradesmen.

Commission adjourned, to open at Waikouaiti on the 2nd March.

WAIKOUAITI, MONDAY, 2ND MARCH, 1891.

Commission opened at Waikouaiti.

Commission read out, and the object and scope explained to the persons present.

Hoani Matiu asked the Commissioner whether he was authorised to settle the Ngaitahu claim; and if not, what was proposed to be done.

Tame Parata stated that the people were of opinion that all the business connected with the Otakou Block should be completed before an attempt was made to commence the work pertaining to Kemp's purchase.

The Commissioner, in reply, pointed out that this was a matter that he was best judge of; the arrangement of the work, and the time and place where it should be carried out, were matters entirely under his control; and, while he was both willing and desirous to consult their convenience, it was impossible to perceive how the non-completion of the inquiry in regard to the Otakou Block could affect the matter.

Patrick Lahee stated that the people after hearing the Commission read out were dissatisfied, as the authority conferred on the Commissioner was so limited; and had they known before they would have taken steps to have the matter remedied, or else prevented the inquiry from being held. The Commissioner pointed out that it would be very impolitic on their part to place any obstacles in the way of the Commission being held because they did not agree entirely with the terms of it. The best course the Natives could pursue under the circumstances, and in furtherance of their interests, was to lend the Commissioner all the assistance they could afford in order to make this part of the matter as complete as possible.

Hoani Matiu stated that the people were weary of the continual delay. The Government was well acquainted with the nature of their grievance, but seemed to find some reason for continually postponing the settlement of it. It had the appearance that the object was to delay matters until the Natives had all died out. Their old people had nearly all gone, the few that were left when the land was alienated to the Europeans could now be easily counted. All the principal men who had taken a prominent part in the past to effect a settlement of their claims had all passed away, and it would seem that the object was merely to pacify and amuse the people until they all died out. Probably this was the object of the periodical counting (taking the census); Government were anxious to ascertain how long it would be before the race was extinct. There had been numerous inquiries into their condition and the nature of their claims, and nothing had come of it. Their first attempt to obtain justice was manifested by holding a meeting and subscribing money to aid Taiaroa in establishing their claim. A considerable sum had been collected for this purpose, but no good had resulted from their efforts. Next a Commission was appointed to inquire into the matter, and sittings were held by Messrs. Smith and Nairn in various localities to ascertain their grievances. The Commissioners reported on their case but nothing came of it. Another Commission was held in 1887, but beyond it having been under consideration for the last three years (sessions), no benefit had resulted; and now another inquiry was being held. All this was very perplexing, and appeared to the Natives from their standpoint to be entirely useless, as Government, if it intended to do justice in the matter, were already fully aware of their obligations; and why did they not fulfil them instead of perpetually finding some reason for postponing a settlement.

Tame Parata, M.H.R., stated that he had interviewed the Premier before leaving Wellington about the insufficient authority conferred on the Commissioner, and that the Hon. Mr. Ballance had told him that the best plan was to allow the inquiry to proceed, and if it was found that the matter was insufficiently grappled with, that further action could be taken to carry out matters satisfactorily; consequently he had refrained from pressing the matter further, but would take the opportunity when the report came before Parliament of pointing out any defects that might exist in it. He thought it was unwise now to offer any obstruction to the work being carried out; it would be much more to the purpose for them to aid the Commissioner to obtain all the information requisite to place their case fully before Parliament.