

*Mr. Rennell:* You asked the question just now whether I thought the Natives had sufficient land for themselves. If the reference was to the Natives in the West Coast Settlement Reserves, I should say they have sufficient land. I hardly think, however, it would be wise to grant, indiscriminately, new leases of the Native land around the town of New Plymouth itself. There they have not sufficient land, or at any rate, nothing too much.

*Mr. Rees.]* You think that very great care would have to be exercised in granting any more leases of this land?—Yes.

*Mr. Carroll:* Perhaps Mr. Rennell might make this distinction more clear.

*Mr. Rees.]* Yes. You might make distinct the areas of land which you mean, and the districts in which they are situated—the two distinct classes?—In respect of the land operated on by the Native Reserves Act around the district of New Plymouth, I consider the Natives have none too much land there.

Here is a plan. Now, which are the lands in which you think it is imperatively necessary that great caution should be used if any more land is to be leased?—Here is a map on a larger scale of the lands around New Plymouth.

Of the two classes of land to be considered, the first is lands that are not over-abundantly supplied to the Natives. Now, within what radius of New Plymouth, or about what radius, do these lands lie?—About three miles.

From three to four miles, I suppose you would say?—Yes; about from three to four miles.

Now, outside that limit, and in relation to the West Coast reserves—the larger areas shown on this plan—what do you say?—I say that generally they are more than ample for the requirements of the Natives. There may be special cases in which it would be as well to go no further in the way of leases even there.

But still there are lands reserved on the outside limit more than sufficient for the use and for the cultivations of the Natives for whom those lands were appropriated?—Yes.

*Mr. Mackay:* You say, Mr. Smith, that Natives have come to you wishing you to exert your influence to enable them to lease more of their lands. Now, where are those lands situated?

*Mr. Smith:* On the Ngatimaru Block; and I may tell you that the other day a deputation from the Clifton County Council waited on me—in fact, I rather went out to meet them. They are making a proposal to the Government praying them to acquire these lands as being unoccupied and lying idle, and the Maoris are willing to lease to the Government, and the young men living about Tikorangi are willing to form a settlement there.

*Mr. Mackay.]* The Native owners and grantees have already come to Mr. Rennell to have that effected on any of the lands under his charge and covered by the West Coast Settlement Reserves Act?—We are not prepared to say what view they take. I only say that these people have been communicating with the Government with the object of inducing them to take steps to acquire this land for the purposes of settlement. The Government have a large block at the back, but these Natives' lands block it. The sons of settlers in the district I have indicated are willing to occupy this land, and the Natives are willing to sell or lease. But without the right to go through the Native land they would not get to the Waitara.

There is no power to sell given by the West Coast Settlement Reserves Acts of 1881 and 1884. These lands can only be leased, and that through the Public Trustee?—That is what they want, and the Natives want the Act amended so that they may be enabled to sell to the Government.

If they want to lease they must come to Mr. Rennell?—Of course, I am not here to say why they do not come to the Government or to Mr. Rennell.

*Mr. Carroll.]* Perhaps they want to lease themselves, instead of through the Government?—I know they would deal with them if they had the power, but these lands are under the operation of the Act.

*Mr. Rennell.]* You allude, Mr. Smith, to the block on the other side of Waitara?—Yes, Tikorangi.

*Mr. Rennell:* There are two blocks there. The Natives will not let. The Government authorised me to treat with them to get them to lease the land, offering to cut it up free of cost if they only allowed part of it to be let. But they declined absolutely. One or two of them whom I have met are willing, but the majority are not. Unless all are prepared to deal, I do not see how the thing can be done, so far as sale is concerned.

*Mr. Carroll:* But you think it would be for the general benefit if the Government did cut up the land free of cost?

*Mr. Rennell:* Undoubtedly, in this case.

*Mr. Rees:* In cases like that, what is the position of such lands—I mean the lands you are speaking of? Are these lands liable for rates?

*Mr. Rennell:* They have been hitherto. I think they are not so now. Hitherto they have been liable to rates, and the rates have been a charge on the lands. At the present time, when the Public Trustee lets the land he is compelled to let it in such a way as to make the incoming tenant pay the rates. I think it would be very much better if the Public Trustee were to let the land and pay the rates out of first rents, as the Natives then would get more money for the land, and it would be much more readily taken up.

*Mr. Mackay.]* What you speak of is owing to the operation of the Crown and Native Lands Rating Act?—Yes. It is the rates that have accrued that have to be provided for.

*Mr. Rees.]* You are hinting at the 10-per-cent. stamp duty?—That does not apply here. It is the arrears of rates.

Money which has been paid by the Government on behalf of the land—heaped up, in fact, on the land—and which has to be paid?—Yes; as a first charge upon the land.