

At Eparaima and in other parts of the district there are lands concerning which we are beset with difficulties. In conclusion I wish success and prosperity to the Commissioners.

*Whata Korari*: I also have something to say with regard to the inquiry which the Commissioners are conducting. I am very pleased indeed to find that the Natives are being consulted, and asked to express their opinions concerning the Native Land Court. I wish to assure the Commissioners that great injury is inflicted upon the Natives in consequence of the operations of this Court, and that the laws controlling and regulating the Native Land Court are the instruments of oppression towards the Natives. I am unable to explain fully and clearly the evils that spring from these Native-land laws. My own opinion, however, is that it would be a good thing for the present assembly of Natives to adjourn and place in writing a statement of their views, and then submit it to the Commissioners; because there is ample time at our disposal, seeing that Parliament does not meet before the 11th June. There is one point with respect to the Native laws that I wish to make clear to the Commissioners. I do not know the particular clause of the Act that I propose to refer to. It is in relation to the power given to the Chief Judge to adjourn the sittings of the Native Land Court from place to place. That practice is very burdensome to the Natives. We have all seen what the real purport of that power is. Let me make this clear to the Commissioners: that of all the cases from Wairarapa to Heretaunga there has been nothing definitely concluded. Before the Court has finished its labours in one district the Chief Judge orders that Court to some other part of the Island, and the cases that are still awaiting or before that Court are then abandoned. These cases have to be abandoned even after the people concerned in them have been put to heavy expense in bringing them before the Court. Despite all this they are left unfinished. The same thing applies to the Court now sitting here. So soon as the Waikopiro case is finished, the Court will adjourn to Marton. What I think should be done is this: When the Court sits in a certain locality it should remain there and conclude its business before leaving. I instance the case of the Waimarama Block. This large and important block has been before the Court for the last three years, and is still undealt-with. Over £8,000 of rent has accrued in respect of that block, and during the time it has been before the Court many of the owners have died, and of course the survivors are unable to touch this money. Some effort is being made to so arrange things that the money shall not come to the people who are entitled to it. Steps are being taken to prevent them getting it. That is the reason why I wish to make it clear to the Commissioners that this power of the Chief Judge to adjourn the Court from place to place is a very weighty matter. We all say, with Henare Matua, that the present Court should sit here until it concludes its business. If, however, it is shifted away before it concludes the business awaiting its determination, great loss will result to the country. If it is to continue travelling about the country as it is now doing all we say is: Do away with it altogether, for it is useless to us. That is the great trouble I see in connection with the law: there are so many blocks of land that cannot be dealt with at all owing to this irregularity. There is another thing that I have noticed: when inquiries are being made by the Court it carries on its investigations at a time when the maps are not authenticated. If decisions are given, then the maps are approved. After the adjudication is concluded, and when the map is approved, there may be £500 in survey-charges—equivalent, perhaps, to 1,000 acres of the land. When a proper survey is subsequently made, it is found that the area is considerably reduced. Instead of 1,000 acres there may be only 700 acres. The survey shows afterwards that the people have paid more than they have got. When the map is put before the Court the area is supposed to be very large, but when the resurvey is made it is found to be very much less. The Court will sometimes award land to the wrong parties, and thus afford facilities for rehearings. This is done with the distinct object of increasing the business of the Court. It should be recognised that we have paid all the costs in the first case, and rehearings should therefore be free. As it is we have to bear the additional expense of the rehearings. There are many other matters of serious complaint. Lawyers who understand very little of Maori come into the Court, and build up cases to the detriment of the Native people. Then, when the case concludes, if the Natives have not the means of paying their lawyers' charges, these lawyers seize upon the land in satisfaction thereof. I object altogether to lawyers and agents appearing in the Native Land Court to make up cases, as it results in great expense to the Natives. The lawyers hold out splendid prospects to the Natives of their ability to win the cases, and they persuade them to sell the land and go on with them, and so on. Then the land is sold to provide for the costs of the lawyers, but when the case comes into the Native Land Court it is found that it cannot be established, and great loss is the result to the individual concerned. That is the way the Native is had on both sides: first he sacrifices his land, and then, when he goes into Court to establish his position, he loses his case. Here, then, are the two great evils that afflict the Natives: first, the Native Land Court; secondly, the lawyers. I therefore indorse what Henare Tomoana said about having a new Court established. Let me explain to the Commissioners circumstances under which adjournments may be made with advantage. Let us suppose there is a Court sitting here at Waipawa and another Court sitting simultaneously in the Wairarapa. Then, let us suppose that some of the people in attendance upon the Court sitting here at Waipawa are also concerned in cases that are being heard by the Court in the Wairarapa. Under such circumstances as these it would be wise to adjourn one of the Courts for the convenience of the Natives who want to attend the sitting of the other Court. To that extent I approve of the principle of adjournment. That is why I think there should be some new arrangement with regard to the sittings of the Court. It should also be made with the view of facilitating a settlement of all cases now in dispute. In fact, there should be some new tribunal for adjusting all existing disputes and troubles. I wish again to express my regards to the Commissioners. I am extremely pleased that the Commissioners have gone among the Natives and ascertained their opinions. As it is, so far as the Natives can judge, the course which the Commissioners are adopting is a satisfactory one. I liken you unto a beautiful maiden.

*Mr. W. H. Grace*: On behalf of a few Europeans who would like to appear before the Commission, I would ask when the Commission would be prepared to grant them a hearing.