

But this was only so recently before this inquiry that I believe instructions have not yet been given for the Receivers of Land Revenue to receive the deposits from these people. I think that is arranged for now, and that authority will be given, if not already given within the last week or two; so I understand there is to be no further difficulty.

25. There was some question as to the company entering into negotiation for an agreement or regulation with the Commissioners of Crown Lands?—The reason why the company took such a course was that in the earlier days any business or negotiations which related to details as against principles were initiated by the company and carried to a certain point with the particular Government officers in whose department the matters lay; among them, the Surveyor-General—*i.e.*, the late Surveyor-General—with whom we had been first brought into contact in making the B 1 valuation for the contract, and in arranging as to how the selections, sales, and surveys were to be carried out. In consequence of an arrangement made with the then Surveyor-General in November, 1888—*i.e.*, shortly after the present contract was signed—it was agreed that the assessment of lands under clause 33, which had to be made by some officer to be appointed by Government, should be made by the Commissioners of Crown Lands of the respective districts, the reason being this this was a more or less formal preliminary step which would have to be referred to the district officer, and it would save an immense loss of time in correspondence which would otherwise have to go from, say, Hokitika or Nelson to Christchurch, from Christchurch to Wellington, back to Hokitika or Nelson, thence to Wellington, and back to Christchurch, and from thence again to Hokitika or Nelson. It was therefore arranged that we should write direct to the Commissioners of Crown Lands in such matters. I was constantly personally engaged in trying for a long time to arrange some system of working the numerous applications under clause 33 of the contract which would be suitable to the company and the Government. Quite recently the company has been requested to deal only with the Wellington office in all land matters, instead of communicating with the local land officers.

26. Did not difficulties arise through the mining reserves and other things? When these difficulties were discussed, proposals were made by the company to different County Councils as to dealing with these lands in the various districts?—Yes; it arose in this way: the Inangahua County Council sent a telegram to the effect that they wished a representative of the company to meet them on the subject of these mining reserves. Consequently, I went to Reefton, and there met to discuss the subject what was called “a Committee of the County Council and inhabitants of Reefton.” That was in January, 1891. I had a long discussion with them as to a certain request that had been made by a previous Government that they should say what lands they thought should be set aside for mining reserves. There had been no instructions given to them as to the lines by which they should be guided in making such recommendations, or as to the purposes for which they were to be made, or the consequences of making them. It was not clear to them whether they were to be only for gold-mining or whether coal or other mining was to be included. They were quite in the dark on the subject. The result was a meeting which lasted half a day, in which I made certain propositions that met their wishes. These propositions, which had been fully approved of by the meeting, were put in draft form, and, after my return to Christchurch, were embodied in a letter dated 6th February, 1891, which was sent to the Inangahua County Council. A similar letter was sent to the Buller, Grey, and Westland County Councils. The Inangahua County Council expressed to the Government their approval of the company's proposals; and the Buller County Council wrote to the company the letter which is here and will be put in with the other correspondence. The Buller, Inangahua, and the Grey County Councils fell in with the company's proposals; the Westland County Council, I think, did not reply. The reply of the Buller County Council is as follows: [Letter read. See Appendix, page 18.] I may say that the pith of the proposition was that, instead of making mining reserves which would prevent settlement, the principle should be that lands which were applied for should be referred to the County Council; that they should be advertised, and plans exposed in certain places. That done, the Council, representing the people, and the public being informed by the advertisements inserted in the local papers, should decide whether the particular pieces of land should be dealt with for settlement or reserved for gold mining. That was thought by the meeting to be the most practical mode of proceeding.

27. *Hon. Mr. Seddon*: Which was that?—It was in the Inangahua District that the meeting was held. This letter is from the Buller County Council. The Grey County Council were in communication with many of the company's officers, and expressed their willingness to concur.

28. In that letter they say that the whole county is more or less auriferous?—Yes; more or less auriferous.

29. *Mr. Wilson*: Did they ultimately withdraw this again, and accept the reserves?—I could not say that from any direct knowledge that I have.

30. You met some of the Inangahua people afterwards?—I had an interview with them.

31. Did they express any opinion as to the possible methods of dealing with the lands in their district after the reserves should have been made? It was understood they could deal with this land?—The meeting I was alluding to was before. I have not since then had any communication with them collectively, but individually I have seen some of them. I have had no direct correspondence with them since then.

32. Did they express any opinion that they could sell the mining reserves after they had been made?—One member did; but he was evidently mistaken.

33. It has been stated that none of this land in the Grey Valley is worth anything for settlement. You know the country: what is your opinion as to its being suitable for settlement?—It is most certainly of use for settlement of one kind or another during a period of years. You will see that there is a certain amount of freehold upon it, and those freeholders are constantly wanting to extend their holdings. The natural features of that country are these: There is the Grey River, also the Inangahua River, forming the principal features of a wide valley. The ground rises from the