

absolutely the property of the tenant, and also the locality value. The locality value is given to the land by settlement, which is paid for by the tenant, and therefore that locality value really belongs to the tenant, and not to the Native owners.

89. You are a selector there?—Yes.

90. When did you select your land?—In 1884.

91. Was there any condition by which part of your improvements should go back to the Natives?—None whatever. The condition under which I took up my land was that improvements up to £5 per acre belong entirely to me; but, as I had 640 acres, I did not at all anticipate that my improvements could ever come up to £5 per acre.

92. Do your improvements come up to £5 per acre?—No.

93. Are there many settlers in the same position as yourself whose improvements are under £5 per acre?—Oh, yes. All the large ones. It is only the small holders who complain under that section.

94. *Mr. Hogg.*] I suppose really the whole complaint may be summed up in two or three words: that the original valuation and consequently the rent is excessive?—Yes; that is one grievance.

95. When were those valuations generally made, two or three years ago in your own case?—There are five, which have been made over a period of more than eleven years.

96. Since the valuations were made do you think the value of land has declined generally?—The real value of the land has declined. I may say that since the valuations were made cattle have gone down very materially; it is almost impossible to keep sheep now; milk has gone down from 3d. to 2½d.; butter is now practically out of the question, but that was a drug in the market last summer. It has been found impossible to grow crops of any kind; their potatoes were all a failure last year. The land is now showing itself in its true colour—it is second-class grazing-land.

97. What the petitioners really want is immediate relief in the shape of reduction of rental?—Yes; and to have these disabilities removed in the shape of insurance.

98. If the petitioners and yourself could secure a revaluation and consequent reduction of rent your object would be served?—No; we ask to be placed under the Land Board.

99. You wish the management to be transferred from the Public Trustee to the Land Board?—Yes.

100. Is not the real object to secure a revaluation and reduction of rent?—No; we simply want the administration of the land to be placed under the Land Board.

101. But, supposing that was done, would not a revaluation be necessary?—No; because a revaluation has already been made in 1891, and has been exhaustively gone into by the Revision Court, therefore there is no need for any further expense to be incurred.

102. But I thought you were dissatisfied with that valuation?—Oh, no, only with the Trustee's valuation. The others were made by competent men.

103. Do you think the land would be better administered by the Land Board?—I have not the slightest doubt about it.

104. Do you think it would be fair to transfer the land in this manner?—I think the Native owners would only be too happy.

105. Are you aware that many of the tenants of the Crown are dissatisfied with the rental they are called upon to pay to the Land Board?—No.

106. *Mr. Meredith.*] I understood you to say that the total cost of the meeting with the Natives for the purpose of conferring on the question of the lease had to be defrayed by the tenant?—It has to be defrayed by the applicant for a new lease.

107. Is no portion borne by the Public Trustee, representing the Natives?—I only have the accounts for our own, and we were charged quite enough to cover the whole cost.

108. But you are not absolutely aware of that?—No.

109. About what distance are those lands from the office of the Land Board in New Plymouth?—My individual land would be about twenty miles away, and some is eighteen miles north of New Plymouth. Some of the land is forty miles distant.

110. Is the Committee then to understand that transferring the office would be a great convenience to the tenants?—Very much so. Officers of the Land Board are constantly travelling over this land, and no extra cost would be added by transferring. There is a large amount of Crown land mixed up with this land.

TUESDAY, 27TH AUGUST, 1895.

W. J. WELLS examined.

111. *The Chairman.*] You are one of the petitioners?—Yes.

112. Will you please give to the Committee any evidence that you may desire to give, avoiding as much as possible travelling over the same ground as the other witnesses?—I will travel over the same ground as shortly as possible. I take a different view of the matter to that which they take. In preface to what I am going to say, I wish it to be understood that, with regard to the Public Trustee personally, I have not the slightest doubt that he carries out his duties in a manner consistent with what his views of the matter is, but the way he has used his powers has not been in the interest of settlement and progress of this country. I am now here to show you such evidence that will conflict with his view of the matter. These leases were taken up in the year 1884, under an Act of Parliament of the year 1881. Now, the majority of persons who take up leases from the Government, or of any public lands, very seldom inquire as to the conditions of those leases. They inquire what they shall have to pay, and as to the termination of the lease, and how they are going to stand. On all other matters in the lease they give very little notice, simply because they are small matters, and hardly ever work out. I was connected with a lease in 1889. I read the lease,