

103. *The Chairman.*] Are you aware that the Receivers of Gold Revenue on the West Coast, acting under the threat of surcharge you have issued to them, are suing and obtaining judgments, and in many instances issuing distress warrants in respect of these arrears?—I have had no official intimation, but I believe it to be the case.

104. Do you not think the Receivers of Gold Revenue ought to have some discretion allowed them in pursuing these lessees for the recovery of the rents—that is to say, to give them reasonable time for the payment?—I think I have instructed the Audit Inspectors in the matter as temperately as I can.

105. Do you not think they should have power to give reasonable time?—That would, I think, require an alteration of the law.

106. Do you not think that the law should be altered in that direction?—I am unable to answer that question. I think I am part of the machinery of the law.

107. Then, you decline to express an opinion on that point, whether the law should or should not be altered to give discretionary power to Receivers?—I would rather not answer that question without thinking over it. At present I am unable to answer it.

108. You have not thought over that?—No.

109. Have you been asked by the Mines Department to delay taking any extreme proceedings?—No, I do not think so. I do not recollect.

110. Have you received any communication from the Minister of Mines, or the Under-Secretary, or any officer of the Mines Department, asking you to delay taking extreme proceedings for the recovery of these rents?—I do not recollect any communication to that effect. My impression is that the Mines Department is desirous not to interfere in the matter.

SATURDAY, 10TH SEPTEMBER, 1898.—(Mr. GUINNESS, Chairman.)

HENRY ALDBOROUGH STRATFORD examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] You are a Stipendiary Magistrate and Warden on the West Coast gold-fields?—Yes.

2. I think as Warden you have two goldfields districts—Westland and Karamea—under your charge?—Yes, both.

3. *Right Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] Was some communication received by you from the Audit Department respecting the giving of a certificate for the issue of licenses?—Through my own department.

4. Briefly inform the Committee what it was?—The request was that I should sign all the monthly returns that were required to be sent up under section 76 of “The Mining Act, 1891,” and I wrote a reply to the Under-Secretary for Mines, for the information of the Minister, substantially to the effect that it would be almost impossible for the Warden to attend all the various Courts for the purpose of signing these returns.

5. Is that the circular [see Exhibit G], Mr. Stratford?—This is 1895. I cannot say I particularly remember this.

6. This [see Exhibit G] is dated 1896 [circular handed to witness]?—I think I do remember this, although it would be filed with the other circulars. But I think I am also justified in adding that it has never been necessary to call me to account for these returns not being sent.

7. You were asked to sign this certificate by the department, in compliance with this circular, and you demurred: is that so?—No. To the best of my belief, I was not. The Minister merely referred to me a communication from the Auditor-General. To the best of my belief, the Minister of Mines never ordered me to sign it.

8. He referred it on to you?—I can confidently say he never ordered me to do so, or I should have endeavoured to comply, or shown him a reason why I could not do so.

9. On receipt of this intimation from the Audit Department through the Minister of Mines you replied that you could not see your way to sign the returns?—Yes.

10. Will you give the Committee your ground for doing so?—Simply because I have a large number of offices to attend to, and I would decline to sign the return unless I myself could in the first place ascertain if it was correct from the records in the office. It could be sent to me by the Mining Registrar wherever I was stationed, but I would not sign it unless I saw it was correct before I put my signature to it. I do not visit my different sub-districts and offices regularly once a month, and consequently the returns would be behind. I was afraid there would be confusion. I may add that under the Mining Acts of 1886 and 1891 I have never been asked to check this work by subordinate officers, and have never had any complaint from my officers.

11. Section 76 of “The Mining Act, 1891,” says, “The Warden shall in each month cause to be transmitted to the Minister copies or abstracts of all licenses issued by him during the previous month, together with a memorandum of every transfer, forfeiture, or other transaction made during such previous month and affecting any licenses issued at any time previous thereto.” What has been the practice hitherto, prior to the receipt of this intimation from the Audit Department through the Minister of Mines?—That the Mining Registrar at the end of each month sent this return to the Under-Secretary for Mines.

12. He can only issue these licenses after you have granted them in open Court?—They are issued by the Warden subject to the approval of the Minister of Mines.

13. And the Registrar on its return, if ordered to be granted, refers it to the Warden?—After the Warden has sat and made his grant the Registrar forwards it to the Survey Department to have a map put on it, and then he forwards it to me, so that there is no time lost wherever I may be. It is then signed by the Warden and forwarded to the Minister for his approval.

14. This does not take place in regard to licensed holdings—you are referring to special claims?—No.