

152. Do you think it would be desirable for an officer in the position of Mr. Stratford to sign an abstract which he is not personally able to check?—It is difficult to answer that. I will give the example of myself when I was acting as Public Trustee. At one meeting of the Board I might have a hundred and fifty deeds to sign, and it would be impossible for me to read through one of them, but I know when I am signing a statement of anything that I am taking the responsibility.

153. Do you say that a Warden who is not in a position to check this abstract should sign it, although he cannot check it?—No, I do not think so. I do not think it should be left to the Warden's judgment what he should do or should not do. If he cannot take the responsibility he should not sign it. But he himself issues the licenses.

154. Supposing a Warden did comply with your request and sign this abstract without checking it personally, and something went wrong, who would be to blame? Suppose there was some fraud which might have been checked if he had gone through it personally?—I suppose he would not sign it if he did not take the responsibility. I want to fix the responsibility.

155. Then, it comes to this: You are not prepared to say that a man shall not make himself responsible when he is unable personally to check it, but, although he cannot personally check it, he is blamable for not signing such an abstract?—Of course, I must allow that an officer should not be required to do what he cannot do. I admit that; but I am not aware that there has been any objection raised that he cannot do it. At any rate, there is only one Warden in the colony who has raised the objection. There are not many of these titles issued. To do this once a month would not take long. All I have asked is that he may give me a signature as to his own acts in the issue of these titles.

156. *Mr. McLean.*] Seeing the difficulty you are in about getting a proper audit, do you consider it is the duty of the Mines Department to get an alteration in the law to facilitate a better audit?—I think, if any alteration is required it should be in the Public Revenues Act. If thought necessary, a general provision should be made in the Public Revenues Act.

157. *The Chairman.*] Have you ever heard before the Warden gave his evidence to-day that he had not an opportunity of checking this abstract, or was unable to check it?—One of the reasons given in the printed correspondence (B.-20, Sess. II., 1897) is that he has not time to do it, but I understand the reason is that it is an interference with his statutory duty to sign the abstract.

158. Has this practically arisen lately, or is it a new thing that the Wardens should sign these abstracts?—The Mining Act has always provided for this abstract. I think the provision of 1891, as well as that of former Acts, is that the Warden shall cause the abstract to be forwarded to the Minister.

159. Prior to your assuming office, did you find that the abstracts were signed by the Clerks, the Wardens, or the Receivers?—I found that in some cases the abstracts were signed by the Wardens. I found that in other cases they were signed by the Receivers, the Registrars, or the Clerks of Court, who were the same persons, and in other cases they were not signed by any one at all.

160. Had that practice been permitted for any time by the Audit Office?—That was the practice for some time before I came into office.

161. In order to get a proper check of the revenue received, you deemed it your duty to forward this requisition?—I made it so that the practice that some Wardens were already carrying on should be made uniform, and that all Wardens should sign, as some were signing, in order that I might have some responsibility for the abstracts by which I checked the revenue receipts of another class of officers.

162. *Right Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] Are you not aware that the Receivers send in certified copies of these returns weekly to the Treasury?—Certified statements of their cash receipts, yes.

163. Are they not supplemented by the bank receipts?—Yes.

164. And then, in addition, the abstracts come at the end of the month signed by the Receiver, the Registrar, or the Warden?—Yes, it comes to the Minister.

165. And then, in addition to that, you want it signed by the Warden—you have the weekly check, the bank receipts, and the monthly abstract?—Yes.

166. And, in addition to that, you have your own auditor, and in some cases he goes bi-monthly?—Half-yearly.

167. I would like to know where you think there would be a loss of revenue?—The question with me is that it is a necessary Audit requirement, and whether an Audit requirement should be complied with or not.

168. Where do you consider there would be likely to be a leakage?—By the Receiver not accounting for rent in the titles under which he collects the rent. He may collect a less rent, and if he prepares the abstract of titles by which I check the rent, then, as I have stated before, it is checking his own receipts by his own statement of what the receipts ought to be.

169. But this abstract you refer to is only the first issue of the title?—It is an abstract which gives the abstract of the conditions of the title. "Annual rent" is in the form.

170. I want to know where the fraud could come in if he filled up the column?—As the Receiver prepares the statement he might not put in the title at all. He might leave it out of the abstract.

171. Although the Warden has issued the title, and has to audit the account?—I do not think he has any statutory duty to audit.

172. *Mr. Fraser.*] I asked a question about Audit officers attending there. Now, supposing a case occurred where a Registrar entered the rent at £10 and collected £6, would not the Audit officer at his six-monthly visit discover that? Would he not have information submitted to him enabling him to detect that?—It would depend upon the Audit officer. I am not satisfied that the Audit officer could go to the extent of seeing that, even if his audit was sufficient.

173. Has he not any means of checking the returns with all the statements in the office?—But they are or may be all prepared by one person.

174. Does he not see the deeds?—The deeds are issued.