

years the quantity cut varied from 30,000,000 to 20,000,000 superficial feet per annum, so that the output of last year is nearly equal to the highest record for the district. I understand that at the present price of timber at the mill this represents upwards of £70,000. Another branch of the timber industry is that of sleeper-hewing. During the last year the Public Works and Railway Departments required a great many sleepers for their various works. The latter department is very careful to protect the public interests by insisting on the production of a license before payment. The Public Works Department, being less familiar with the ways of some bushmen, were taken advantage of, and passed sleepers without this necessary formality, the result being that several had nearly succeeded in having their vouchers paid when discovered. In these cases substantial fines were inflicted, and now anticipate that this and other measures I am adopting will have the effect of stamping out illegal cutting, which is unfortunately too common in several localities, the evasion of royalties being looked upon as easily done, and not a very heinous offence among a certain number of bushmen. I am strongly opposed to sleeper-cutting in virgin bush, on account of the excessive waste, more especially by inexperienced axemen. I think, therefore, it would be well to stop this by regulation, making it illegal to cut sawmilling timber in bush except within abandoned sawmill areas. The sleeper timber in this district is being rapidly cut out, and unless stringent measures are adopted, and totara and black-pine in particular protected, and utilised to the greatest extent, it will be a matter of only a few years when it will have to be found elsewhere. An illustration of this waste was furnished to me a short time ago by an experienced bushman, who stated that he has seen axemen obtain only five sleepers from a tree (royalty, 2s. 3½d.), for which the sawmiller would have to pay 7s. Taking the industry as a whole, and assuming the present demand were to continue, the output from this district for the future year should be equal to and probably exceed that of any former year.

The following is a summary of Crown land open for application for settlement or as pastoral runs, at the 31st March, 1898:—

Southland County—						Acres.
Surveyed rural lands, mostly second-class open country, in areas						
from 20 to 1,500 acres	...	...	...	...	...	69,680
Village-homestead sections, mostly first-class lands, in areas from						
1 to 20 acres	...	...	...	...	...	1,492
Town lands	...	...	...	...	...	254
Suburban lands	...	...	...	...	...	750
Unsurveyed lands being prepared for settlement, mostly forest						
country, but fair soil	...	...	...	...	...	23,000
Wallace County—						
Surveyed rural lands, mostly second-class and partly open country,						
in areas from 50 to 1,900 acres	...	...	...	...	...	19,640
“ Land for Settlements Act, 1892 ” (Otahu and Beaumont)						8,208
Village-homestead sections, mostly first-class bush land, in areas						
from 1 to 20 acres	...	...	...	...	...	660
Five pastoral runs, high, rugged, poor country	...	...	...	...	...	44,960
Three runs, fair grazing country	...	...	...	...	...	8,353
Town and suburban lands	...	...	...	...	...	189
One small grazing-run, hilly, open country	...	...	...	...	...	4,808
Lake County—						
Surveyed rural lands, second-class, in areas from 80 to 100 acres						1,499
Town lands	...	...	...	...	...	8
Fiord County—						
Twenty-one pastoral runs, high rugged country, chiefly on west						
coast	...	...	...	...	...	1,090,000
Stewart Island County—						
Surveyed rural lands, second-class forest country, in areas from						
30 to 300 acres	...	...	...	...	...	2,354
Unsurveyed land, but open for application, mostly second-class						
forest country	...	...	...	...	...	143,950
Total						1,419,805

D. BARRON,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.