

To His Excellency the Governor-General, Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg,
V.C., G.C.M.G., K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

SURPLUS LANDS COMMISSION

1. We have the honour to report that we have now completed the inquiry committed to us by Your Excellency's Commission dated the 5th October, 1946.

2. We held a preliminary sitting at Auckland on the 21st November, 1946. It was then represented to us by counsel for both the Crown and the Maoris concerned that the preparation of their respective cases required a vast amount of labour and research, and that it would be several months before they could hope to be ready. They thought, however, that they could be ready in about three months to address the Commission on the historical aspect of the case, and they suggested an adjournment accordingly upon the understanding that, after their addresses had been made on the historical aspect, there should be another adjournment to enable them to make the further investigations necessary for the purpose of placing the whole matter before us in detail.

3. The Commission agreed to the suggestion of counsel and adjourned until the 25th February, 1947. We sat at Auckland on that day and continued our sittings on the 26th, 27th, and 28th days of February.

4. At the commencement of our sitting at Auckland the Maoris asked that we should, instead of sitting there, adjourn to some place in the North, preferably Kaikohe, as there were large numbers of Maoris interested in the subject-matter of the inquiry who would like to be present so that they could hear everything that was said. As a matter of fact, a number of the northern Maoris had come to Auckland, and there were present, when our sitting at Auckland commenced, about one hundred persons altogether, including Auckland residents and visitors from the North. The suggestion was that we should go to Kaikohe, and, as it was said there was no hall large enough to accommodate all the Maoris who might be expected to attend, that we should hold our sitting in an open marae. The suggested arrangement was obviously impracticable, and counsel for the Maoris said in answer to questions from the Commission that they could not support the request, though they considered it their duty, having been asked by the Maoris to do so, to bring the request before the Commission. Eventually it was decided that we should proceed with the addresses of counsel on the historical side of the case, and that, at a later sitting to be held at Kaikohe, the historical aspect of the case could be made the subject of further addresses, or that the addresses to be made in Auckland should be interpreted to the Maoris who might assemble at Kaikohe.

5. On the 28th February the addresses on the historical side of the case having been completed, the question arose as to when the Commission should continue its sittings. Counsel represented that their investigation and researches would occupy several months, and eventually we provisionally fixed the 10th June, 1947, at Kaikohe as the time and place for the resumption of our sittings. We were subsequently informed that counsel would not be ready to proceed then, and that their investigation would take several months longer; and accordingly, with their consent, we postponed our sitting, which was eventually resumed on the 10th October, 1947.

6. We sat at Kaikohe in the Magistrate's Court. In order to meet the representations of the Maoris made to us at Auckland in February we arranged for the erection of a large marquee and for the installation of amplifiers so that any Maoris who could not find accommodation in the court-room could hear in the grounds in front of the court, or, if the weather was bad, in the marquee at the back, everything that went on.