

1902.
NEW ZEALAND.

“ THE UREWERA DISTRICT NATIVE RESERVE ACT, 1896 ”

(REPORT OF CHAIRMAN OF COMMISSIONERS UNDER).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

REPORT.

SIR,—

Wellington, 6th August, 1902.

I have the honour to report that the Commissioners appointed under “The Urewera District Native Reserve Act, 1896,” met for the first time at Whakatane on the 1st February, 1899. The duty of the Commissioners under section 6 of the Act being to divide the Urewera district into blocks, adopting as far as possible hapu boundaries, and to investigate the ownership of each block, the Commission held sittings at Ruatoki, Waimana, Te Houhi, Te Whaiti, Ruatahuna, Maungapohatu, and Waimako for the purpose of affording all members of the Urewera Tribe an opportunity of making claims and giving the boundaries of the hapu blocks within the district. Claims were made for fifty-eight hapu blocks; but this number has been considerably reduced, some by arrangement among the claimants themselves and others by decisions of the Commissioners. After receiving all claims, counterclaims, and lists of names of claimants, and showing (approximately) the boundaries of hapu blocks on the plan of the district, the Commission adjourned for the season on the 6th April.

The Commissioners met again on the 5th February, 1900, and proceeded with the investigation of title to those blocks for which sketch-plans had been prepared as required by section 7 of the Act. The time occupied in the ascertainment of title to the blocks which came before the Commission was much longer than was anticipated. Tuhoe were new to the work, and would not make the smallest concession, the result being that the ownership of each block was fought out to the bitter end, notwithstanding the efforts made by the European members of the Commission to induce them to settle the ownership of, at any rate, the smaller blocks among themselves. The work of the Commission was also retarded by the want of a suitable building. Sittings were held in the open air, and there were many interruptions through wet weather, strong winds, and other causes. The Commission adjourned *sine die* on the 18th May, the weather having become so inclement that it was considered inadvisable to continue any longer.

In the summer of 1901 and the present year the Commissioners continued the work of investigation of title, and completed the hearing of claims to all the hapu blocks within the district.

I forward herewith a tracing showing division of district into thirty-four blocks. Orders have been made for thirty-three of these blocks in favour of the persons found entitled and the interests of families and individuals defined in accordance with terms of section 8 of the Act. The other block, known as Ruatoki or Tuhua, was brought within the jurisdiction of the Commissioners by “The Urewera District Native Reserve Act Amendment Act, 1900.” All claims to this block were heard by the Commission, but the decision was deferred.

By section 8 of the amending Act all orders made by the Commissioners are deemed to be interlocutory and subject to such revision as the Commissioners may think fit. Several applications were made to the Commissioners to revise some of their earlier decisions; but many of the persons whose interests might have been affected by such revision had left for their homes to harvest crops, and it was thought that they were entitled to notice before cases were reopened. For this reason, and because winter was approaching, the Commissioners decided to adjourn to a day in October to be fixed by the Chairman. This sitting, which will be the last as regards the ascertainment of title to the Urewera district, will occupy a few days only. Decision will then be given in the Ruatoki case, and final orders made for all the hapu blocks.

Power has been conferred upon the Commissioners by section 3 of the Act of 1900 to partition hapu blocks, but there are only two that the Commissioners think should be partitioned—namely, Ruatoki and Te Whaiti, the former because it contains a large area of land suitable for close settlement, and the latter for tribal reasons—it has been awarded to hapus who for generations have been at enmity and would be better separated for the present. There will probably be disputes in connection with other blocks, but it is hoped they may be settled without much difficulty. Unless something occurs to give value to the steep ranges that form so large a part of nearly all the blocks it would be almost impossible to make a fair division among the owners owing to the very small areas that are fit for cultivation.

The Hon. the Native Minister, Wellington.

I have, &c.,
W. J. BUTLER, Chairman.

Approximate Cost.—Preparation, not given; printing (1,200 copies), not including plan, 16s. 6d.

By Authority: JOHN MACKAY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1902.

Price 3d.]