

The Chairman : I think it would be better, Mr. Wi Pere, to confine yourself to asking questions in reference to the statement made by the Public Trustee which has been read by the clerk. The principle of the management of these West Coast lands is not under the discussion of the Committee at the present time at all.

16. *Mr. Wi Pere.*] I understand by your statement you say that if, as the petitioner desires, the administration and leasing and all the matters of that kind of these reserves were placed in the hands of the Native owners, that they would not be able to get such good rents, and that the expenses would be very greatly increased?—That is quite right.

17. Now, supposing that was the case, and the Maoris were administering their own land; how many years would it take to run up these expenses?—I have known Maori leases to be hanging over for five and seven years.

18. Supposing a lease was completed in one year?—Yes. Well, there are in some of these grants three hundred and fifty Natives, who are living in all parts of New Zealand. Some of them may be infants. It would take many years to get them all.

19. Do you not think, Mr. Poynton, that after all there would not be such an expenditure for the Natives as the present system involves? Here is £6 16s. deducted regularly to the end of time?—Well, the man who would take a lease from the Natives would have to consider that he would be at the expense not of £6 16s., but probably of £45, and instead of the Native getting £97 4s., he probably would only receive about £60. The lessee would have to take that into consideration. He would have to find these Natives all over the country. Perhaps he might pay the wrong man, and have to pay again. He would, of course, take all this into consideration when making his lease.

20. Perhaps, Mr. Poynton, you mean those remarks of yours to refer merely to bush lands?—No. There are hardly any grants on the West Coast that are not held by, say, a dozen. Some are held by a hundred Natives. Some are held by two hundred, and some by over three hundred Natives.

21. Well, now, do you not think that if these grants were handed back to the Natives to administer themselves, and they were put up to auction and so on—do you mean to say that these conditions would still apply?—Yes. I say, instead of paying £6 16s. they would have to pay fully £40. I have not the slightest doubt about that.

22. If they are put up to auction?—Yes. The lessors would have to sign the lease, and when the lease was signed the man would not be certain that he had the right people.

23. You are perfectly certain then, Mr. Poynton, that the Natives could not administer leases of their own for these lands?—I am quite certain. The difficulty is this: There is a grant for, say, 3,000 acres. In that 3,000 acres probably four hundred Natives are interested, some of them possibly only in half an acre of the grant. The European would have to get each individual Native and would have to trace each individual share, and then he could not be certain that he had got them all. The end of it would be that half the land would be lying covered with gorse. It would not pay the European to give the rents after paying all the expenses.

24. Could not a committee be set up to administer their lands?—Yes, but it would require the whole law to be altered. I have nothing to do with that at all.

25. I would like, just as a test case, to see whether the Public Trustee is right or whether I am right in my view of the case. Would it not be possible, just for a test case, to take one of these blocks, and let them deal with it just for a trial? Then we would be able to see whether they could not administer their lands?—Yes. I have no objection to their trying that.

26. Very well, Mr. Poynton, you and I will arrange the matter?—Of course, you will have to get the law altered, because otherwise Natives could not give a valid lease.

27. I mean that you and I will consult about this, and see if we cannot find some way out of the difficulty?—Yes. I will be glad to consult with you.

28. With respect to certain lands in the occupation of the Natives, you have taken these lands away from them and let them on lease. Why did you do that?—Because there was too much for their use, and the Natives who were absent wished it.

29. I mean those pieces that have been subdivided to separate Natives?—We have never done that except only in two cases, and then it was deserved. Only two of these occupation licenses have been cancelled. In one case the Native would persist in leasing to Europeans, and in the other—I forget exactly what that was.

TUESDAY, 30TH AUGUST, 1904.

J. W. POYNTON, Public Trustee, examination continued. (No. 5.)

1. *Mr. Heke.*] I want to be satisfied as to the area of land owned by Mrs. Thompson, and the rents that she is getting from her several interests in Taranaki under the control of the Public Trustee. Can you give us this information, Mr. Poynton?—Yes.

2. I want the grants, acreages, and yearly rentals that Mrs. Thompson is entitled to?—I may say that Hapotiki was originally a larger grant, and was divided into two areas, now known as 3952¹ and 3952. In the former area Mrs. Thompson holds 112½ shares out of 300.

3. Do those shares mean acres?—In some cases they do, but in this case it would not be that. She has 112½ shares out of 300. The half-yearly rent is £26 4s. 2d. In Grant 3952, Hapotiki, she has different interests which accrued at different times. These interests are numbered and they represent different values. No. 12 interest represents seven twenty-fourths of thirty-three shares, equivalent to 9 acres 2 roods 20 perches. The half-yearly rental of that portion is fixed at £1 7s. 5d. No. 13 interest represents seven twenty-fourths of thirty-three shares, the area being the same as in the case of the previous interest—9 acres 2 roods 20 perches—and the rent 6s. 10d. half-yearly. Interest No. 26 is one-half of eight shares, and represents 4 acres. The half-yearly rent is 11s. 5d.