

case of land taken by the Governor for a public work." The Commissioner of Crown Lands has had the improvements effected by petitioner valued, and £29—being double the amount estimated—has been tendered and refused. The claim of the petitioner appears to be not so much for actual loss of money as his estimated gain through having made a good investment. The evidence is conflicting and unsatisfactory, and fails to establish the allegations in the petition. The Repeal Act makes no provision for the principal items claimed by the petitioner, and in the absence of anything to prove that the estimate of the work done furnished by the Commissioner of Crown Lands is unfair or inadequate your Committee is unable to make any recommendation.—(Appendix I.—5b.)

2nd November, 1904.

No. 372.—Petition of C. G. DALGETY and Others, of Otago and Canterbury.

PETITIONERS pray for the passing of a measure similar to "The Pastoral Tenants' Relief Act, 1895," on account of losses of sheep from unprecedented falls of snow.

I am directed to report that the Committee have inquired into statements contained in the petition, and have taken evidence thereon, which they now report to the House. They find that on the date mentioned there was a severe snowstorm, which resulted in a heavy loss of stock in certain parts of Otago and Canterbury. The evidence, however, shows that, apart from the storm in question, a number of causes have contributed to the serious reduction that of late years is said to have occurred in the stock-carrying capacity of certain pastoral runs; and that the managers of these properties believe an extension of existing leases with better security for improvements would encourage and facilitate the adoption of remedial measures. It is contended that the terms and conditions under which the land is held are of such a nature as to discourage, if not prevent, steps being taken that would secure stock against exceptional stress of weather, and improve the value of the pastures. The conclusion seems therefore unavoidable that, owing to the reluctance of these runholders to invest sufficient capital on improvements for which they might not be fully recouped when their leases terminate, the properties are not efficiently worked. The concession applied for does not appear to be so much a remission of rent as an extension of the term of the leases and increased compensation for improvements at the end of the term. Opposed to such a concession is the policy of land-settlement. Numerous signed memorials indicate that if the larger runs that are suitable for the purpose were subdivided into moderate-sized holdings they would be eagerly taken up and made much more productive than at present. The question must therefore be determined whether, in the interests of the State, it is desirable that the sufferers by the snowstorm referred to in the petition should receive an extension of the term of their leases or increased security of tenure as compensation for their losses, or if their leases should be allowed to expire in due course, so that the State may be free to give effect, where it is considered necessary, to the demand for subdivision and closer settlement. Your Committee, after weighing carefully the evidence and taking the circumstances surrounding the prayer of the petitioners into consideration, do not feel justified in recommending legislation that may have the effect of locking up land that is being improved with public works from an influx of settlers. While expressing sympathy with the petitioners on account of the losses they have sustained, they are unable to recommend any special form of relief beyond what may be allowed if the powers of the Land Boards are extended. They recommend that the Boards be asked to formulate a scheme that will have the effect of giving them more power to deal with the land upon such terms as they think advisable in the interests of the State and the occupiers, but that such provision should be subject to the approval of the Minister of Lands.—(Appendix I.—5c.)

2nd November, 1904.

No. 760.—Petition of WILLIAM GLEESON and 55 Others.

PETITIONERS pray for remission of rent for a number of years on account of severe losses caused by excessive rain and floods.

I am directed to report that the Committee recommends that the petition be referred to the Government.

2nd November, 1904.

No. 828.—Petition of G. DONALDSON and 6 Others.

PETITIONERS, who are pastoral tenants of the Crown, pray for relief on account of losses of stock through snowstorm of 1903 and other causes.

I am directed to report that the Committee recommends that the petition be referred to the Government.

2nd November, 1904.

No. 829.—Petition of T. G. LOVE and 30 Others (and 49 similar Petitions, *vide* Schedule attached).

PETITIONERS pray that a referendum vote of the electors be taken on the following proposals: (1.) That no more Crown lands be sold. (2.) That the freehold of any lands leased from the State be not granted.

I am directed to report that the Committee recommends that the petitions be referred to the Government.

4th November, 1904.