

FRIDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER, 1909.

MARTIN KENNEDY examined. (No. 3.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Where do you reside?—In Wellington, and I have been residing here for the past twenty years.

2. Do you appear in favour of this petition from Greymouth?—Yes. I previously resided in Greymouth for a period of twenty-four years.

3. Have you read the petition?—No, I have not.

4. *Hon. Mr. Guinness.*] The petitioners ask that the present Native Reserve be converted from leasehold into freehold, and the Committee desire any evidence you may be able to give in support of such application?—I am of opinion that it could be done to the mutual advantage of both races—that is, to the tenants and to the Native owners.

5. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] On the terms they ask for in the petition?—I do not know what the terms are.

6. *Hon. Mr. Guinness.*] Capital value £110,000?—I should say, the usual mode of valuation. I do not know what is in the petition, but what I wish to say is that in Greymouth fifteen years ago property was of considerably less value than it is to-day, and a similar condition of affairs might arise again. Consequently, if the rents were capitalised now and the money invested for the benefit of the Native owners, I can imagine it would be to their advantage, and, as one who lived there for twenty-four years, being one of the largest tenants of the Trust myself, I can realise the inducement it would be to the present occupiers to improve their property. In any case it would not be a hindrance to them. There are many persons who are holding back and would be still further held back from improving their property so long as it is leasehold, no matter whether it is Native or otherwise.

7. *The Chairman.*] Did you ever hold one of those leases?—Yes, I had some four or five acres of it.

8. And do you still hold it?—No, I have no interest in it now.

9. Did you find any inconvenience in regard to your business by holding the lease?—No, I did not find any inconvenience. The period had not arrived for us to put up what you would call durable buildings; but I understand that time has now arrived.

10. Have you any further statement to make?—Of course, if you desire evidence as to the condition the Reserve was in in the years 1865 and 1886, I can supply it.

11. As a matter of fact, in 1874—that is going back a good deal—there was a greater annual rent collected—namely, £3,697—than last year, when the amount collected was only £3,264?—The modes of collecting the rents may not coincide. There might possibly be a difference between what is collected and what accrues. The current rent for the year may be different from what is collected, but over a series of years it may be right.

12. *Hon. Mr. Guinness.*] Do you know that at a certain time, when the goldfields were flourishing, the rents were put up much higher than they were some years afterwards, when there was great depression and people were getting rid of their leases, and consequently the ground-rents were reduced? Do you remember those periods?—I lived there myself in 1889, and things were very dull then—so much so that property which I had I sold for less than the value of the improvements on the ground; but the portions I refer to when I make that statement are the residential quarters, not the business quarter. The residential quarter was all heavy bush country during the sixties. My first arrival there was in 1865.

13. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] There was a settlement there then, was there not?—No, there was little or no settlement—it had just commenced. The goldfields brought the settlement. There was a little Native settlement then, but no European settlement.

14. You think it would be to the advantage of the Natives if the leasehold were converted into the freehold, and the rents capitalised and used for their benefit at the present time?—I do. Considering the future of the property I think it would be to their advantage, and also to the advantage of the settlers. I have no knowledge of the present rents and their relative values.

15. That is, in reference to the capitalisation of their rents from which they would draw, they would be assured of interest exceeding their present rents?—That they would be secure against future fluctuations.

16. With regard to the advantage to the Europeans, how do you show that—it would be subject to those fluctuations, of course?—Europeans, being business people, generally take those risks, and the advantages are such that the incentive would be to improve, and their improvements would be their own.

17. So that that describes the advantage you attach to the European side in the event of the conversion such as you suggest?—That is what occurs to my mind. There may be other commercial advantages about which I am not qualified to speak on account of not being a resident there.

FELIX CAMPBELL examined. (No. 4.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A merchant residing at Greymouth.

2. *Hon. Mr. Guinness.*] You are also Chairman of the Harbour Board and Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce at Greymouth?—Yes.

3. You have been residing there—how long?—Since 1865.

4. And you have watched the growth and progress of the town?—Yes.

5. During that period has the town had its growth checked by depression on more than one occasion?—Speaking from memory, during that time it went through three grades of depression, and on those occasions some leases were surrendered to the Department, as the lessees would not pay the rents on them.