

witnesses than can be called here, came to the conclusion that I have mentioned. That is the only reason to justify me in referring to the subject. I come now to the question of severance. I have handed in copies of a reply that the Board made to the report of Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst, and I shall refer to that a little later on. In the opening of Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst's report they say, "We have the honour, in accordance with your letter of instructions of the 19th May, to submit a new classification of all the lands included in the Taieri Drainage District (schedules of this classification, with a lithograph coloured to assist you to follow the same, are attached), together with a report touching on the present classification and the causes of discontent which appear to exist amongst a considerable number of ratepayers, and we respectfully tender some suggestions which we think may assist towards the settlement of the same. The existing classification is, in our opinion, too severe on those lands which form the fringe of the district. Some of these lands are already naturally drained; some will only receive a modicum of benefit in comparison with those situated at a lower level requiring extensive and expensive systems of drainage to permit of them being utilised to their full economic value; other portions, consisting of islands at the mouth of the Waipori River and lands on the eastern bank of the Taieri River south of Allanton Township, which cannot from their position receive much benefit from drainage-works, have been placed in the A Class. These last, in our opinion, should be placed in the D Class until such times as a possible scheme from which they would receive benefit is formulated. This severity of classification, together with the uncertainty of the extent of liability in which the cost of necessary extensive works will involve them, and the indefinite amount of taxation which under existing law may be levied on all classes except the D Class, are the primary reasons for so many ratepayers agitating for an alteration in the area and classification." Now, I would point out that what Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst went there to do was to endeavour by a reclassification to allay the discontent, especially in the north end of the district, amongst the owners of the so-called dry lands. Now, this Committee is being asked to reverse the decision of the Royal Commission on the report of Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst; that is practically what this petition comes to. I have not seen the original instructions from the Department, but it is obvious, I submit, from their report that what Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst went there primarily to do was to see whether they could make a better classification of the lands, a classification which would have the effect of allaying the discontent which had been caused by the decision of the Magistrate; and I submit it is a very extraordinary thing that the report made from that point of view should be used for the purpose of attempting to reverse the decision of the Royal Commission. That is practically what this Committee is asked to do. Now, those gentlemen say, "Three ideas for improving the present unsatisfactory position have occurred to us. The first was suggesting the alteration of the boundary of the Silverstream and Owhiro Subdivisions from its present position to a line running east and west along the road called Centre Road, so that all lands drained by the Silverstream and its tributaries should form one subdivision, and all lands drained by the Owhiro, together with the lands on the east of the Taieri River between Allanton and Henley, should form the Owhiro Subdivision. . . . The second was to recommend that the Silverstream Subdivision be excluded from the Taieri Drainage District. The third, that all lands lying east of the Taieri River now included within the district be severed from the same." I submit that it is, at any rate, a fair deduction from those clauses that those ideas that occurred to those gentlemen when they went there to reclassify the lands were not the primary objects of their mission, and that those were simply ideas that they got into their heads in the course of their peregrinations throughout the district. I submit it is obvious from the report that that was not the primary object of their mission, and I shall endeavour to show further on that those ideas of theirs are really the cause of a good deal of trouble. Now, what are the grounds on which Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst suggest that what the petitioners ask should be done—namely, the severance not merely of the Silverstream Subdivision but the whole of the East Taieri from the district? They are stated under paragraphs (a), (c), and (d) of their report: "(a.) By far the larger portion of the East Taieri will receive little or no benefit from the proposed or contemplated drainage-works." "(c.) The cost of the proposed work on the eastern side and other works contemplated, together with the maintenance of the same, will be more than the area of land to which drainage is necessary can reasonably afford without contributions from the owners of lands already provided with drainage; and it appears to us unfair to expect owners of the drained lands to consent to be taxed for the benefit of owners of land requiring drainage. (d.) We see no indication of any such drainage schemes as proposed by Messrs. Bell, Higginson, and Blair in report E.-6, 1880; Mr. Carruthers, D.-5B, 1871; or Mr. J. T. Thompson, I.-2B, 1877, being adopted." Now, if we take reason (a), what does that involve? Here are two gentlemen who, I think I am justified in saying, were not sent there for the purpose of saying whether or not the report of the Royal Commission should have been given effect to or not. This reason is the first of three reasons given by gentlemen who do not profess to have any special qualification for the work. The Royal Commission, as members are probably aware, consisted of three experts out of the four members. The Chairman, Mr. David Barron, was then Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands; and the other Commissioners were the Chief District Railway Engineer, a gentleman from the Head Office who is well known to members; and Mr. Short, who is both an engineer and solicitor, and a man who has had more experience of Royal Commissions than probably any other man in the colony; and the fourth member of the Commission was Mr. Cruickshank, Stipendiary Magistrate. Now, it is inconceivable to me that it could ever have been intended by the Department, when it sent Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst to the Taieri, that they should submit a report for the purpose of enabling the Government to say whether or not the Royal Commission was right or wrong. One would think that, if the Government had intended that, they would have sent engineers to report upon the work of engineers; but what I submit as a fair inference is that Messrs. Lundius and Buckhurst were not sent for that purpose, but as classifiers, skilled perhaps