

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

PAEROA, MONDAY, 23RD MAY, 1910.

THE Commission met at 10 a.m.

Mr. T. Cotter and Mr. T. A. Moresby appeared for the Ohinemuri County Council, Mr. R. McVeagh and Mr. E. Clendon for the Waihi Borough Council, Mr. C. J. Tunks for the mining companies, Mr. A. Hanna for the Waihi-Paeroa Gold-extraction Company (Limited), and Mr. F. H. Mueller for the Ohinemuri River Silting Association.

The Chairman: There was evidence given before the Goldfields and Mines Committee in 1907, I.-4A, which clears away a good deal of the ground, I take it. I presume that some of the witnesses who gave evidence then will be here to give evidence again. I suggest that the matter might be simplified possibly by their stating that, so far as the evidence as given by them is concerned, they approve of it, and they can state what changes have taken place since then. Some of the exhibits then put in evidence by them have unfortunately been destroyed by the fire that occurred at the Parliamentary Buildings. It appears to me that the best method of procedure will be for those representing the farming industry to show what extent of damage has been done to their properties. We will take their evidence first.

Mr. Mueller: In opening the case for the farming community, I wish shortly to state that the holding of this Commission is one of the most important events, if not the most important, which has occurred in this district for a very considerable time. The result of the inquiry, no matter what that result may be, will undoubtedly have a very great effect upon the welfare and prosperity of almost the whole of the individuals in this district. There is no doubt that during the whole of this inquiry a great deal of what might be called ancient history will be placed before the Commission. Therefore I would ask the Commission to bear with me for a moment in referring to what has led up to the present position, and to the agitation which has resulted in the holding of this inquiry. The Ohinemuri goldfield was opened in 1875. In 1895 the Proclamation was issued declaring the river to be a sludge-channel. Up to that time the amount of mining in the district was very small comparatively, and it was not until some years after that any result was seen as to the effect of this silting. It was in 1900 or 1901 that it was first noticeable to have any serious effect. It was then drawn attention to, and a report was obtained from Mr. Perham, which no doubt the Commission has seen, or will see. Up to the year 1901, from the information that I have been able to gather, roughly there would be about half a million tons put into the river. Up to the present time I think it will be found that over four million tons have been put into the river. This quantity of stuff has been increasing in a very large ratio. The Silting Association was formed some years ago for the purpose of seeing if they could not have remedied what they looked upon as a very serious evil to the farming and agricultural interests of the district. In 1907 a petition was presented to Parliament, and evidence was heard before the Mines Committee as to both sides, and that petition was favourably reported upon. The petition practically sets out the stand which the association takes at the present time, and which it has taken up, in connection with this matter. The petition states,—

“To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled.

“The humble petition of the undersigned members of the Ohinemuri River Silting Association humbly sheweth,—

“1. That your petitioners are the members of the Ohinemuri River Silting Association, and were duly appointed at a public meeting convened for that purpose.

“2. That on the 4th day of April, 1895, the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers flowing through the Thames Valley were proclaimed sludge-channels for the deposit of mining *débris*.

“3. That since the date of the said Proclamation the introduction of the cyanide process in the treatment of ore has led to a silting-up of the rivers, thereby destroying a valuable navigable waterway, and creating great and lasting damage and injury to large areas of valuable land by the deposit of silt and the obstruction of natural drainage, and streams available for domestic and township water-supplies are being destroyed.

“4. That the Thames Valley has become an important producing and farming district, settlement is becoming permanent, and large areas of land are being brought into productive use; and, in addition to this, thousands of acres of Crown lands are becoming available for settlement, use, and occupation, all of which is being seriously prejudiced by the raising of the river-beds owing to the silt-deposits.

“5. That by reason of the silting-up of the Waihou and Ohinemuri Rivers numbers of farmers and settlers are being ruined, their properties destroyed, large and valuable industries are being crippled, settlement will be retarded, and the progress of this portion of the Dominion checked.

“6. That this question is not merely a local one, but is a colonial one, affecting great national assets; and the said rivers are amongst the most productive and important navigable highways in the Dominion.

“7. That the stoppage of the deposit of silt in the said rivers will not prejudicially affect the mining industry in any degree commensurate to the great and lasting damage that is now being done to national assets and permanent industries.

“Wherefore your petitioners pray that such immediate steps be forthwith taken as will prevent the damage to and destruction of the valuable national assets comprised in the said waterways, lands, and industries.

“And your petitioners will ever pray, &c.”