

That is the stand which they still consider it their duty to take up in the interests of the farming community. As regards the damage, it will be the main point of our case that the damage can be put down—firstly, to the land, and, secondly, to navigation. That will come into the matter, of course, on account of the farmers also. And the damage to the land is not only to the surface of the land, but it is damage to the other land in the way of the stopping-up of drains; the outlets of the drains to the rivers become choked, and the land which may not be covered with silt is affected by the want of drainage. We will attempt to place the matter of damage as far as possible before you, starting from the top of the river as near as possible, and taking the properties in sequence, as near as possible, down the river. We will try to give the actual area which is absolutely destroyed, in the opinion of the owners, and we will also try to give the actual area that is partially damaged. The question of damage, of course, not only refers to the land which is damaged, it refers to the cattle also; and in that respect I shall specially mention to the Commission one particular, and that is this: that the very fine deposit that will sometimes be made over the pastures is so fine that it actually adheres to the grass itself, and when the sun comes out after the flood-waters have subsided, this deposit is adhering to the grass, and the sun turns the deposit into a sort of paint almost. The farmers call it whitewash, but it is worse than whitewash, because it does not wash off with ordinary rain. It has either to be eaten off by the cattle or grown off by the grass. Evidence will be given to show that some of the cattle have been found after slaughter to have this stuff inside of them—in their lungs—stuff which is presumed to have come from the pasture itself. The land is not only European land, but there is also Native land. A very large portion indeed of the land in this district is Native land. We have one or two representatives of the Native race who will give evidence before the Commission on behalf of their different tribes, who are very largely interested in this matter. They say that at the time this district was ceded the Government, in asking them to sign the deed of cession for mining purposes, gave them a promise that they would not be injured at all by the mining; and they consider, whether rightly or wrongly, that they have a grievance in connection with the silting-up of the river and the damage to their land. It may be said that the evidence which will be given in connection with the assessing of the damage to the land will be overestimated. I wish to draw your attention to this fact: that these farmers, who will be glad to give evidence as regards the damage to their land and as to the depreciation in value—every one of them would sell out to-morrow, if he got an opportunity. I think I am justified in saying that all of them are willing to sell at once. They do not like to put the damage done at a very great amount, because they are under the impression that if they depreciated the value of their land out of their own mouths, how could they ask a purchaser to give them the figure they think they ought to get for the land? So that, instead of the damage being overestimated, I think you will see that it will be rather underestimated, because they are in that position that they are willing to sell at any time. I think it is a foregone conclusion that will be admitted by practically all the parties to this inquiry that some damage has been done. The question will be the amount of damage. As regards the navigation, I dare say the Commission have seen the different heads of navigation that have existed from time to time in this river. At one time the navigation went right past the Paeroa Township by a couple of miles, right up to Mr. Cock's place. When the bridge near the Criterion Hotel was erected, that prevented the navigation going past it. And then there was Snodgrass's Wharf, a little below the Criterion Hotel; and from there it went down to another wharf at the end of Wharf Street, about the centre of the township. Then the railway-bridge was built, which prevented any traffic above that. Then the Junction Wharf was built, near the junction of the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers. That has been discarded, and now the head of the navigation is at Te Puke—that is, as regards the Ohinemuri River. As regards the Waihou River, the navigation still continues to go right up to Te Aroha Township. The evidence will be that the navigation has been impeded very materially, and that it is still being hindered. After the question of damage comes the question of the remedy. The association which I represent is not an association of experts: it is purely an association of farmers and business men, and they look upon the matter in this light: They say that what has caused the damage is the silt that has been put into the river: therefore the natural sequence follows that if the silt is prevented going into the river the damage will cease. Clear out what is in there, and prevent any more going in. In support of their contention there have been reports made. There was a report of Mr. J. Stewart, made in 1907, when he was talking about the Piako land, which was then being considered by the Government. He said in his report, "But at a time when it is seriously proposed to commence the arterial drainage on the great low lands in the Thames and Piako Valley, it seems anomalous that a system should be continued which would to a large extent render nugatory a scheme of such importance from a national point of view." And Mr. Blow, Under-Secretary for Public Works, in a report to the Prime Minister, says that the only thoroughly effective remedy is to prevent further deposits of tailings into the river. It will be said that nothing else can be done but put the tailings in the river. There will be evidence to show what is being done in other places, and what can be done in that respect. Apart altogether from the absolute prevention of any further tailings going into the river, there are the alternatives of, first, dredging the channels and cutting down the willows; and then comes the question how that is to be done—the question of finance. As regards finance, I should just like to mention this: that the revenue which is mentioned in the text of the Commission—the revenue derived by the local bodies from the gold-mines—relates to two sorts of revenue. You will probably hear a lot during the Commission about the gold duty. Now, gold duty is only one of the portions of the revenue derived from the mines. The gold duty is a duty of 2s. an ounce on all gold actually won. The mines have to pay that in the way of tax. There is another portion of the revenue which is called "goldfields revenue" in the mining district, and that comprises the moneys received at the different Wardens' Courts of the district for the issue of miners' rights, rent of claims, rent of residence and business