

WILLIAM ATKIN NICCOL examined. (No. 36.)

1. *Mr. Mueller.*] You are secretary for the Silting Association?—Yes.
2. It has been mentioned during the course of this inquiry that something ought to have been done in regard to the clearing of the willows: can you tell us what your association has done in this connection?—Last year there was a sum voted on the estimates to clear the willows out of the river, and my association wrote to the Ohinemuri River Board asking them to get authority to expend the money in clearing the willows. The amount of the vote was £1,000.
3. Is that the reply your association got from the River Board?—Yes. [Exhibit No. 23, as follows: "17th September, 1909.—Memo. for W. Niccol, Esq., Hon. Secretary, Ohinemuri River Silting Association.—DEAR SIR,—I am instructed to thank you for your letter of the 27th ultimo, enclosing portion of Mr. Breakell's report upon the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers, and to inform you that application has been made to the Minister of Mines to authorize the expenditure of the £1,000 which appeared on the last supplementary estimates in the destruction of willows on the Ohinemuri River.—Yours faithfully, R. W. EVANS, County Clerk."]
4. Do you know whether the £1,000 was obtained from the Government?—I do not think it was.
5. So nothing has been done by the Board or county in commencing operations on the willows?—I know the County Council did some clearing of willows just below the Junction.
6. Did your association make application to the Mines Department for some reports?—Yes.
7. Is this a copy of a report by Mr. H. J. H. Blow, Under-Secretary for Public Works?—Yes. [Exhibit No. 24.]
8. Is this a copy of Mr. Breakell's report received at the same time?—Yes. [Exhibit No. 25.]
9. Is this a copy of a report by Mr. Stewart which your association got?—Yes. [Exhibit No. 26.]
10. Are these two letters which you have received as secretary of this association bearing on this matter [Exhibit No. 27]?—Yes. They were read as follows: "Auckland, 14th July, 1909.—Mr. W. Niccol, Hon. Secretary, Ohinemuri Silting Commission, Paeroa.—DEAR SIR,—At a meeting of our executive held on Friday last your favour of 29th May with regard to the depositing of mining *débris* in the Ohinemuri River was fully discussed, and I was instructed to write to you, stating that this association are communicating with the Minister for Agriculture, urging the necessity of taking immediate steps to prevent the silting-up of the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers, as they feel sure that this is the only measure that will save the valuable farming and dairy lands of the Thames Valley.—Yours truly, EDWIN HALL, Secretary, Auckland Agricultural and Pastoral Association." The other reads, "Paeroa, 2nd April, 1909.—E. W. Porritt, Esq., Chairman, River Silting Committee, Paeroa.—DEAR SIR,—For the information of the Committee I beg to state that I am prepared to remove the tailings from the Waihi Company's batteries to the Waihi Plains for the sum of 1s. per ton, and would be prepared to pay a substantial sum as a deposit on the contract; provided I secured a contract for a reasonable period, and that every facility was afforded me by the company. By 'every facility' I mean that my operations would rank as of equal importance to the company's operations.—Yours faithfully, WM. FORREST." Mr. Forrest is a contractor, and he was residing in Paeroa when that letter was written. I believe he has now one or more contracts in connection with the Auckland City drainage-works.
11. *Mr. Myers.*] Mr. Forrest's letter was presumably in reply to a letter from you?—No; he made the offer himself.
12. How did he come to make the offer?—He was a member of the Silting Association.
13. Had he been living here long?—Yes, about a dozen years.
14. What was he doing here?—I think he was contracting at that time.
15. *The Chairman.*] What class of contracting?—I think the last contract he had was for the Waikino water-supply.
16. *Mr. Myers.*] And was he doing timber-work?—He had a sawmill at one time.
17. Do you know whether he ever had any mining experience?—Not that I know of.
18. *Mr. McVeagh.*] How long have you had that letter?—About twelve months.
19. Was it entirely spontaneous on the part of Mr. Forrest?—I was not aware that it was entirely spontaneous, because the question of the disposal of the tailings had been discussed so often that Mr. Forrest said he was prepared to take them away for a certain sum, and he was asked if he would put that offer in writing, and he sent us that letter.
20. *The Chairman.*] Do you hold your meetings in public or private?—As a rule they are public.
21. Was the meeting public when this letter was received?—It was.
22. Was the letter published in the newspapers?—I am fairly certain it was.
23. *Mr. McVeagh.*] Did you communicate that offer of Mr. Forrest's to the mining companies?—No.
24. Did you ask Mr. Forrest himself to communicate it to the mining companies?—No.
25. Have you any other expert reports besides these which have been put in now?—No.
26. They comprehend all the reports you have on the silting question?—Yes, with Mr. Perham's.
27. *Mr. Mueller.*] Do you know whether the matter of that letter appeared in the local papers?—I am fairly certain it did. I will ascertain.
28. *Mr. Flatman.*] Have you had any conversation with Mr. Forrest since that letter was written?—He went away not very long afterwards, and I have not spoken to him since. I believe he was a member of the association when a reply came back from the Minister of Mines that the matter would be considered, and that the whole question was being gone into.
29. You do not know if Mr. Forrest is willing to take up the contract to-day?—I do not.
- Mr. Mueller:* That is the evidence which the association wish to place before the Commission.