

No. 86.

SIR,—

Minister of Lands Office, Wellington, 5th September, 1910.

With reference to your letter of the 5th July last, inquiring whether the Government intends making arrangements to acquire the freehold of the land leased by Mr. Jones in the Mokau District from the Native owners, I have now the honour to inform you that the Government is advised that, in view of the extraordinary complications in this case, it is most inadvisable to enter into any negotiations for the purchase of the land in question. The more I investigate the matter the more complicated it appears.

I have, &c.,

J. G. WARD,

Minister of Lands

H. J. H. Okey, Esq., M.P., Parliament Buildings.

No. 87.

The Under-Secretary of Lands, Wellington.

Wellington, 24th August, 1911.

Mokau-Mohakatino Part No. 1 Block.

I HAVE the honour to forward herewith brief notes on the above block for your information, as verbally requested this morning.

Total area, 55,652 acres. Crown Lands Rangers Twiss and Tolme estimated price that the block would realize after being subdivided and offered for lease, &c., and making provision for the usual roading, &c., at £45,144. (Note: This sum excludes valuation over those parts of block cut off by Native Land Court to satisfy Crown survey liens, but which it has since been decided to hand over to the syndicate on the understanding that they pay the survey costs in cash.)

My estimate as above is that the block would realize a total of £52,254, or approximately 18s. 9d. per acre over the block as a whole. (Note: My estimate covers the land alluded to above as having been cut off to satisfy survey liens.) This rate—18s. 9d. per acre—less cost of survey 3s. per acre, and roading 5s. per acre, would leave 10s. 9d. per acre, or a total sum of £29,912, which the Crown could with any degree of safety give for the block.

There would not be more than one-fifth of the block, or, say, 10,000 acres (an outside estimate), fit for close settlement in subdivisions from 100 to 500 acres, and these would be scattered over the western half of the block, and then not in any one particular locality. The best and most accessible portions of the block are held under subleases, which are registered under the Land Transfer Act, and have an unexpired term of about thirty-two years to run. These subleases cover 6,789 acres, and embrace the whole sea-front and the principal flats—rich country—along the Mokau River frontage, and also a large slice of the best country in the Mohakatino Valley. Fully two-thirds, comprising the whole of No. 1G, No. 1H, and No. 1J, and a large slice of the western part of No. 1F, is very rough and of poor quality, and only fit for sheep-farming.

The timber on the block is very limited, and only sufficient for ordinary farm purposes, fences, and rough sheds. There are outcrops of coal on the land, but it has not been found so far advisable to attempt the working of same, as for various reasons—dips of seams, inaccessibility, &c.—it would not pay to work. Limestone abounds over the western middle portion of the block, while the eastern half is a mixture of sandstone and papa.

The block taken as a whole can only be classed as second class; but the fact that as long as the title rested in the Natives all settlement was blocked in north-west Taranaki has created an added value to the Mokau-Mohakatino lands. I am strongly of opinion, knowing as I do the full details now being undertaken by Surveyors Sladden and Palmer for the subdivision and roading of the block, that an excellent scheme of settlement will eventuate, and the land put to its fullest use. In fact, the State could not do better, unless it is prepared to spend freely over and above the sums above mentioned.

I am not prepared to say more with regard to the minerals than I have already noted, excepting to state that this is but a corner of the large coalfield that extends over the northern part of Taranaki, and that the main portion of the field will eventually be tapped in many parts by the Stratford-Ongarue or Stratford-Mangaroa-Te Kuiti Railway at easily worked points, with short sidings leading from the railway to pit-head. Contrast this with the inaccessibility and difficulties of working the seams on block under review, the dangerous bar at Mokau Heads, and the difficulties, especially in summer, of the river navigation. This, I maintain, will most seriously discount the ultimate value of the coal-seams on the Mokau-Mohakatino No. 1 Block.

W. H. SKINNER,

Chief Draughtsman for Taranaki.

No. 88.

(Confidential.)

District Land Office, Invercargill, 25th August, 1911.

Mokau-Mohakatino Block.

SIR,—

In reply to your telegram *re* above, I have to state that I triangulated all over the block. The Mokau River from Totoro to where the river joins the sea forms one boundary. Mohakatino from the sea to its source is the boundary on south side, and on the east a long straight line that runs over narrow ridges. On the lower Mokau River there are some small flats, not large in extent. From Tarawhati to Totoro the land is better, and some moderate-sized sections might be laid off. The Totoro Valley runs back flat for a few miles, and is narrow. One or two homestead-sites might be found in it. The homestead block on the sea-coast, of several hundred acres, makes one farm, and up the Mohakatino a few sections, purely pastoral, could be laid off. The middle portion of the block from Panirau to the north up to Tarawhati, and westward to a little above the Totoro Stream, is exceedingly broken, ridgy, forest country, covered with a considerable amount