

No. 2.

To the President and members of the Aotea Native Land Board, Wanganui.

GENTLEMEN,—

We, the undersigned lessees of lands in the Ohotu Block, respectfully request that your Board will cancel the clause which has been inserted in our leases respecting payment of royalty on timber on the lands leased by us from your Board, for the following reasons:—

1. That if the provision for payment of timber royalty is retained your petitioners are precluded from dealing with the timber on their lands, as, by reason of the distance of the said timber from the railway, and the absence of roads and bridges or any practical means of access, the cost of putting the said timber on the market will, with the addition of royalty charges, be prohibitive in comparison with the cost of other large areas of milling-timber which adjoin the railway and are now beginning to be utilized.

2. That such other timber-areas are sufficient to last for many years, and that in the meantime we, being required by the improvement clauses in our leases, and by reason of having to pay heavy rental charges, are unable to conserve the timber until such a period in the future as it may become marketable.

3. That the area of milling-timber in the said block is very limited, and confined entirely to the northern end of the block: part of this area is not subject to royalty. A large portion of the remainder has already been felled, and will be burnt during the coming summer; that unless the royalty clause is cancelled further areas will continue to be felled and burnt, until the whole of the milling-timber is practically destroyed.

4. That for the above reasons no revenue will be obtained by your Board from the timber if the royalty clause is retained, whilst if your Board consents to its cancellation your petitioners may be enabled to negotiate with millers for the erection of a sawmill in the block, or may erect a mill themselves.

5. That the erection of a sawmill will promote settlement by relieving the land of much of the fallen timber, by enabling us to utilize any tramway for the carriage of goods and products of the land, by supplying us with building-timber for our own needs, and in other ways.

At present the road from the block (the Oruakukura-Ohotu Road) to the Main Trunk line is a "map road" only. We have been in communication with the Minister of Lands with regard to getting a subsidy for roading purposes, and have received the following reply: "I understand the tenants will have to complete the roads themselves, or make arrangements with the Aotea Maori Land Board to do so." We therefore trust that your Board will give the matter your careful consideration, and free us from a condition which is irksome to us and useless to the Native owners of the block.

No. 3.

Wanganui, N.Z., 5th November, 1907.

The President and members of the Aotea District Maori Land Board, Wanganui.

GENTLEMEN,—

We have been making inquiries with reference to the possibility of disposing of the timber on our sections, or such of them as are suitable for milling. The following reply was received by us from a timber company whom we approached on the matter:—

"After looking into the matter, our company could not consider the matter if the ruling Government royalty were charged, as the block is so far from a station that the tramming-charges would, when added to the royalty, be more than we could purchase timber for close to the line. If, however, the Aotea Land Board were to allow the timber to be sold at a reduced rate, I think our company would probably agree to buy the timber and put in a tram to get it out. There is a lot of fine timber in the block, and it seems a great pity that it should be all wasted; but a tram to the Rangataua Railway-station, which would be the nearest point on the railway, would be seven or eight miles to the centre of the bulk of the timber. This would cost a large sum of money, and would probably have to be laid with steel rails, so that unless the timber were allowed to be sold at a reduced rate there would be no inducement to do anything in the matter. If you would find out from the Board if a sum of, say, £1 per acre would be agreed to for the timber rights, our company would go into the matter and would be prepared to make a definite offer."

The petition which we sent you, and to which you replied on the 4th ultimo, sets out fully the facts of the case, and we again respectfully urge the matter on your favourable consideration. As high royalties, which are chargeable if the strict letter of our leases is insisted on, are proving an absolute bar to dealing with the timber, we now beg to apply that your Board will assist us by fixing the value of the timber at £1 per acre, on such of the sections that contain milling-timber, half of which would be payable to your Board and half to the lessee. If you can see your way to grant our request the present uncertainty will be removed, and we shall have a definite basis to work on in negotiating with milling companies. We have already felled about 850 acres of milling bush on our sections, which will be burnt this summer, and we take this early opportunity of approaching your Board, as our future policy with regard to felling the land must necessarily depend on your decision as to whether you will meet us in this matter. It will be ten thousand pities if the present conditions result in neither the Natives nor ourselves obtaining any benefit from the timber.

Yours, &c.,