

1,550 acres were taken away.. That area was an area held under different titles from those which are the subject of the present inquiry. They had been issued under the State Forests Regulations, whereas the areas were subject to the Land Regulations, so that the titles went by the board without any question. Then there were proceedings in the Supreme Court in which it was sought to attack the decision which had been given by the Commissioner for State Forests in refusing to allow Mr. Massey's titles to be questioned. In 1910 there were proceedings upon a petition to Parliament before a parliamentary Committee. Now, the chief actor in all these proceedings is Mr. Wallis, whose name appears at the head of the petition. While referring to the petition I might draw the attention of the Committee to the fact that while Mr. Wallis's name heads the list of signatures there are some twenty-odd others, all of whom are described in the petition as farmers; five belong to one family, by the name of McCall, and three to another by the name of Morton. The two others who are described there as sawmillers are careful to add that they are settlers also; that is because each of these two gentlemen has a small mill upon land which he farms and works. Mr. C. H. Robinson, of Waimahaka, is described as a sawmiller and settler, and has a very small mill which he has used for cutting down bush on his own farm. That has been closed for a couple of years. That is a significant fact when placed beside the allegations which would lead the Committee to infer that there is a scarcity of bush for milling. One of the petitioners has a bush which might be cut—Mr. C. H. Robinson, Waimahaka—if he cares to cut it. Now, following upon the parliamentary proceedings of 1910 an arrangement was come to with the Government. I might say, as introductory to the proceedings before the Committee on that occasion, that some years before, when questions were raised as to Mr. Massey's right to hold these areas, and before he paid his money for the bush—that was, for the reserves—he took the opinion of counsel in various parts of New Zealand independently as to the construction to be placed upon the regulations under which the licenses were issued. These licenses, I might point out, were not applied for by Mr. Massey. They were originally taken by Mr. Walter Guthrie, and, I think, Sir Robert Stout, as the representatives of the New Zealand Pine Company, and it was when the New Zealand Pine Company went into liquidation that Mr. Massey became possessed of these areas. It was material to him to know, of course, whether the position of the titles was sound or not, and he took the opinion independently of Mr. Frederick Chapman, who was his solicitor, Mr. Martin Chapman, of Wellington, Mr. T. Cooper, and myself. Mr. Frederick Chapman and Mr. Cooper, as you know, are now on the Bench. Copies of these opinions were submitted to the Government for the purpose of an inquiry before a Committee two years ago, and a reference to them will show that counsel were unhesitatingly of opinion that the regulations under which the original licenses were issued entitled the licensee to hold the areas until he had cut out the bush. The fact that that was the position of those licenses would be evident, I think, to any layman when he considers the terms in which the subsequent regulations are couched. It was found that the original regulations imposed no limit of time, so these subsequent regulations provided that all bush-areas were to be cut out within a reasonable time. That is effected by the regulations that the mills shall be kept going in a reasonable manner, it being assumed that this would suffice to prevent delay in cutting out the bush. That will be found to be the character of the regulations which were made subsequently to 1886. Now, these opinions were placed at the disposal of the Committee upon the previous inquiry, and they referred the question to the Solicitor-General for his opinion, and the Solicitor-General gave it as his opinion, without any hesitation, I think—from the terms of it I may say it was an absolute opinion—that the bush-areas which were held by Mr. Massey under the regulations of 1886 were held by him subject only to being cut out in a reasonable time—that is, no limit was marked out by a space of so-many years. Well, I do not recall the exact terms of the finding of the parliamentary Committee on the previous occasion, but according to the petition it is said that the matter was referred to the Government, and that the Lands Committee had recommended the prayer of the petition to the Government for consideration, and also recommended that a full inquiry be instituted into the legality or otherwise of the sawmilling licenses situated in the District of Southland. Then the petitioners say they received no answer to their petition or heard of an inquiry being held into the matters arising out of the petition. I think it may be fairly well assumed that they were made aware that an inquiry was held into the legality of the licenses, and of the opinion given by the Solicitor-General that they were valid. The Government thought some steps should be taken to give a time-limit to these licenses, and approached Mr. Massey to know if he was prepared to impose upon himself a limit of time in which the bush should be cut out, and ultimately Mr. Massey agreed to eighteen years, one of which has already gone. Thereupon an agreement was made on the 12th February, 1912, by which Mr. Massey agreed as follows: "I hereby agree with His Majesty the King to cut and remove the sawmilling timber on the sawmill-areas enumerated in the schedule hereto, held by me under the State Forests Regulations of 1886, within a period of eighteen years from date hereof. I also undertake to abandon each year those areas worked out by me, and at the expiration of eighteen years from this date I will surrender absolutely such of the areas as shall not have already been abandoned. Schedule: Sawmill areas Nos. 187, 187A, 187B, part of 187C, 188, 188A, 188B, 188C, 189A, 189B, 191, 191A, 191B, 191C, 233, 233A, 233B, 234, 234A, 234B, 234C, 444, 444A, 444B.—Witness to signature—A. McGAVOCK, Chief Clerk Lands, Invercargill.—H. A. Massey.—Recommended—G. H. M. McClure, Conservator of State Forests. On behalf of His Majesty the King I agree to the above.—J. G. WARD, Commissioner of State Forests." Now, after that agreement had been come to, at the instance of the Government with a view to satisfying the petition, Mr. Massey thought that he was no longer to be harassed by the proceedings to which he had been subjected in the past, and I respectfully put it to the Committee, on behalf of Mr. Massey, that the Committee should approach this petition from the standpoint of a contract entered into as between the Government and Mr. Massey. After the question of title had been referred to the responsible officers of the Crown, and an agreement come to for the purpose of defining the disputed rights, surely we have a right to ask that these rights should no longer be questioned. If this Committee makes