

*Mr. G. W. Russell, M.P.:* May I, Mr. Chairman, as representing the holders of about 300,000 acres of land who are deeply interested in this matter, ask Mr. Clifton a few questions?

*The Chairman:* Certainly.

77. *Mr. Russell.*] I think you hold the opinion, from what you have said, that this country will be broken in in the first place in fairly large pastoral areas?—I think that is the essential process.

78. That is, you anticipate that a large part of it will be sheep country?—Yes.

79. Do you think there is any possibility, with reasonable cultivation and manuring, of fat lambs being produced on that country?—I think that will follow.

80. Is there any possibility of fat lambs being sent to market from that country unless there is railway communication that enables the lambs to be forwarded rapidly to the market?—We know it is impossible.

81. All the country south of Taupo, including Wharetoto and Runanga and the big stations down there—is there any possibility of those stations now forwarding fat lambs to Napier?—They could not possibly send fat lambs to arrive in reasonable condition. The only alternative is to raise stock and fatten on other lands.

82. In other words, stock can only be sent away as forward stores?—I think that is the position.

83. Supposing this line from Putaruru is linked up with Taupo, would it not greatly increase the carrying-capacity of all the country south, including Wharetoto, Runanga, Pohukura, Taharua, and all the stations down there, which altogether at the present time are carrying upwards of eighty thousand to one hundred thousand sheep?—It would afford the means of using it reasonably.

84. Do you think it is possible, then, for any of this country lying between Putaruru and extending within an area of from twenty-five to fifty miles of Taupo ever to be fat-lamb country unless that railway is made accessible, in order to reach the market at Hamilton?—It is impossible to get lambs from there unless some communication is provided by railway.

85. A very large area of the country that you have been dealing with to-day is not bush country but open country. In preparing that land for cultivation would not the fact that it is easily ploughable stand as against the expense of felling the bush and taking the chances?—Those are two different forms of development altogether. It might bring them together as far as profit is concerned; as a matter of fact, I should prefer the bush lands.

86. And take the chance?—Yes.

87. But the difference would not be so great when you set the felling of the bush as against the open country?—It is difficult to estimate. My preference would be for the bush country.

88. Dealing with the question of the smaller areas, would not a man who took up, say, 5,000 acres of this country leave the greater portion of it untouched and undeveloped, and merely make it by putting his stock on it?—I do not think a great deal of that country is amenable to improvement by merely stocking. The better portions perhaps would be, but a great part of the medium-class land would not be so improved—that is, judging by what has taken place through a great part of the Waikato. In any case it would require many years for that improvement to become of importance.

89. If this country were cut up into comparatively small areas—say, up to 600 acres—would not the owner then be compelled to cultivate and fertilize in order to get a return, and consequently would not the settlement be much greater and more rapid in small areas than in big ones?—That may apply to the better class of land in the Taupo district. It could, as a matter of common-sense, apply only to the better lands.

90. Assuming those statements to be correct, that country will open up a field for small settlement, and will be more likely to be successfully handled as small-settlement country than in big areas of 10,000 and 15,000 acres?—Yes. I must always make a distinction between the better land suitable for smaller holdings and the poorer class of land of the Taupo district.

91. You have had a good deal to do with the wattle plantations at Rangiriri and down there, have you not?—Yes.

92. Those plantations have turned out a financial success, have they not?—Yes.

93. Is it not a fact that even the very worst of the pumice country will provide excellent soil for acacia plantations on the same lines, for the purpose of exporting the bark for tanning?—They would, but there is this qualification, as often happens with enterprises of that sort: the question of the availability of labour would be very serious.

94. *Mr. Buchanan.*] The frost is very severe in the Taupo country, is it not?—Acacia-trees are growing in the Taupo country. I should not regard frost as being dangerous or a serious consideration. The labour would probably preclude any proposal to plant largely and to harvest the bark. I find already that difficulty at Rangiriri.

95. *The Chairman.*] The frost at Taupo is nothing like it is in Southland?—No. The frost penetrates the light land more deeply; but acacia-trees grow there very successfully.

96. *Mr. Russell.*] I do not wish to mention particularly any block, but on the hill country and even on the river-flats and the plains—on what you regard as the better-class land—have you not found that cocksfoot and cow-grass and red clover all grow well?—Yes, on the better soils.

97. Have you examined any of the cocksfoot on the hill country at all, or on any of the old Native settlements?—Not of late years. I have seen it there, but I have not specially observed it.

98. *Mr. Buchanan.*] In the course of your evidence you expressed a preference for the development of bush land rather than open land: how would you maintain the pasture upon this bush land?—The only means of maintaining pasture would be by top-dressing. That is what I think I said. The question of the carrying-capacity depends on the extent of the agricultural operations, or the alternative of top-dressing.