

13. *The Chairman.*] Do you wish to state any other point?—With regard to reafforestation, speaking from practical experience I found that when I grew *Pinus insignis* close together I got a millable tree, while if grown apart the tree was worth nothing.

14. Have you had any experience in milling *Pinus insignis*?—No. I have seen it milled, and it turned out very well. I planted them twenty-five years ago, and they are now 3 ft. in diameter and fit to mill. I planted them on very poor gum country. I will forward measurements.

15. Have you planted gums?—No; only *Pinus insignis*, Norway pine, pitch-pine, and *macrocarpa*. I have come to the conclusion that the closer together you plant the cleaner the trunk will be; the tree will shed its branches, and the sun will draw it up into a straight, clean stick.

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EDWIN HARDING sworn and examined. (No. 46.)

1. *The Chairman.*] I understand you wish to tender evidence regarding the question we are inquiring into?—Yes. I am a farmer residing in this district, and I wish to urge the desirability of adopting a better method of selection or location of the forest reserves, and as to the class of country to be reserved. Many of the areas which have been set apart for climatic and other reserves have been well adapted for settlement; on the other hand, a good deal of country has been opened for selection which is of no commercial value, but is distinctly adapted for reservation purposes. Hilltops have been opened in this district and in Hawke's Bay for selection which, when the forest has been removed, have proved worthless; while in other places, such as portions of the Pekehekarau State Forest Reserve, and near Puhipuhi, where reserves have been set apart, it has been impossible to prevent fires. Thus the Dominion loses the value that it sought to obtain by making these reserves. Sections on the Tangihua Range, near Tangiteroria—almost bare rock, or with a certain light forest growth—might be set apart with advantage as climatic reserves.

2. Are those sections in the hands of the Crown?—Some are, but others have been in the hands of settlers for some years. They have applied in one or two cases to be allowed to surrender a portion of their leases which contained land useless for pastoral purposes, but nothing has been done.

3. *Mr. Clarke.*] Then they would not have any forest reserve?—The forest is already there, and should be reserved from the climatic point of view. While a member of the Hobson County Council we made repeated application to the Land Board and the Minister for the removal of reservations on the lower-lying hills, and to have reserved in their place similar areas, or even larger ones, on the mountain-tops. Again nothing was done. I would even suggest that the mountain-tops, where they are in private hands, should be purchased and reserved, or exchanged for available pastoral lands lower down; or the latter could be sold.

4. *The Chairman.*] If the Government wanted to purchase land on mountain-tops might not an enhanced value be put on the same?—Yes; but would there not be a still greater commercial value in the case of the lower lands released from reservation?

5. I am not speaking of the intrinsic value, but rather of the chance the owner would have to impose an enormous price on the Crown when he knew the land was wanted for scenic or climatic purposes?—Then I would be in favour of taking the land compulsorily.

6. *Mr. Murdoch.*] I presume there are portions of the Tangihua Range still in the hands of the Crown?—A portion belonging to the Omana Block—known as Wangimatangi—we repeatedly asked should be reserved, as it had no value from a settlement point of view, before that block reached its present high commercial value.

7. *Mr. Clarke.*] Do you suggest that trees should only be planted in situations where the land is absolutely valueless for settlement?—I am talking of land which is covered with virgin forest, and absolutely safe from fire. For climatic purposes some of the reserves have been made in the wrong places and in localities prone to fire; also in districts which would have been better settled.

8. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] You suggest a comprehensive scheme of exchange in connection with all such areas?—I do—holding what is in the hands of the Crown where the areas are suitable for reserves, purchasing the hilltops where required, and selling the lower levels now held as reserves and where the same are fit for settlement.

9. *The Chairman.*] Do you know the Waipoua Forest?—Yes, very well. I have had a life-long experience of that class of country, and taking into consideration what has occurred in this district, the Bay of Islands, and in the Whangarei district, I am distinctly of opinion that it is impossible to preserve that forest from fire.

10. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] Do you know the rainfall?—Not accurately.

11. We are told that it is very high?—That is so; but in such districts there occasionally comes a period of drought, when fires will occur and spread. There is no class of country more inflammable than a kauri bush. Every credit must be given to those responsible for protecting this forest in the past, but the time will come when a huge fire will occur, with the result that, as at Puhipuhi, many thousand feet of most valuable timber will be lost to the Dominion. At Kaihu there is the Kauri Park, and a considerable expense was incurred in preserving that place from fire by cutting the scrub and clearing the ground round the park from grass; but only a few years ago a fire travelled across the country for some distance and destroyed the most striking portion of the park—the big kauri-tree. As to the commercial value of the Waipoua Forest, myself and others feel that it would be a permanent injury to the district if an enormous asset—