

NEW PLYMOUTH, WEDNESDAY, 30TH APRIL, 1913.

WILLIAM ANDREWS COLLIS sworn and examined. (No. 64.)

1. *The Chairman.*] We shall be glad to hear what you have to say?—I am the New Plymouth representative on the Egmont National Park Board. Yesterday the Commission visited the Everett Road Reserve, which was laid off not because the country was rough and bad, but in order to preserve some specimen of the lowland forests in this district. Probably in a few years' time that piece of forest will be the only bit left of the genuine lowland forest. For that reason we oppose the lifting of the reserve if that question is being raised. If any attempt is made to interfere with the Egmont National Park we soon know all about it, as nothing can be done excepting by Act of Parliament; but in regard to the Everett Road Reserve there is a danger of the real facts of the case not being put before the Commission, with the result that the reservation might be lifted.

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THOMAS C. LIST sworn and examined. (No. 65.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What matter do you wish to refer to?—I am the chairman of the New Plymouth Expansion and Tourist League, and we desire to bring under your notice the matter of the preservation of river and mountain scenery in north Taranaki. For some time past the League has been urging upon the Government the necessity for protecting and reserving what remains of the incomparable river scenery on the River Mokau. Some of the best stretches have already been destroyed, and more is now threatened with destruction. The former owners of one large block, I understand, were willing to reserve without compensation the bush fronting the block on the riverside, from the water's edge to the skyline, but for some reason that has yet to be explained the Government of the day did not take prompt steps to proclaim the land involved a scenic area. The block subsequently changed hands, and most of the bush was felled and the fire put through; so that where a short time ago some of the most beautiful bush in the world adorned the river-bank, bush which took probably decades to grow and cannot be replaced in less time, if ever, is now a scene of desolation, a veritable eyesore to the visitor. One could probably understand this destruction if the frontage to the river were of any value for settlement, but for the most part it has no value other than scenic. It is to prevent more of the river scenery sharing the same fate that our League is anxious to enlist the support of your Commission. There are considerable areas still remaining that have been surveyed as scenic reserves, which have not yet been gazetted and taken over by the Government. There are also portions of bush scenery on Native land that should be proclaimed. Again, there is a fine piece of bush on a section the lessee of which is willing to hand it over if the Government will pay for the necessary fencing. When approached by the League on this matter recently the Prime Minister expressed his entire sympathy with our desires, but explained that it was a question of finance, involving a cost to the Government of £10,000 for compensation to owners. I submitted then, and do so now to you, that the preservation of this bush for which compensation is being sought is absolutely necessary in the interests of the settlers themselves. Once destroy the bush, and the banks, especially soft banks like those of the Mokau, will sooner or later fall into the river, impede the flow of the water, and ultimately seriously affect if not absolutely block the river as a means of communication—the only means of ingress and egress the holders of most of the sections have, or ever will have, to their properties. But apart from this important consideration, the price put upon the land required to preserve the river scenery could, it appears to those qualified to judge, not be justified before a Compensation Court, and if the State had to pay compensation it would probably be found to be a sum considerably less than that mentioned by the Prime Minister. In any case, it is felt by our League that a strong effort should be made by the Government to secure for present and future generations what is left of the scenery on the Mokau, even if it does entail the expenditure of a few thousand pounds. This river will before very long be as popular a tourist route as the Wanganui River. The road connecting Totoro, at the head of the river, with Te Kuiti is being improved, and with the opening-up of settlement the upper reaches of the Mokau will have to be snagged to allow vessels reaching Totoro. Tourists will be able to leave Te Kuiti, motor or coach to Totoro, and go down the Mokau to the township, thence coming on to New Plymouth. A prettier trip there is not in New Zealand, and everything should be done to preserve the scenery. The mistake was made years ago, before the bushman's axe began its work, and when the whole of the bush for a mile on each side of the river, with necessary outlets, of course, for settlers, should have been reserved, as in the case of the Wanganui River in Mr. Ballance's day. This may not have been easy on account of the complicated ownership of most of the lands affected, but for these laches posterity will have something very pertinent to say of our legislators. Another matter to which our League would direct attention is the maintaining of the Patua or Kaitake Ranges as a scenic reserve. An effort is being made by interested parties to have the low-lying land on these ranges thrown open to settlement, the statement being made that at present the reserve is nothing else than a seed-bed for noxious weeds. To cut down this bush will be a scandal and a calamity that would fall most heavily on those anxious to bring it about, and I trust you will not agree to it. The bush-clad ranges act as nature's reservoirs for the whole of Taranaki. But for this provision the province would not be the well-watered, fertile, and prosperous district it is. The water, unrestrained by the natural forest covering, would tear its way quickly to the sea, carrying probably much good land with it, and in summer-time soon drying up and so depreciating the stock-carrying capacity of the land. As for the ranges harbouring weeds, it is difficult to see how this can be so where the bush and undergrowth is luxurious. Once cut that away and the weeds would have an opportunity to flourish which they do not possess now.