

JOHN WALKER sworn and examined. (No. 2.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Do you also wish to make a statement?—I am a builder, but have had only a limited experience in sawmilling. We only got twelve years ago half what is being got for timber now.

2. *Mr. Clarke.*] What is the reason for the difference? Has there been a large increase of cost at the stump?—Millers have to go farther back for it now, and into rougher country. Wages are not much different, but the millers are making better profits now.

3. You agree with the builders that further plantations should be established within a reasonable distance of the places where the timber is needed?—Yes. There are a lot of abandoned mining-areas near Otautau that should be planted.

4. What height do the hills run there?—From 300 ft. to 400 ft.

5. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] Whom do the abandoned areas belong to?—I think to the Government.

6. *Mr. Murdoch.*] Have you made recent observations of the cutting of the timber, the getting it out of the bush, and the alleged slaughtering that is said to be going on?—No.

GORDON HURRELL MORELAND McCLURE sworn and examined. (No. 3.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are Commissioner of Crown Lands and Chief Surveyor for the Southland District?—Yes. I have been here twelve months last December.

2. You have the administration of the timber industry under the Land Regulations?—Yes.

3. Do you find those regulations work generally satisfactorily?—I suppose they work satisfactorily, but I do not quite understand your question. Do you want my opinion as to whether the Timber Regulations should be improved or not?

4. Yes?—I have not gone into that question. When I came here the usual thing was to estimate the timber, and I found that the quantity of timber some mills were supposed to be cutting was farcical—one panned out at 355 ft. a day; so I recommended the Head Office to alter the system of reckoning to the actual output, and every miller, barring two or three, is against the change, which seems a strong argument that they were not paying for the timber they were previously cutting. The improved system applies to the new areas taken up.

5. How was the timber estimated previously?—By the Ranger and the surveyor who surveyed the area. The way they estimated the value of timber was absurd—much too approximate, in my opinion.

6. What is the process in Southland if a miller wants 200 or 400 acres of rough bush?—He can only get 200 acres.

7. Does the Department here insist on a survey?—In every case, practically. Those surveys are done by private surveyors, instructed by the Department.

8. How are the figures of the sawmiller checked as to his output?—He has to put in a sworn statement; but we have not commenced the new system yet.

9. Have you ever had complaints from the sawmillers that the Ranger had overestimated the timber?—No; their stock argument is that they did not appoint the valuers. They also wished to know why they had to pay for second-class timber. I replied that everything off the saw had to be paid for.

10. Under the old system if a Ranger made a mistake and estimated a bush at 3,000 ft. to the acre, and it turned out to be 20,000 ft., the miller would get the benefit?—Yes.

11. But if the trees were counted, branded, and measured, there would be no danger of the Crown losing revenue in that way?—No.

12. What royalty do the millers pay here on red-pine?—Sixpence per 100 ft.

13. It has been represented to the Minister that certain scenic and other reserves have become breeding-grounds for noxious weeds and rabbits: have you such complaints in this district?—No. One settler complained about a small reserve I have made since I came here, near Orepuki.

14. On what ground?—He wanted the land for farming, I think. Rabbits are all through Southland, and unless you net the country you cannot keep them out.

15. Have you heard complaints about opossums doing damage to native trees?—No, the office file will give what information there is. There was a consensus of opinion that for these animals there should be an open season.

16. Can you suggest any suitable areas of Crown lands that could be planted?—Not offhand. Up near Kingston there is a lot of inferior country that is available for the purpose, but there is nothing to the east.

17. *Mr. Adams.*] What do you think of the eastern slopes of the Longwood Range for the purpose?—That is nearly all sold. As soon as you mill the virgin bush the weeds follow, and it is impossible to cope with them. The only thing to do is to cut such country up for settlement. As soon as you mill the bush here it is valueless as a bush.

18. And the soil where you refer to is decent?—Fairly good.

19. *Mr. Clarke.*] It has been suggested that areas near Otautau and Orepuki and Hedgehope, abandoned mining claims, would be suitable for tree-planting: is that your opinion?—No such areas are available at Otautau and Orepuki. The Hedgehope country is poor, cold, indifferent country—the worst in Southland. Land there has been offered to the Land Purchase Board for £2 10s. per acre. The ground wants lime. Country which has been so treated has been resold at £10 an acre.

20. *The Chairman.*] Do the settlers here experience any difficulty respecting the second growth on their clearings?—Most of the clearings have been made along the coast, and there is probably no better land in Southland than round the coast. It is now in grass paddocks.