

FREDERICK AUGUSTUS THOMPSON sworn and examined. (No. 31.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are Commissioner of Crown Lands and Chief Surveyor for the Nelson Land District?—Yes. I have been here as Commissioner about nine months, but I have spent fourteen years in the district altogether. I left it many years ago, and was engaged in survey-work in the Oamaru district and in the Grey Valley, returning here as Commissioner a few months ago.

2. Have you had any recent complaints that the scenic reserves are becoming breeding-grounds for noxious weeds, and are blocking land-settlement?—Yes, a good many complaints to that effect, but they were from people who were interested in acquiring the land. It became a common expression to say that if a man wanted a piece of a scenic reserve it was infested with blackberries.

3. You think that in the majority of cases these complaints were not justified?—They were not from a public point of view. Possibly there were a good many weeds on them. In some cases portions of the scenic reserves have been burnt, become denuded of timber, and then full of rubbish and weeds.

4. Are there any specific cases where you can recommend the Commission to uplift the reserve and throw the land open for settlement?—Not to any great extent. The main cases are where such reserves have been made without due consideration—land that would be better adapted for a homestead-site, and which has without proper care been declared a scenic reserve.

5. I understand that in certain cases you have already had the reservation uplifted?—I have in several cases recommended that the reservation should be uplifted, and the Scenery Board has gone into the matter.

6. Do you think the present method of first getting the recommendation of the Land Board and then referring the matter to the Scenery Preservation Board is quite ample in regard to safeguarding the same?—Yes, it would be ample. In all cases we get full reports from the Ranger or surveyor. It is very desirable that there should not be power to uplift them too drastically. The present process seems the best, as it does not allow anything to be done hurriedly and without proper consideration. The Land Board has first to pass the resolution that it is desirable to lift the reservation with the idea of utilizing the land for a homestead-site.

7. Are there any places in this district you can recommend to be set aside as climatic reserves for water-conservation purposes?—Yes; I will indicate them on a map I will forward shortly.

8. Do you consider the present method of administering the timber under a dual control is satisfactory?—No, for this reason: in the first place the sawmilling business is really distinct from mining, and, as far as the records are concerned, we have to do the work twice over. One office looks after the granting of the titles, and is supposed to record them, while the other office has to collect the revenue. In fact, one office is a receiving office and the other is a collecting one. It would be better if the collecting office and receiving office were combined.

9. Do you consider that if the matter were administered under the regulations of the Land Act, 1908, it would be a much better system?—If they were carried out in their entirety they would meet the case.

10. Do you consider the time has now arrived when timber disposed of on Crown lands should be measured correctly before it is offered for sale?—Where land is disposed of by public tender the timber thereon should be specified and measured up. A proper estimate should be made tree by tree.

11. Do you think that would tend to prevent waste?—I think so. There is a tendency to waste timber and to work it out in a slovenly manner, and it would be better if each party knew within a reasonable time what they were buying.

12. Do you consider the estimates of the timber on Crown lands which have been published by the Department at various times, especially in the Report on Forestry for 1909, at all reliable?—No. I do not think they are more than merely a shot at the quantity.

13. In the case of country which has never been explored they must be simply a guess?—Practically. A practical man going through the bush would have a good knowledge of the quantity, but I do not think this work has been done with anything like accuracy.

14. You do not think a man standing on a hilltop overlooking miles of country would be able to estimate how much rimu, kahikatea, and miro would be in that bush?—Not if he did it that way. In some cases the estimates may have been based on more careful averages.

15. But in a district where there are thousands of acres practically unexplored?—You could not do it anything like near the mark.

16. *Mr. Clarke.*] If it is a rough shot would it not be just as likely to be overestimated as to be underestimated?—The chances are about equal.

17. You would not suggest that although not approximately correct they are absolutely unreliable?—I have not any certain information on the matter. I have generally found they might give you a good idea as to what sort of bush you might have in a place, but not a very close estimate if worked out block by block.

18. *Mr. Adams.*] Some witnesses thought it was very much of an underestimate. What is your opinion?—I have not gone into it.

19. Would it be more likely to be underestimated than overestimated?—It is impossible for me to answer that question.

20. *Mr. Murdoch.*] Do you think those estimates give even an approximate idea of the timber in any district?—A careful man would be able to work it out as an estimate only if he went through the country carefully. It would be no use my saying whether the estimates referred to are right or wrong. I can only say from the premises that it was just a rough shot.