

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 1913.

JOHN STRAUCHON examined. (No. 1.)

1. *Mr. Forbes.*] We have a report which you have placed before the Committee?—Yes.

2. Does it deal with this matter fully?—Yes. Mr. Hawthorne and Mr. Brodrick went into the matter closely: I have not had time myself to do so. Mr. Brodrick is the Commissioner of the district, and the charges were made in respect to his district. The charges have been gone into carefully, but there is no absolute charge made, and therefore you cannot investigate a matter like that. If a special case was given we could inquire into it. It is not a fair position to put the Department in. We have had to hunt round amongst the settlers and ask questions of them. Most of the cases are freehold, and we have nothing to do with them. If they would make a general charge against any particular person or in connection with any particular section, then we would be in a position to go into it and give a proper answer. As it is we can only give general answers. Mr. Lundius, Mr. Brodrick, and Mr. Hawthorne went to a great deal of trouble in inquiring into the statements made in the *Mangaweka Settler* and the *Auckland Star*, but we had simply to fossick about. If the charge is worth making, surely they can give us a definite statement, and then we can investigate it.

3. The provision as to limitation fixed by the Crown in connection with leasehold has not been broken?—No, not so far as I know. Of course, we have no check on the freeholders. We went to a lot of trouble and searched in the Deeds Office, and you will find the search notes in the report of Mr. Hawthorne which is before the Committee.

4. *Hon. Mr. Massey.*] You mean the freehold alienated prior to 1907?—Yes. I can remember that a charge had been made in consequence of last year's Bill. There were only two or three 10-acre sections that changed hands since then. Previous to that there were two or three 10-acre sections around Mangaweka and Taihape.

5. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] I presume what you mean when you say there has been no aggregation worth mentioning is that there is no aggregation going on which the Land Board has any control over by law?—Yes, freehold lands.

6. You do not dispute the fact that aggregation is going on?—I could not say. We searched the deeds of every case quoted, and the particulars are before the Committee now. We have no means of checking them.

7. Take, for instance, the Wilsons' name?—Some of them are not in any way related.

8. We wish to know whether those individuals are connected by relationship, whether the properties are worked separately or as one holding?—That was inquired into and reported to the Committee by the Crown Lands Ranger. The report is in front of you.

9. *The Chairman.*] They are different families altogether?—Yes. Some are related, and others are not, although they have the same name.

10. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] Do you know anything about their being asked as to the different holdings?—The Ranger inquired into that, and one family has different farms.

11. *Mr. Guthrie.*] Take the case of the Wilsons: there is T. B. Wilson, C. G. Wilson, A. and J. Wilson, R. A. Wilson, N. D. Wilson, H. C. Wilson, A. L. Wilson, G. H. Wilson, with an aggregate of 6,321 acres altogether. When this matter was brought before you you had inquiries made?—Yes. A thorough search was made in the Deeds Office, and the Ranger made inquiries on the ground.

12. The result of that inquiry was that these people had nothing to do with each other, and were not connected in any way?—Yes; I understand that three of them are not relations.

13. There are four distinct families?—I think so.

14. And live in four distinct places?—I do not know where they are living, but they are working separate holdings.

15. In fact, T. B. Wilson is many miles away from the others?—There was one a long distance away, but I could not say where.

16. Amy L. Wilson has got 200 acres: did you find out anything about her?—We found out everything we could from what was laid before us.

17. She holds no other land?—I could not say.

18. She resides with her husband on a Native reserve?—I believe so, but I could not say definitely.

19. As to the land held by C. G. and G. J. Wilson, can you give the Committee any information about that?—You could get it from Mr. Lundius, who made a search. I had nothing to do with it personally.

20. You do not know personally that all those Wilsons are not related with each other?—I looked into it at the time, and was quite satisfied after making several inquiries.

21. You know the whole thing through the Wilsons' name being used?—Yes, there were several family names used.

22. Do you know anything about Musket's property?—No. I just got a general idea in reading over the report. You can get that information from those who searched,