

33. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] It has been stated here that some small sections have been purchased by adjoining owners in the Town of Mangaweka, the freehold of which was granted under the legislation of last year. Are you aware of such transactions having taken place?—No. Of course, if the freehold had been granted the land may have been sold unknown to me. I may not hear of any such transaction. Possibly I might not hear of such a transaction for months and months.

34. In your journeys through that district have you noticed a number of empty homesteads anywhere?—Old original whares. All that land was cut up into 200-acre sections, and you will see the remains of old homes on some sections, but there are no good houses shut up.

35. There are no really good homesteads?—No; no habitable houses shut up.

36. Are those sections on which there are uninhabited houses of any considerable value per acre?—The value may run from £12 to £15 per acre. That would be the average throughout the whole district.

37. Would it be suitable for dairying purposes?—No, not taking it on the whole. There may be little flats which may be suitable for dairying on, but it is mostly suitable for pastoral runs.

38. Where is dairying mostly carried on in that district?—There are a few sections round about Mangaweka, in the Ruahine district and in the Rangiwahia, but taking the bulk of the land it is all pastoral and round country.

39. If you heard it stated that the population of Mangaweka was, say, 40 per cent. less than it was, say, ten years ago, would you think that was a correct statement?—Quite possibly. The sawmilling would account for that, and the construction of the railway, and one thing and another always means a difference in the people living in a locality.

40. But would not the railway ten years ago have gone right ahead?—It was just about completed then. There is always a lot of public-works people and workmen living about the place.

41. If any one said that the adding of one section to the other, and leaving these small homes uninhabited, had reduced the population, say, by 30 or 40 per cent., would it be in any way near the truth?—Not in the agricultural population.

42. It might if you took the effect on the town?—Yes, it might.

43. Generally speaking, you would consider it was not an unreasonable statement to make that the population had been reduced during the last ten years by 30 per cent.?—There has been some reduction, no doubt, but I would not like to say how much.

44. Freehold land when sold by the occupier would not come under your notice in any way, would it?—Except I had to report in regard to whether they had complied with the conditions. Where everything is in order the Ranger is not referred to.

45. Have there not been a number of the o.r.p. tenures turned into freehold?—Yes, a few have been gradually taking them up and buying out the freehold.

46. Do sales take place whether they are under the freehold or still under the o.r.p. tenure?—Sometimes.

47. It makes no difference to the question of transfer?—No, I do not think so. It all depends on how much money the man is offered.

48. *Mr. Guthrie.*] It has been stated that the sections in the Mangaweka Township have been aggregated lately to a very considerable extent: is that your experience?—No.

49. You know the land down near the station?—Yes.

50. Have people been living on those sections during the five years you have been there?—Yes. Those settlers have fulfilled the conditions of the leases without any trouble at all. I have had no trouble with those settlers at all.

51. Could a man make a living off those sections?—No, and they were not meant to.

52. What were they meant for?—As homes for working-people.

53. Would that be a suitable place for a man to reside in who was looking for work in the district?—No, there is no work there to induce a man to settle and live there at the present time.

54. Formerly there was plenty of work, such as co-operative works and railway works, going on?—Yes.

55. And at that time you agree that the idea was that those men if they got a home there might permanently settle?—Yes. A man must go where he can get work.

56. You know that the men could not live there?—Yes, we find that now in all the small settlements along the Main Trunk line.

57. And if the matter came to you as Crown Lands Ranger for a report on the subject, would you have any hesitation in advising the Board that under the conditions existing they should allow some of the small sections to be increased?—It would all depend upon the circumstances of the case. I would take everything into consideration before making a recommendation to the Board.

58. Do you know Ames's land there?—Yes.

59. Has he got a good home there?—Yes, a good home, and permanently resides there.

60. Do you think the Board did anything wrong in allowing him to take up the adjoining 10 acres?—No, it was only the right thing to do.

61. You do not consider that was a disadvantage to the district?—No, I think it was rather an advantage.

62. In regard to Hawaenga, it is said that the original settlers there have practically all gone and it has been aggregated?—There have been only three or four settlers there for years.

63. What class of land is it?—Poor stony land.

64. If you were asked to report in regard to cutting it up to make village settlements, would you recommend it?—No, not now that the bush is cleared off.