

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

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HOUHORA, THURSDAY, 2ND APRIL, 1914.

DAVIS LEWIS CALWELL, Police Constable and Kauri-gum Ranger, stationed at Houhora for the past seven months.

*To Mr. Greville.*] His district extended from Kaikino on the south to the North Cape, and he was frequently over the ground, his duties as Ranger being to collect license fees and issue kauri-gum licenses to the diggers. He satisfied himself before issuing any licenses that all conditions had been complied with. In his opinion, based on the number of licenses issued, there were about six hundred diggers on the Houhora Reserves.

(Witness subsequently handed in the following statement of gum licenses issued in the district for the previous three months: Ordinary licenses, 18; special licenses, 519; gum-buyers' licenses, 31: total, 568.)

RALPH KENWORTHY, Gum-digger for fourteen years, now resident at Houhora.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He was a married man, with fourteen children living with him, and considered that the whole of the Houhora Reserves should be kept for digging gum therefrom. He agreed with Constable Calwell that the number of diggers engaged on the reserves in the locality was about six hundred, of which probably 20 per cent. were married men with families. In his opinion these reserves would support more men by digging than by being cut up and opened up for settlement purposes. He did not think it would pay for diggers to dig this land "on a face."

FREDERICK McGRATH, Gum-digger with sixteen years' experience; married.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He considered the Houhora Reserves should be retained solely for gum-digging purposes. He was aware of the encroachment of the sand from the west, and knew that in places it had encroached over half a mile during his sixteen years' residence in the district, and could point out one swamp that had become entirely obliterated by the sand during that time. No alien should be allowed to dig until he had become a naturalized subject, and all burning-off of vegetation should be stopped by the Government during certain months of the year, as indiscriminate firing was responsible for the loss of thousands of pounds' worth of gum each year. He did not consider it feasible to have gum lands dug "on a face." The drainage of some of the gum swamps by the Government as an object-lesson would receive the support of the body of the gum-diggers.

ADAM WILLIAM HOWSHAM, of Houhora, married, and a family of fourteen children living with him.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He had spent sixteen years on the Houhora gumfields, which he considered should be retained purely for gum-digging, and if small portions were found to be dug out or free from gum they should be cut up for the resident diggers only. He thought the Austrian influx should receive the attention of the Government, and only naturalized subjects be allowed to dig for gum. He did not consider it practicable to work the gum swamps "on a face." He was aware of the encroachment of the sands on the west coast, but could not give any idea of its progress during the time he had lived in Houhora. He thought £2 per week a fair average for an industrious digger, though many he knew were earning less. He did not consider it more difficult to earn a living at digging now than formerly, because the quality of the gum that can be sold at the present time is much inferior to that sold previously. The collection of fees and issue of diggers' licenses should be entrusted to one of the diggers themselves, as the local constable already had more work than he could undertake. He did not think the Government should drain the gum swamps systematically, but that nature should be allowed to work out her own ends, otherwise the gum would be too easily won and the field become prematurely exhausted.

TIMOTHY WALSH, of Houhora, married, and with a family of five children, and twenty-four years' experience on the field.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He did not think any part of the Houhora Reserves should be lifted for settlement. He knew under present regulations 25 acres could be selected by a digger, but considered the area too limited to be of practical use. Diggers have done better during the last five or six years than previously, owing to the better price prevailing for gum. He considered £2 per week a fair average for an industrious digger all the year round. He was aware of several gum swamps that had become covered by sand-drift during his twenty-four years' residence in the north. He was of the opinion that the south end of Houhora Reserve would be a good field for settlement if drained, as the land was not gum-bearing.

*To Mr. Stewart.*] He was of opinion that the firing of vegetation on the gum reserves should be stopped altogether.