

JOHN STOREY. (No. 18.)

Farmer, residing on the north bank of the Wairau, and Chairman of the Pelorus Road Board. My Board did not attend the conference, as it had no direct community of interests. It is the desire of my Board not to be included in any rating-area. We have two large rivers—namely, the Pelorus and the Whakamarina—in our district which give us a lot of trouble. We have only one large creek—the Ara-ara—which flows into the Wairau River. A very small portion of the district is affected by the Wairau. The groyne affects our land very little. The groyne puts more water into the Wairau, and it caused the washing-away of the approach of the Wairau Bridge. A small portion was washed away in July, and the balance in November last. The road at Squire's Bend was washed away. The Onamalutu Creek was fairly high. A groyne at Rock Ferry was erected privately by Maher Bros., about the same time as the large groyne. The groyne put a little more water in some low ground, but it is poor land—800 or 900 acres, worth about £1,800. A small bridge was washed away. The rainfall at the November flood was probably the heaviest for many years.

LEWIS GRIFFITHS. (No. 19.)

Until lately Chairman of the Wairau Harbour Board. Auctioneer and land agent. The work at the bar already done—namely, the erection of the groyne across the river and the opening of a new cut through the Boulderbank a mile and a half south of the old outlet—has been of the greatest benefit to the district from a flood-relief point of view. The old bar has absolutely closed up. I cannot say how much lower the water is at flood-time at McArtney's than it used to be, but Mr. McArtney's statement should be correct. Every settler without exception for five miles up the river has told me repeatedly that since the new cut was opened the river at their land has been much lower in flood-time than it used to be. I cannot say how far up the river this benefit would accrue, but it must be a benefit in a gradually reducing degree. My Board recognizes that the groyne or wall erected across the river at the bar must be extended later on. One of the ideas my Board has is to deepen the river right up to the wharves, and also to deepen the Wairau River up to the Ferry Bridge. The result of this would be that 200-ton boats could work the river instead of the present boats. This would allow coal to come in, and the cost would be from 10s. to 15s. per ton less to the consumers around Blenheim. It is estimated that over 6,000 tons of coal per year are used in and around Blenheim, so the saving to the community should be, at any rate, £3,000. In order to deepen the river a dredge would have to be obtained, but the Harbour Board is not financially able to do the work at the present time. As to a rating-power, it seems to me there should be no objection to the Board having a rating-power, because no rate could be levied or made without a poll of the ratepayers being taken first; and if the majority wish to be rated, why should the minority rule? There may come a time when it is in the best interests of the district that a large sum of money should be spent on the river for harbour benefit, but if no rating-power exists it will be impossible to expend the money. If it were not for the stirring-up of the rivers by the steamers travelling up and down the Opawa would ere this be 2 ft. shallower. I do not know if the wash from the steamers brings much silt into the river, but probably it does to a certain extent. The Omaka River, from its confluence with the Opawa up to the High Street Bridge, has absolutely silted up in the last twenty years. Probably it has silted up fully 2 ft. I do not think the Opawa River will go entirely down Rose's overflow. The rise and fall of the tide at the bar is from 3 ft. 6 in. to 4 ft. 6 in., and at the wharves at Blenheim it is not more than 1 ft. less. The tide does not go up to the Opawa Railway Bridge, but stops somewhere about the entrance to Rose's overflow. I think the tide will always keep the present channel open, but if the Wairau River is taken away from it the bar will, of course, not be so good. In flood-time Rose's overflow cannot carry all the water. I have seen both the channels there full, whilst the Opawa, lower down, has been at the top of the banks. There has been more water in the Opawa since the Waihopai burst through. A good flood leaves from 2 in. to 3 in. of silt behind it. If the Harbour Board is absorbed by the River Boards, I take it that accounts would be kept separate. The Wairau Harbour Board exists by a special Act—No. 24, local, 1907. The members comprise two from the Omaka, three from the Blenheim Borough, one appointed by the shippers, and two appointed by the Government. In the early days of the Board three were appointed by the Government, but this was altered some five years ago. I do not think the people in the Awatere could obtain very much benefit from the Wairau Harbour Board, but I do think that the district of the Board should be to the hilltops of the whole Wairau Plains. Mainly, the people not served by the railway would benefit by the Wairau Harbour Board. All the wharves in Blenheim belong to the Board: they cost about £17,000. If a channel were made up Rose's overflow suitable for the river-boats, and wharves were erected at the end of Riversdale, the Board's expenditure of £17,000 on the local wharves would be lost. It would be possible to go to the wharves by coming through the neck of Mr. Robert Allen's property. This would entail considerable dredging and the purchase of land, but would be a much shorter distance to Blenheim than up the Opawa River. My Board recognizes that it is possible that another bank will form outside the present cut in the Boulderbank, and run in a northerly direction. A bank has started to form on two or three occasions, but up to the present time the flood-water has always carried it away. Since the cut was opened the bar has never been blocked, and the only time boats have been unable to get into the river they have been stopped by bad weather and not by a bad bar. Three-quarters of a mile from the cut the water is 30 ft. deep. It is not 40 ft. deep until a mile and a quarter has been reached. Before the cut was made the river-boats were blocked on an average for six weeks every year. The Lower Wairau River Board did not pay anything towards the cost of the work at the bar. They promised to consider the question if it was clearly shown that the work at the bar was a benefit from a flood-relief point of view, but they are not inclined, apparently, to carry this promise out. Some of the members even