

REPORT.

NEW ZEALAND.

In the matter of a Commission, dated the 9th day of January, 1917, issued under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1908, to the Honourable Mr. Justice Hosking, Charles F. Thomas, Esquire, and William Milne, Esquire, directing them to inquire into and report as to the operation of the provisions of section 137 of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1908, and in particular its operation in respect to certain leases granted by the Wellington City Council, and also to inquire into and report as to the sufficiency of the leasing-powers conferred on Borough Councils by the said Act.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

We have the honour to report that we entered upon the duties imposed upon us by the Commission at as early a date as was practicable after its issue.

SITTINGS HELD.

We held our first sitting at Wellington on the 16th January, 1917, which was continued there on the 17th, 18th, and 19th January. We also sat at Auckland on the 22nd and 23rd January, at Christchurch on the 25th January, at Dunedin on the 29th, 30th, and 31st January, and again at Wellington on the 1st and 2nd March.

NOTIFICATION OF SITTINGS.

As a preliminary to our sittings in each city we caused advertisements to be inserted in the local daily newspapers announcing the Commission and inviting all persons interested to attend and give evidence or make any representations they desired. We also caused a letter to be written to the representatives of various local bodies for information and assistance. The invitation was not confined to the officials of cities and boroughs, but was extended to those of other local bodies, such as Harbour Boards in particular, known to possess endowments leasable with a right of perpetual renewal.

COURSE OF SITTINGS.

Throughout the sittings in Wellington the Wellington City Leaseholders' Association was represented by counsel, and the Wellington City Corporation was represented by the City Solicitor, Mr. O'Shea. He also attended the sittings of the Commission at Auckland and Dunedin.

In Wellington witnesses were produced by the Wellington City Corporation and by the City Leaseholders' Association. Certain gentlemen were also independently invited by the Commission to attend and express their views. At the other centres certain witnesses voluntarily tendered themselves in addition to those whom the Commission had asked to attend. The evidence was not taken on oath, as the character of what was stated by those who appeared before the Commission was not such as to really require the sanction of an oath. It consisted rather of matters of opinion, although facts were adduced in support of the opinions. Addresses affording considerable help were made by counsel, and the greatest readiness to assist the Commission was evinced on all sides, and in particular by the officials of the local bodies. At Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin the Council Chambers were placed gratuitously at the service of the Commissioners, and the greatest courtesy was extended to them by the Mayors and Town Clerks of those cities. Thanks are due to them and to the various witnesses for their attendance, and also for the trouble taken by them in compiling the various returns presented. It should be added that the witnesses attended and gave their evidence without fee. A list of the witnesses is contained in Appendix B herewith.

CAUSES LEADING TO THE ISSUE OF THE COMMISSION.

Legislation proposed by Wellington City Council.

The immediate cause of the Commission was the desire of the Wellington City Council to obtain legislation altering the mode in which the valuation of rents under their renewable leases should be effected.