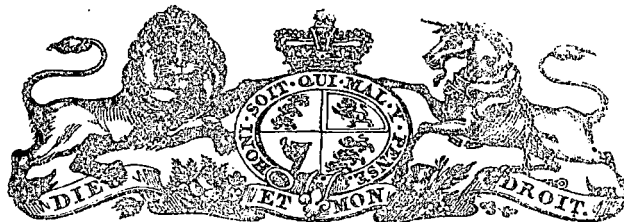


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H O U S E O F A S S E M B L Y.

M I N I N G D E P A R T M E N T :

R E P O R T F R O M C O M M I S S I O N E R O F M I N E S.

Return to an Order of the House of Assembly. (Mr. Lette.)

Laid upon the Table by the Minister of Lands, September 20, 1882, and ordered
by the House to be printed, September 21, 1882.



MINES AND GOLD FIELDS.

Launceston, 6th May, 1882.

SIR,

I REGRET I have been unable, owing to urgent official demands upon my time, to attend earlier to your verbal request that I would furnish you with a sketch of my views as to the best system to be adopted in dealing with applications for Leases and other matters connected with the Mines and Gold Fields.

In order that I may be the better understood, I will first refer to the system at present in force, and some of the inconveniences arising therefrom.

Gold.—There is no complete record in any place in the Colony of the applications for Leases under the Gold Fields Regulation Act. Until recently there was such a record in this office; but your instructions lately issued, requiring all applications to be sent to the local Commissioners in the several Districts, have prevented the continuance of such a record here. The local Commissioners have no complete record of applications in their Districts, because all applications received prior to the instructions above referred to are recorded in this office. Persons desirous of inspecting the records, or of obtaining information, must therefore inspect the records both here and in the Districts, a necessity which I need not point out is productive of the greatest possible inconvenience. The same system, and consequent inconvenience, exist in reference to plans. Some are in this office and some with the local Commissioners. As the local Commissioners are frequently absent from their places of residence for long periods (especially Mr. Commissioner Chapman and Mr. Commissioner Glover), and during such absence there is no one in charge of their offices, the public are practically denied that access to necessary information which is absolutely indispensable in the proper conduct of the mining industry.

Minerals.—There is a complete record in the Lands' Office of all applications under the Mineral Lands Act, but there are no complete records in the several Mining Districts or in the offices of the local Commissioners. There are in the latter partial records, which are only misleading. They contain a record of applications received on the spot by the local Commissioners, but no others, and as the majority of applications are deposited here, or are sent direct to the Lands' Office, the local records are necessarily incomplete. There is no plan showing recent surveys to be seen anywhere, not even, I understand, in the Lands' Office. There is no record in this office of any value whatever, inasmuch as the one we have is necessarily incomplete, and therefore liable to mislead. Persons interested in mining, and desirous of obtaining information, can get none reliable in the several Districts, none here,—but must proceed to Hobart for the purpose.

Registration of Mining Companies.—Another source of serious inconvenience is the system recently adopted of requiring the registration of Mining Companies to be made in Hobart and the records to be kept there. The simple registration of a company may perhaps be as easily accomplished by the Manager in Hobart as here,—at any rate the extra trouble is not worth consideration; but the inconvenience and, I may say, hardship are experienced by persons who are interested in the companies, or who have business transactions with them. Every person wishing to address the Manager, or serve any process, or take any proceedings against a company, or transact business in many ways which I need not particularise, is compelled to enquire at the Lands' Office, Hobart, and ascertain from the register the particulars required, of which the name of the Manager and the situation of the Office (both of which are repeatedly changing) are the most frequently required. As, I believe, every registered company in existence (with the exception of a few on the West Coast, which are as accessible to Launceston as to Hobart) carries on its mining operations in Northern Tasmania, the persons interested, as I have above described, are in the northern part of the Colony; and consequently in many cases, especially those of employes, are subjected to the inconvenience and expense of a reference to Hobart. There is now no record here of any kind whatever; and although the inconvenience to me is very great, and occasions considerable loss of time, I have applied in vain for a copy of the Register.

I would now respectfully submit for your consideration the following suggestions :—

Gold.—All applications for leases from all parts of the Colony to centre in the Office of the Commissioner or Registrar of Gold Fields in Launceston. Any applicant to be permitted to deposit his application, and pay the fees, with the Commissioner of the District or other officer appointed in the Districts for the purpose, or with the Registrar at the Central Office, whichever he found most convenient.

Each Commissioner to keep in his Office a complete record of all applications for leases in his District; to enter any application received by him and immediately transmit it to the Central Office, together with the fees, if paid to him. The Registrar at the Central Office, immediately upon receipt of an application, to transmit a copy of it to the Commissioner of the District in which the land applied for is situate, who shall immediately enter it in his register. Thus, in every District there would be a complete register of all applications for leases in that District; whilst persons applying for leases in the District could apply on the spot, or, by their agents, if more convenient to them, lodge their applications and fees in Launceston. The Registrar in the Central Office to keep a complete record of all applications in the Colony. Thus persons interested would be enabled to obtain reliable information either in Launceston (where almost every applicant has a partner or an agent) or in the District where he may reside. Instructions for the survey of all leases to be issued by the Registrar at the Central Office; and the Surveyor's plans and reports to be sent to the Central Office when surveys completed. Each Surveyor to furnish a tracing of the plan, or a duplicate, to the local Commissioner for record in his Office. The plans at the Central Office and the duplicates or tracings at the District Offices would be open to the inspection of any persons, with the same certainty of obtaining accurate information that would exist in the case of applications. Maps of each District or Gold Field to be kept in Central Office, upon which a competent Draftsman would enter every survey immediately upon the receipt of the plan from the Surveyor. Lithograph copies of the map to be made and sent to each District at stated periods for sale. Tracings of any part of the map or particular claim to be issued from the Central Office upon application and payment of a fee. Miners in any District who required information respecting any survey of later date than the lithograph plan could obtain a tracing from the Central Office, or themselves, or by their agents in Launceston, inspect the map. It would be a further advantage to have a map in every District with latest surveys marked upon it, but they would involve the expense of a Draftsman in each District.

Minerals.—I would recommend a precisely similar system for Mineral applications to that suggested for Gold.

Registration of Mining Companies.—I would simply recommend a return to the system adopted when I, as the only Gold Commissioner in the Colony, kept the register of all Mining Companies in Launceston.

In viewing the question generally, the first and most important point to be considered is the position of the Central Office—whether it ought to be in Hobart or Launceston. I have always held and expressed the opinion that the convenience of the Department and the officers attached to it should be quite a secondary consideration. First consideration should be given to the convenience and interests of persons engaged in mining pursuits, and the departmental arrangements should be such as to secure to them substantial justice, and every reasonable facility for transacting their public business. With this object in view, I cannot imagine there can be a difference of opinion as to where the mining business ought to be transacted whilst almost every mine and Gold Field is in Northern Tasmania. If it proved inconvenient to holders of claims at any part of the West Coast, and to those persons connected with the working of them, to transact public business in Launceston, arrangements could be made to permit it to be done in Hobart.

In conclusion, I may be permitted to say that many of the complaints which have recently found expression in the public prints and otherwise are well founded, and urgently call for attention. I do not pretend to say that many unreasonable and foolish things have not been written and said, but beyond doubt the mining community is subjected to very serious inconvenience and annoyance, and consequent loss, and the remedy is simple and may be readily applied.

I have, &c.

BERNARD SHAW,
Commissioner of Mines and Gold Fields.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands and Works, Hobart.

Lands Office, Hobart, 11th August, 1882.

SIR,

In compliance with instructions verbally communicated by you to me this morning, I have the honor to submit the following suggestions relative to the creation of a separate Department of Mines with the Central Office and Chief Commissioner located in Launceston.

Assuming that the proposed Department will have the general management of all matters connected with the goldfields under the Goldfields Regulation Act and Regulations, mines of the various minerals under the Mineral Lands Act and Regulations, and the registration of Mining Companies under the Mining Companies Limited Liability Act, I think you will find my views of the best system of departmental arrangement fully set out in my letter of 6th May last. I will, however, repeat the main features of the scheme I recommend, briefly referring to the most important points, and also to the duties of the Chief Commissioner in his relation to the several Commissioners in the Colony.

Receipt of Applications, gold and mineral.—All applications for leases to centre in the Chief Commissioner's office; any applicant to be permitted to deposit his application and pay the fees at the proper office in the district where he resides, or at the Chief Office, whichever he may find most convenient.

A complete record to be kept at each district office of all applications for leases, and also a complete map of all surveys; both to be open to inspection.

A complete record to be kept in the Chief Office of all applications in the Colony, such record to contain on the page for each application a history of its progress; also complete maps of all districts in the Colony, which shall be kept up by a competent draftsman, each survey being entered immediately upon the receipt from the Surveyor of his plan, and a copy or tracing thereof furnished to the district office.

Surveys.—All instructions for surveys to be issued from the Office of the Chief Commissioner; the Surveyors to transmit their plans and reports to the Chief Office.

By the adoption of this system, any person desirous of applying for a lease could make his application and pay the fees either at the Chief Office or at any other most convenient to him; and any person desiring to inspect records or obtain information can do so either at the Chief Office or in the district where the land is situate.

Adjudication of Disputes.—Immediately upon an objection being entered with any Commissioner the whole of the necessary documents to be forwarded from the Chief Office to the Commissioner, who will return them upon conclusion of the case.

Preparation of Leases.—Upon the expiration of the time allowed for entering objections the Chief Commissioner to transmit the applications to the Minister, to be laid before the Governor in Council. Immediately upon receipt of an intimation that the applications are approved, the leases to be prepared in the Chief Commissioner's Office.

Registration of Mining Companies.—The present system of registration in Hobart at such a distance from the scene of mining operations is inconvenient in the extreme, for the persons who most frequently require access to the register are shareholders and employés. The Register would be most conveniently kept in the office of the Chief Commissioner.

The Staff required.—I believe the work of the Department, exclusive of the drafting, could be performed by the present Staff in the Launceston Office, with the addition of a competent corresponding clerk. I am not, of course, in a position to say positively that this could be done,—much would naturally depend upon the number of applications,—but I do not feel it necessary to recommend any further increase until experience shall point to the want of it.

I have consulted the senior Draftsman in the Lands' Office, as well as the Draftsman who has hitherto dealt with mining plans, and it appears that it will be necessary to transfer one of the Staff to the Chief Office in Launceston, and after the first three or four months another will probably be required.

I would recommend that all applications received in the Lands' Office up to the day when the Chief Office shall open in Launceston be continued and dealt with in the Lands' Office, and that all applications received after that day be dealt with in the Office of the Chief Commissioner.

I have &c.

BERNARD SHAW,
Commissioner of Mines and Gold Fields.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands & Works.