

(No. 72.)



1863.

[SECOND SESSION.]

---

T A S M A N I A.

---

W A S T E L A N D S.

MEMORANDUM BY THE SURVEYOR-GENERAL ON THE  
REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE.

---

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Colonial Treasurer, and ordered by the House to  
be printed, 19 August, 1863.



*To the Honorable the Colonial Treasurer.*

MEMORANDUM.

CONFORMABLY with the orders of the Colonial Treasurer to give him my remarks on the Report of the Waste Lands Committee, I beg to hand him the following notes thereon that I have written after an attentive perusal of the same.

As the Report is based on the evidence of witnesses, it will be impossible to avoid touching occasionally on such portions of their statements which may, if acted on, be inimical to public interests.

My remarks will be mainly restricted to the matters contained in the Resolutions 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, which I shall review in the order of their importance.

The Committee record their opinion that it is desirable that applicants for the purchase of land shall deposit the Survey fee for the same in advance. But of the evils of this practice we have already had abundant experience: for it was in force up to the passing of the Waste Lands Act, when it was, after a thorough investigation of its merits by the Attorney-General of the time, wisely abandoned as obstructive of settlement. Hence the exclusion of any direction on the subject from the Waste Lands Act, except in cases of private selections, under the 19th Section, where they are paid for on the selections being approved.

The Resolution of the Committee (7th) which is intended to annul or satisfy the "personal residence" condition contained in the 4th Clause of the Pre-emptive Right Regulations (where a renewal of lease for ten years certain is guaranteed to all who fulfil the condition) should be considered next; but as the 2nd Resolution of the Committee provides for fourteen years fixity of tenure "to all Crown Lessees and Pre-emptive Right Holders," discussion on this subject is useless: for if the latter can be carried, what signifies it whether the personal residence condition of the Regulations have been fulfilled or not?

The Resolution which would enable persons who are either unable or indisposed to pay cash for their Pre-emptive Right Selections when due to bring their purchases under the Credit Clauses of the Act, has been so favorably received in all quarters, that the principle is safe from further discussion. The only question for the Legislature to consider seems to be, whether the concession shall be made indiscriminately, as well to those who do deserve it, as to those who do not—to *bonâ fide* selectors who in many cases highly improved their lands, and to mere jobbers, who have generally done nothing in relation thereto, except to prevent their improvement and obstruct their occupation.

The Committee are also of opinion, that it is undesirable to reduce the upset price of land in the settled Districts: on this subject my views were expressed in a letter to your predecessor of the 18th September, 1862, which Parliament at your suggestion caused to be printed. Of this letter I append a copy, to which I must refer you. It has been widely circulated throughout the Island, and its contents have been much discussed; but I have never heard of its arguments being refuted, while I am certain its facts cannot be overthrown. Founded, as I humbly believe it to be, on common sense, a favorable consideration will yet be given to the views it holds. But I will not trouble you with any further remarks on it, but will leave the letter to speak for itself.

I may remark, that it does not appear to me to be the intention of the Waste Lands Bill (now in draft) to apply low upsets to any other lands except those that are of inferior value. Indeed the 15th section seems quite decisive on this point, for it directs that all lands *shall* be priced according to real value, (even taking into consideration "the circumstances of the time"); and the 19th clause positively disallows the selection of any land privately at any lesser price than 20s. the acre.

That the lowering of the upset price of inferior crown lands will have the effect of sacrificing the only security the Government can offer for the payment of its Debentures, is the dogma of most of the witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee. But as the position of these gentlemen is not fortified by proof, it does not seem to me to be a tenable one. Their evidence, I am constrained to say, has been given without sufficient consideration of the effects that must follow the adoption of their advice, which will be certainly disastrous to the Revenue, and perhaps injurious to the credit of the Colony; that is, in so far as its credit is connected with the question of the retention of the land, which is the point from which the Committee's witnesses view it. The recommendations of these witnesses would reduce the Land Revenue to the lowest figure it can well be screwed down to, by sorely diminishing the chief sources that supply it, for which they discover no substitute to make good the enormous deficiencies they would cause it. They would make fixity of tenure for fourteen years universal, as far as relates to the crown pastures of the Colony; but they say not one word about the losses the Revenue must sustain on account of sales of portions of these pastures, which produce about £22,000 a year of hard cash, but which must be lost under a system of fixity. Again, by a temporary abandonment of the payment of instalments due, and coming due; on credit purchases, taking 8 per cent. interest thereon instead, they would reduce the Revenue from this source from £30,000 a year to £3000 or less for three years. By these processes of reduction, far more easily devised than remedied, the Land Revenue, which could be kept up to £100,000 a year for a period practically indefinite, must sink to about £35,000: for, look at things as I will, I cannot see my way clear to a larger sum than the latter, that is if the suggestions of these witnesses are adopted without modification; and even this £35,000 will be subject to a further diminution of about £9000 on account of the pledge of the Executive to devote one-fourth of the proceeds of the land to the improvement of our inland communications—a pledge which I can assure them the whole Colony expects will not be retracted. Thus will the Land Fund be cut down to about £26,000 clear, which is all we shall have to pay £45,829 17s. 3d. with, the amount of the items that are chargeable on it for 1864, or much about 11s. 4d. in the pound.

It is by such figures as the above that Capitalists will judge of the value of their legal security (for it is the income of the Estate that is pledged to them). They will look at naked facts, without enquiring too closely into the causes that have produced them. They will derive little satisfaction from learning that we are locking up the lands for the advantage of another generation, without having any consideration for themselves; but, if they chance to know from what sources the Revenue they are paid from is derived, they will recognise the propriety of selling a small portion of the lands annually, otherwise the payments due to them cannot be secured to them (for rentals will not do it).

In conclusion, I will beg to observe that the 8th Resolution of the Committee, if carried, will be very nearly equivalent to expunging one of the most beneficial clauses of the Act from it, namely the 18th. It is to be hoped that it will not be pressed, as I can assure the Executive that its withdrawal from the Act will be very injurious.

J. E. CALDER.

18th August, 1863.

(COPY.)

Survey Office, 18th September, 1862.

SIR,

THE Parliament having been pleased to reduce the Field Expenses of the Survey Department from the sum asked to £3000,\* I think it a duty to assure you of my belief that such reduction will be injurious to the public interests, on account of the insufficiency of the sum voted to meet the necessities of the service and the requirements of *The Waste Lands Act*, by which it is made imperative that all applications for Surveys should receive a speedy attention, and that all work performed should be done in a creditable manner.

Before troubling you with any comments on the reasons that seem to have led to this reduction, I must be allowed to make a few explanations: for I think the operations of this Department must be greatly misunderstood, otherwise a sum so insufficient for a year's Surveys as £3000 would not have passed the Legislature.

The occupied portion of Tasmania is so large that it has been found necessary to divide it into *Sixteen* Survey Districts, each of which requires the presence of one Surveyor, be the demand for land therein great or small, and when great of two, three, or even four.

These Districts, which may average about a thousand square miles each, are fully large for our purposes; for the back or bye roads by which they are crossed are almost always so unsuited to

\* The sum submitted was £6000, but I asked for £7000.

rapid progression, that a survey party, whose journeys are necessarily made a-foot, is often occupied three or four days in reaching one end of it from the other.

In these Districts the work of the Surveyor is so scattered, owing to the irregular manner in which settlement has spread itself about, that travelling on survey duty is always a source of much expense. The time consumed in the frequent shiftings from place to place is worse to the Surveyor than time lost; for his disbursements are always greatest when his earnings are *nil*.

It is right to state that each man of a survey party costs about £80 a year; his wages varying from 15s. to 20s. a week, and his board, which is always additional, being about £30 a year more.

The yearly cost of a party which consists of three men varies from £200 to £250 a year, exclusive of cost of horses, camp equipment, and general wear and tear.

But the sum about to be allowed for 1863—viz. £3000—will not pay the cost of menial labour alone; for if the grant were distributed equally, it would give to each Surveyor only £188 to meet expenses that far exceed it, leaving nothing to the Surveyor himself for highly skilled services but an absolute loss.

If such be the terms we have to offer professional men, we can hardly expect that they will be agreed to. That two or three of our *employées* that possess land may work for us when it pleases them, to fill up spare time, is probable enough; but others will not. And if we are to make any show of work it must be under some such system as that of employing beginners, who, for the sake of field practice, may consent to work at a loss, (the public being a far greater loser in the long run,) or men who, by the methods understood by the unprincipled of all trades and professions, can make profit out of anything.

Against all such methods of doing business, I, who am answerable for the correct discharge of the duties of this Department, must be excused for entering a most energetic protest. I have confidence in the men now under me; but I cannot answer for the fidelity of such as would take service with us for less than £200 a year, which, being below their outlay, can only be made to pay by combining it with practices which it is fearful to think of.

Honorable Members who have expressed themselves so strongly against the Survey Department on account of its presumed expensiveness and "enormous cost," &c., will hear with surprise, (and I hope with pleasure also) that about two-thirds of the principal item of our expenditure,—namely, that for Contract Surveys,—is recovered again in a very short time, owing to that cost being invariably added to the price of the land sold.

Thus, of the sums allowed us since the passing of *The Waste Lands Act* up to the end of last year (£33,022), we have restored to the Treasury the handsome amount of £21,444, being at the rate of £5361 a year; so that the outlay, however large it may appear to be, is in reality nothing of the sort. I shall not be thought disrespectful in saying, that it appears to me hardly fair that our estimates are never credited with this large and certain restitution, but on every occasion of their being submitted to discussion we are mercilessly assailed on account of an excessive expenditure, which, though provided for by vote, cannot be said to take place.

Nor have we, taking the four years above referred to, very much exceeded the entire sum allowed by Parliament to meet the immense demand for surveys, which I have had far more difficulty to overcome than persons unacquainted with my duties can possibly have any conception of.

The following Table will illustrate the above statements:—

Years.	Estimated Cost for Contract Surveys.	Amount paid for Contract Surveys.	Survey Fees recovered on Lands sold.	Remarks.
1858.....	£ 10,000	£ 5,812	£ 5,712	All fractional parts re- jected.
1859.....	6,000	7,314	5,441	
1860.....	7,000	9,826	5,551	
1861.....	6,000	10,070	4,740	
	29,000	33,022	21,444	

It will thus be seen that the formidable sums set down against us in original and supplementary Estimates for Contract Surveys are vastly diminished by the Survey Fees recovered: and I believe that very nearly the whole amount spent on these Surveys (shown in the second money column) would have been repaid us long ago, but for the practice, which I must be excused calling a very pernicious one, of forcing the Department to affix prices to our lands often far in excess of their worth.

The sole reason assigned for reducing the estimate for Contract Surveys from the sum required to £3000 (as I learn it from the *Mercury* report of the debate of the 2nd instant) was, that, the Government having already large tracts of land surveyed that are undisposed of, it is not desirable to undertake any operations, except on the most limited scale, until these lands are sold. But Honorable Members will cease to wonder that so much remains on hand, when it is explained to them that the great bulk of the same is mere rough pasture land (marked off under circumstances to be hereafter explained), that is no more worth the price we affix to it than sixpence is worth half a crown, and so it remains unpurchased.

For the survey of these lands this department is in no way accountable, for it was allowed no discretion in the matter, but acted under orders, to cut up everything it could lay hands on, that were in the highest degree mandatory and decisive.

The first of these orders, dated March 26, 1857, directed the Department "to put up as large an amount of Crown Lands as possible for sale, and to secure the survey in advance of lands in various localities, with the least possible delay."

This order was speedily supplemented by others to cut up every acre of rented land as fast as the leases fell in; indeed, so anxious was the Government to sell all the land it could, that in the early days of the Weston Ministry, a Bill was actually prepared empowering the Government to sell any of its country lands *without waiting for any Surveys at all*.

To keep the survey of a country well in advance is, I humbly apprehend, a very wise practice indeed; but this wisdom avails us nothing if counteracted by fixing high prices on such of our soils as are of low value only,—such, for example, as some of our sheep-runs.

Persons unacquainted with the Crown Pastures of the Midland Districts of the North and East Coasts are prone to overrate their value, and to believe that every acre of the same is cheap at a pound.

It appears to be unknown to this class of persons, who may number three-fourths of the population, that no little proportion of the same is composed of rough hills; and that the vast plateaux that form the region known as the Lake Country are very elevated and bleak, and much less perfectly protected by trees or hills than the low country lands are.

That there are fertile, favored, and sheltered tracts amongst them of more than ordinary value is perfectly true, and these are they for which we get our own price (witness our sales of 170,000 acres of them at 18s. 8d. per acre); but the chiefest portions are too steep and stony to be fit for anything but pasture ground, and such they must remain for ever.

Of lands surveyed but not sold, the great bulk will be found to lie amongst the tracts above described, which were marked off under the circumstances above stated, and being over priced find no purchasers.

Of the 226,000 acres open for sale under the 18th Section of the Act, 168,000 were put up by order, and which, though they would doubtless sell for 20 or 30 years' rental, will never bring the price we ask,—namely, a sum exactly equal to the rent of a hundred years,—which cannot be expected from second and third rate lands.

The remaining 58,000 acres were marked off under private applications, as required by the Act, whenever made. Such lands as those last named as remain unsold are invariably put up by persons intending to buy when reduced to their real value, but who will not give a pound an acre for them, and who therefore wait for their reduction; but, as this is to be no longer the rule, they will not purchase at what they justly conceive to be unfair prices.

To show that I do not stand alone in the opinion that much of our lands are not worth a pound an acre, I must advert to a Table that I have been at the pains of compiling, from information received twelve months ago from the District Surveyors, who I requested to report on the value of the Agricultural and Pastoral Lands of the Crown in their respective Districts which they were acquainted with. From 12 of these gentlemen I received reports (the rest being either absent or newly appointed.) They valued about 1,865,000 acres, and the following is an abstract of their reports:—

Worth 40s. an acre .....	9,600 acres.
Worth 37s. 6d. ditto .....	500 "
Worth 30s. ditto .....	9,000 "
Worth 20s. ditto .....	338,125 "
Worth 15s. ditto .....	234,887 "
Worth 10s. ditto .....	667,415 "
Worth 5s. ditto .....	473,415 "
Worth 2s. 6d. ditto .....	50,000 "
Worth 2s. ditto .....	144,000 "

From this it will be seen that, of the whole quantity appraised, no less than 1,272,060, or more than two-thirds of it, was rated at 10s. an acre or less, and of which 667,000 acres ranged between the very humble prices of two and five shillings an acre.

The operations of late years having been so much amongst second-rate lands, it follows as a thing unavoidable that we must have large quantities undisposed of, but which would go off rapidly enough if they were priced according to *value* instead of according to *law*.

Other Colonies of a far more pretentious character than we claim for Tasmania are much in the same position as we are in respect of not being able to dispose of all their surveyed lands. From Victoria or New South Wales I have never been able to obtain any return of lands of this class, though I have tried hard enough to get them; but I have succeeded better with South Australia and Queensland.

In these Colonies, it would appear, they have nothing but small agricultural farms, varying from 80 to 300 acres, to dispose of; but in South Australia there were no less than 1633 of such farms advertised for sale in the Official Returns at the last date, (May, 1862), and in Queensland, 1502, (1 January, 1862). At the date when we made up our last Returns (30 April, 1862), we had 837 lots for private sale.

Our own condition is not so very appalling after all; but if the argument be good at present that we ought to engage in no operations, except on the most limited scale, till we have sold all our refuse stock of land, it is likely to be good through all time, for we shall never sell it at present prices.

I hope I have succeeded in showing that the reason assigned for the reduction of the Estimate for Contract Surveys is an unsound one, and that, if persisted in, it will prove not only most inconvenient to the Public Service, but highly impolitic as well. I trust, therefore, that yourself and Honourable Colleagues will make an effort to obtain a reversal of the vote, and the approval of the estimated sum.

In any other land-selling Colony such a reason as the one assigned for cutting down the Estimate would have, I believe, no weight. I have shown that in South Australia and Queensland their unsold lots far outnumber our own, and yet they do not slacken their subdivisionary surveys of territory, because their best lands go off first, as they do with ourselves, whereby the inferior are left unsold, which they must continue to be so long as we ask first class prices for them.

I may, in conclusion, cite the practice of the Great North American Colonies as examples worthy imitation, who wisely keep their surveys in advance of immediate necessities as the surest means of advancing themselves, and beg to follow it up with a Table illustrative of their Land System, compiled from information contained in the Land Tables of the Colonization Circular for 1861, page 75.

I remain, &c.,

(Signed) J. E. CALDER.

*The Hon. the Colonial Treasurer.*

*TABLE showing the progress of LAND ALIENATION in the principal Colonies of North America.*

<i>Name of Colony.</i>	<i>Area alienated.</i>	<i>Surveyed and open for selection.</i>	<i>Price per Acre.</i>
Upper Canada.....	ACRES. (Not given.)	ACRES. 1,530,252	Half a dollar (2s. 1d.) to a dollar (4s. 2d.) 1s. 9d.
Lower ditto.....	6,373,597	5,630,552	
Nova Scotia.....	4,792,014	3,555,720	2s. 5d., (20 per cent. discount for cash.) Unknown.
New Brunswick.....	6,864,364	276,993	
Cape Breton.....	750,220	840,762	