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EIGHTH PROGRESS REPORT

OF THE

ROYAL COMMISSION ON STATE FORESTS AND TIMBER RESERVES.

GRAZING LANDS IN THE PARISHES OF WURRIN, WANGARABELL,
KOOLA, AND DERNDANG:

GENOA RIVER FOREST, EAST GIPPSLAND.

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY'S COMMAND.

By Authority:

ROBT. S. BRAIN, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.

GRAZING LANDS IN GENOA RIVER FOREST.

PROGRESS REPORT.

To His Excellency the Right Honorable THOMAS, BARON BRASSEY, Knight
Commander of the Most Honorable Order of the Bath; Governor and
Commander-in-Chief in and over the Colony of Victoria and its
Dependencies, &c., &c., &c.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY :

We, the members of the Royal Commission appointed to investigate the general question of forestry and forest control and management in Victoria, have the honour to present the following Progress Report :—

GENOA RIVER GRAZING LANDS.

Timber and Soil.

The Genoa River rises in New South Wales in the ranges at the southern end of the Maneroo tableland, and after a south-easterly course through the county of Croajingolong flows into the Southern Pacific Ocean at a point about 6 miles westward of Gabo Island, and in the neighbourhood of Cape Howe, the extreme eastern point of Victoria. Throughout the greater part of its course, the stream flows through rugged mountainous country, but at several places, such as Wangarabell and Maramingo, 30 and 20 miles respectively from its mouth, there are wide valleys with good alluvial soil, which have been occupied for over 50 years as cattle stations and farms. In its lower course the river widens out into two extensive lakes, connected with each other by a broad channel, which stretch southwards nearly to the mouth, and are known as Mallacoota Inlet. The stream is at present navigable as far as Gipsy Point, a distance of about 13 miles; but, owing to the existence of a sand-bar, which almost closes the entrance and which is continually shifting its position, navigation is greatly impeded, and only small vessels of light draught can cross at high water, when there is a depth of 3 to 4½ feet on the bar.

On the upper lake, the hills rise from the water's edge, and are clothed with a dense growth of stringybark, messmate, and apple tree, the timber as a whole being of inferior quality. Higher up stream, in the parish of Wangarabell, the timber is larger and of better quality, the prevailing trees being stringybark, messmate, and silver-top or bastard ironbark, with some blue and white gum in the valleys, and grey, yellow, and black box on the slopes. The information furnished to us by the Forest Branch led us to believe that this portion of the Genoa reserve contained large areas covered with the valuable hardwood known as Bairnsdale grey box (*P. Bosistoana*), but careful inspection of the country satisfied us that this is not the case, and that any examination on which such information was based must have been of a very perfunctory nature. In the district under notice, this species of box is, as a rule, confined to the plateaux and lower spurs which divide the small tributaries of the Genoa. Even there, it grows in small clumps or beds only, and while many of the trees are past maturity, there are very few saplings or trees of younger growth coming on to take their place. At times, clumps of about half-a-dozen or a dozen fine large-barrelled trees are met with, but these are nearly all old and pipy, and while they would yield good sleeper timber, their distance from the head of navigation, and the difficulty of transport to that point, render it in the highest degree unlikely that they could be profitably utilized for this purpose.

The lands in the parishes of Wangarabell, Koola and Derndang are almost wholly of granitic formation; while towards the east, in Wurrin, they change to Silurian schists and clays. From the coast range, which runs almost parallel with the border line towards Cape Howe, a number of small creeks flow in a S.W. and S.E. direction, and fall into the Genoa River in the upper part of its course. Between

these creeks the country consists chiefly of low hill ridges and narrow tablelands, bearing thin brush forest, and covered with a luxuriant growth of kangaroo grass from 1 foot to 2 feet in height. As a whole these lands are unfit for agriculture (with the exception of small alluvial strips on the creek flats), but the granitic and vegetable loam of which they consist, and the regular rainfall which the district enjoys, make them exceptionally suitable for ordinary grazing or dairying purposes.

Settlement.

The settlement in the district is very sparse, there being 31 families along the whole course of the river, and of these thirteen are at Mallacoota, near the entrance, nine between Gipsy Point and Maramingo, along the middle course of the stream, and nine further northward in Wangarabell. The development of the neighbouring country has been greatly retarded by the impediment to navigation at the mouth of the river, and by the want of a safe harbor for coasting vessels. At present in rough weather, steamers and sailing craft trading to this part of the coast have usually to go round Cape Howe and take shelter at Eden, Twofold Bay. There is a small harbor on the north-west of Gabo Island, some 6 miles eastward of Mallacoota bar, but it is unsafe during the prevalence of south-westerly winds. A proposal has been made to the Government to build a breakwater on a reef at the western side of this harbor, the cost of which is variously estimated at from £3,000 to £6,000, and it is said that the completion of this work would afford a safe refuge for vessels in any weather, while even without any further expenditure in improving the entrance at Mallacoota bar, regular communication could be kept up by launches and small sailing craft with the Genoa district. There is no doubt that the settlers along the river valley, and especially those in the parish of Wangarabell, suffer great hardship and inconvenience owing to the want of regular communication with Victorian ports. Their butter and other produce is carted some 50 miles to Eden, over a rough mountain track, while owing to the border duties their stores cannot be purchased there, but have to be procured from Cunninghame and brought up by sailing craft to Gipsy Point, thence by rowing boat some 5 miles further up stream to the head of navigation, and lastly by dray to the destination. With proper facilities for coasting steamers at Gabo, it is probable that the water-way of the river could be fully utilized, the produce and stores transhipped by means of small craft to and from the steamers, and the trade thus secured for Melbourne.

Excision of Grazing Lands from Forest Area.

In view of the fact that the timber in the parishes of Wurrin, Wangarabell, Koola, and Derndang is not of first-class quality; that it consists principally of stringy-bark and messmate, interspersed with some silver-top ironbark and a little blue-gum; that the grey box is scattered in situation and very limited in quantity, and that, owing to the broken nature of the country between these lands and navigable water, the timber of commercial value is practically inaccessible, we are of opinion that the parishes named should be excised from the State forest area, and thrown open for settlement in blocks of 640 acres, as third-class lands under the Act of 1898. While, however, we consider that all suitable grazing lands in this area should be offered to the public for occupation, we do not think that it would be advisable to allow selection on some of the higher ridges, where the outcrop of rock is frequent, and alternates with a thin coating of very poor soil. These lands, in their present natural condition, are almost bare of vegetation, and the ring-barking of the timber on them (some of it of fair quality) would not improve the grazing value to any appreciable extent. It is very doubtful policy to encourage struggling settlers to take up such land, even with a forty years' tenure, at 10s. an acre; and when the subdivisive surveys are being made, we strongly recommend that such areas be withheld from selection, and kept under forest cover for climatic purposes, and as a source of timber supply in the future.

We are, further, of opinion that in the survey of these lands the control of the Crown over the water frontages should be strictly maintained, and that, therefore, a strip of land not less than a chain and a half in width should be reserved on either bank of the upper course of the Genoa River, and a similar strip not less than a chain in width on either bank of any permanent creeks flowing into that stream.

The estimated area of Crown land in the parishes named, a great part of which will be available for settlement in blocks of 640 acres, is as follows:—

| | Acres. | | | |
|--------------------|--------|-----|-----|---------------|
| Wurrin | ... | ... | ... | 19,840 |
| Wangarabell | ... | ... | ... | 23,420 |
| Koola | ... | ... | ... | 27,520 |
| Derndang | ... | ... | ... | 18,560 |
| Total | ... | ... | ... | <u>89,340</u> |

Supervision.

During our inspection of the country, we noticed that there is great destruction of immature feather-leaved wattle on Crown lands, owing to the bark strippers cutting young saplings 3 and even 2 inches in diameter. There is a great demand for this bark in the New South Wales market, and while the strippers can take what they please from Crown areas for a nominal licence, private land-owners in the district charge them a high royalty for the right to strip in the paddocks, and besides refuse to permit them to touch immature trees. As there has hitherto been but little selection in this part of Croajingolong, and hardly any timber-cutting for sale, the Lands Department has not considered it necessary to station a bailiff there; but in view of the prospect of a considerable increase of settlement at an early date, and the unchecked waste and destruction of young wattle, we consider that the early appointment of a forest officer and bailiff to supervise the reserves and Crown lands is very desirable. The supervision of the areas would not fully occupy a bailiff's time, and as the revenue would probably be small, it is not advisable at present to appoint a salaried official; but, from inquiries made on the spot, we believe there will be no difficulty in selecting a suitable man from the settlers on the river to carry out the duties of the position on payment of a reasonable allowance.

Summary of Recommendations.

The following is a summary of the recommendations made in this Report:—

1. That, subject to the restriction mentioned in clause 2, the Crown lands in the parishes of Wurrin, Wangarabell, Koola, and Derndang, which are distinguished on the new county plan of Croajingolong by vertical red lines as part of a State forest area, be excised from the proposed reserve, and made available for selection as third-class lands under the Act of 1896.
2. That such of the higher ridges as, owing to the barren character of the granite or silurian formation, are unfit for successful occupation as grazing lands, be withheld from selection and retained under forest cover for climatic purposes and for the growth of timber.
3. That in surveying these grazing lands for selection, water frontages not less than a chain and a half in width be reserved to the Crown on either bank of the Genoa River, and that along all permanent creeks flowing into the said river frontages not less than a chain in width on either bank be likewise reserved.
4. That a local resident be appointed to supervise the forest and ordinary Crown lands in the Genoa River district, and that he receive a reasonable allowance for his services.

A. L. TUCKER, President.
 J. BALFOUR BURTON.
 DAVID HAM.
 DAVID KERR.
 G. J. TURNER.
 HUGH MACKAY, Secretary.

Parliament House, Melbourne,
 20th December, 1899.