

1891.
—
VICTORIA.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

REPORT

FROM

SECTIONAL COMMITTEE (No. 1)

ON THE

PROPOSED RAILWAY

FROM

NATHALIA TO BARMAN;

TOGETHER WITH THE

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND APPENDIX.

By Authority:

ROBT. S. BRAIN, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.

No. 10.—SECTIONAL COMMITTEE REPORT.

MEMBERS OF SECTIONAL COMMITTEE (No. 1).

The Honorable THOMAS BENT, M.L.A., Chairman.

The Honorable James Buchanan, M.L.C.
Arthur Champion Groom, Esquire, M.L.A.
John McIntyre, Esquire, M.L.A.

The Honorable Donald Melville, M.L.C.
The Honorable Albert Lee Tucker, M.L.A.
The Honorable John Woods, M.L.A.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

SECTIONAL COMMITTEE (No. 1).

NATHALIA TO BARMAH LINE.

REPORT.

THE SECTIONAL COMMITTEE (No. 1) to which the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways referred the proposed line from Nathalia to Barmah have the honour to report as follows:—

1. The Committee arrived at Nathalia on Thursday, the 7th May, and drove out to Picola along the route of the proposed line. They returned to Nathalia the same evening, and took evidence in the local hall. Proceedings of the Committee.

2. The Nathalia to Barmah line is 15 miles 60 chains in length, and is estimated by the Railway Department to cost £95,508, or £6,064 per mile. The ruling gradient is 1 in 250, and the sharpest curve 25 chains radius. Line proposed.

Nathalia is the present terminus of a short spur line fourteen miles in length which branches off the Goulburn Valley railway at Numurkah, and the proposal under consideration is to continue this line westward about sixteen miles to Barmah, a township on the banks of the Murray River.

3. The country traversed by the projected line is very level and presents no difficulties in the way of construction. The Broken Creek will have to be bridged three times, as the survey crosses it twice within two or three miles of Nathalia, and a third time about the same distance from Barmah. According to the departmental surveyor the country for the greater part of the way is fairly high and not subject to being flooded. There is a considerable farming population along the route of the line, and the land passed through is of good quality. Midway between Nathalia and Barmah is the small township of Picola, the centre of a fine agricultural district, the chief product of which is wheat. The country is all settled south of the line, and settlement extends from five to ten miles to the north until swampy ground along the banks of the Murray River is reached. Beyond the settlement to the north and north-west and stretching along the river to Barmah lies one of the finest redgum forests in Victoria. It is known as the Barmah and Yielima State Forest, and contains about 90,000 acres. Character of country.

4. It was pointed out in evidence that the original intention of the Department was to extend the railway to Barmah, and with this object in view the station at Nathalia had been kept as far north of the township as possible, so as to avoid making a sharp curve in continuing the line. The district generally would be benefited by the extension of the line westward; and a large area of good agricultural land in the Summary of evidence.

parishes of Yielima, Picola, Narioka, Moira, and Barmah, the development of which was retarded through want of railway communication, would be opened up. Owing to the heavy timber traffic, the roads were greatly cut up, and, consequently, the cost of carting produce to Nathalia station was considerable. The cartage rate between Picola and Nathalia (about eight miles) was from 6s. to 7s. per ton. From one-fourth to one-third of the land along the proposed line was under cultivation. Of the total quantity of grain forwarded from Nathalia station, upwards of three-fourths of it came from the district north and west of Nathalia, that portion of the country through which the line is projected. The settlers to be benefited were all small holders, there being no large estates in the district. In addition to the cultivation of cereals the country was well suited for vine and fruit growing, and the railway revenue, it was represented, would be augmented by live stock traffic. The witnesses admitted that the line would not pay if constructed at the cost estimated by the Department, and advocated a light line, with trains running at a slow rate of speed. They also expressed their willingness to pay a differential rate until the line was self-supporting. It was acknowledged that if the line stopped at Picola, seven miles from Nathalia, instead of running right through to Barmah, the railway would be brought within the reach of everybody in the district.

Timber
resources of
the district.

5. With regard to the timber resources of the district the Committee examined Mr. J. C. Young, Government forester, who gave evidence that the Barmah and Yielima State Forest was the best forest in Victoria at the present day, and that the supply of redgum timber would have to come from there and Gunbower in future. An approximate estimate he had made showed that the forest would yield two trees to the acre, each tree averaging 1,000 feet, or 2,000 feet of timber to the acre. All told, including different reserves, the forest contained about 90,000 acres. If the timber were disposed of under the royalty system in vogue in New South Wales it would realize £86,500. The projected line would tap 75,000 acres of forest. If it stopped at Picola it would get nearly the whole traffic of the forest. The extension to Barmah would open up the timber traffic of Barmah Island and all the best of a forest of 6,000 acres. Practically a line at Barmah would not benefit the forest at Yielima. Picola was six miles south of the forest, and if the line were brought anywhere near there, it would be about the centre of the forest traffic. One of the local saw-millers was also examined, and his evidence was to the effect that there were two mills at work in the forest whose output of timber was 2,500 tons per annum, which had to be dragged through the mud to Nathalia, whence it was sent to Melbourne by rail. If the railway were extended from Nathalia the output of the two mills would be doubled. It cost 2s. 9d. per hundred feet super. to draw the timber fourteen miles to Nathalia and put it on the trucks, the freight from Nathalia to Melbourne being 3s. 1d. per hundred feet super., or 11s. 2d. per ton. He was constructing a wooden tramway from the forest to Picola, four miles, at a cost of £80 per mile, on which he hoped to be able to bring a load of 30 tons by horse traction.

Statistics—
population,
&c. (*Vide*
Appendix).

6. The population of the area which is likely to be served by the proposed extension from Nathalia is estimated to be 1,399, and the live stock as follows, viz. :—Horses, 1,854; milch cows, 960; other cattle, 6,682; sheep, 16,863; and pigs, 1,984. Altogether 71,907 acres are occupied, of which 22,187 acres are under cultivation. The principal product is wheat, the yield according to the Agricultural Statistics for 1891 being 214,797 bushels from 12,273 acres, or an average of over 17½ bushels to the acre. The acreage under oats is 512 acres, yielding 14,202 bushels, or an average of over 27½ bushels to the acre. The yield of other cereals amounts to 82,646

bushels from 4,538 acres, an average of over 18 bushels to the acre; and of hay 1,315 tons from 1,099 acres. The above statistics, which have been specially compiled by the Government Statist, will be found in detail in the Appendix to this Report.

7. The Sectional Committee herewith submit the evidence they have received, ^{Recom-} and recommend that a line, seven miles in length, be constructed from Nathalia to ^{mendation.} Picola, under Class A (*vide* General Report of the Committee), at a cost not exceeding £3,000 per mile; that increased rates be charged on goods carried on this extension; and that the construction of the line be conditional on the land required for the track being given to the Railway Department free of cost, and without compensation for damage by severance.

THOS. BENT,
Chairman Sectional Committee No. 1.

Parliament House, Melbourne,
4th November, 1891.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND APPENDIX.

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Statistics furnished by the Government Statist.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

NATHALIA EXTENSIONS.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

(TAKEN BEFORE SECTIONAL COMMITTEE NO. 1.)

(At Nathalia.)

THURSDAY, 7TH MAY, 1891.

Members present:

The Hon. T. BENT, in the Chair ;

The Hon. J. Buchanan,
The Hon. D. Melville.

Mr. Groom,
Mr. McIntyre,
The Hon. A. L. Tucker,
The Hon. J. Woods.

NATHALIA TO BARMAH LINE.

William Thomas Moloney, sworn and examined.

1. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—Hotel-keeper and farmer, at Barmah.
2. What representative capacity are you in to-night?—Secretary of the Picola and Barmah Railway League.
3. Which line do you favour?—The line from Nathalia to Barmah.
4. Is that the unanimous opinion of the people?—I believe that is the unanimous opinion of the people within five miles. I wish to point out that the original intention was to carry the railway out to Barmah *viâ* Nathalia, inasmuch as they kept the station as far north of the township of Nathalia as possible when constructing that line, in order to avoid making a sharp curve in carrying out the extension. Two hundred thousand bags of grain have been forwarded from Nathalia Railway Station in the past two seasons, and upwards of three-fourths of that has come from the district north and west, the portion of the country seeking this extension.
5. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Was that up to Picola?—Yes, the parishes through which this line was surveyed. The principal portion came from Picola and the other parishes. There were 8,951 bags forwarded from Picola last year, and nearly 100,000 this year. The total acreage under tillage in the parishes of Yielina, Picola, Narioka, Barwo, and Moira for the season 1889–90 was 30,315 acres; the total yield 391,632 bushels—that was for last season. For this year the acreage under tillage is 30,397 acres, and the yield 415,262 bushels.
6. How much came from Picola?—Last year there were 5,372 acres under cultivation, and this year about the same, and the yield last year was 70,608 bushels, and this year 75,312 bushels, showing an increase.
7. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Where have you got these figures from?—The Government Statist.
8. Those recently published?—Yes.
9. Then the compilation of these figures is no act of your own, nor can you swear to them?—No.
10. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—But you are swearing to them. I presume you have verified them in some way?—I was under the impression they were correct.
11. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Suppose you have made a mistake, what check is there?—I have checked them. I had them direct from Mr. Hayter.
12. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—You wrote for them and got them?—Yes; here is the paper from the Government Statist, signed by him—[*producing a paper*].
13. Where does the parish of Picola start and end from the railway?—North-west.
14. How far from the railway?—About three miles from here.
15. The people up to that are well enough supplied with a railway?—Yes.
16. The next parish is Narioka, that is bounded by Picola?—There is the geodetic between the boundaries, on the south of Narioka.
17. If that railway were extended to Picola, would it not be sufficient?—The railway would go between two parishes.
18. Both those parishes would be served?—We also consider that this line, besides serving the agricultural interests, will also tap the largest redgum forest in the colony—86,500 acres in extent. On the royalty basis, similar to what is enforced in New South Wales, and which will be enforced here, I think,

allowing two trees to the acre of matured timber, 1,000 feet, the monetary value would be £86,500 of the timber at present standing in that forest. A tree measuring 1,000 feet super. could be cut to the acre, which would return an income of nearly £11,000 per annum. Presuming that the half of that timber were carried over at the average price of 2s. 9d. charged now, it would mean a return of over £14,000. After leaving Picola this survey goes alongside of the main road, and we consider a portion of that road could be used. We would be satisfied with a light railway and a low rate of speed. The terminus is on a Government township reserve.

19. *By the Chairman.*—At the river?—Yes, a mile square; it is the only high bank between Cobram and Echuca that can be approached in flood time. You can cross there in a punt when you cannot cross at Wahgunyah.

20. Is there anything else?—No, I think not.

21. You know that district thoroughly?—Yes; I have been there twenty years.

22. Have you been in any public capacity?—A councillor of the Echuca shire.

23. Could you give us any information about the field estimates, sleepers, cuttings, and side cuttings?—I could not.

24. How long have you been a councillor?—Six years.

25. Do you know the whole of the country about here?—Yes.

26. Do you know the country on the Kyabram and Tongala line?—Yes.

27. Which is the nearest existing station to Picola?—Nathalia.

28. How far do you think that station serves Picola?—It would serve half-way between here and Picola.

29. You say that the proposed line would tap this forest, but what is the length of it. Suppose this line were made to Barmah, how much of that forest would be within a reasonable distance?—I cannot give you that.

30. How many bushels of grain have been raised outside of that four-mile area, and inclusive of this portion to Barmah; how far do you think existing stations would serve that?—Approximately, I should say 60,000 bags.

31. What, in the first instance, would be a fair area in width to take for this railway half-way to Picola, and how far in the other directions. In connexion with this I am taking the Kyabram and Tongala proposals; what would you claim for the line to Barmah on each side; you have given us four miles in length?—I understood you to ask whether I considered that people four miles from here on the proposed route would be fairly well served.

32. How much land do you consider, knowing the locality, would be served from the existing station?—About four miles.

33. Now on each side of that, how far would you consider they would be served?—Say from three to four miles in width on each side.

34. It is fifteen miles in length to Barmah; how much land have you got on each side fit for cultivation beyond that that could be debited to that proposed line?—I could not answer that question.

35. That being the case, where do you get those figures from; how do you discriminate in giving the number of acres and the bushels produced in that area?—Four miles from Nathalia, and three miles on each side, would possibly take half the Yielima and Barwo parishes, and I would claim the other half for Picola; we claim all that.

36. *By Mr. Groom.*—How much is that?—The gross yield of Picola is 75,312 bushels; the next is Narioka, 73,828; we claim the whole of that.

37. How much would the line from Tongala to Narioka take from Barmah if constructed?—I consider, if our line is constructed, it would serve the whole of Narioka.

38. If the other line were constructed would it not serve Narioka south of the creek?—South of the creek possibly.

39. That is about half of it?—Yes.

40. The next parish is Yielima?—I think we would take a fourth of that.

41. *By the Chairman.*—How much is that?—About 30,000 bushels; a little more perhaps.

42. *By Mr. Groom.*—Is there any more?—There is Barwo, but we would take very little of that, if any.

43. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Is there any more?—There is Moira. I think we could claim nearly the whole of that.

44. *By the Chairman.*—How much is there?—Sixty-three thousand two hundred and eighteen bushels.

45. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—What about Barmah?—We have no statistics for Barmah.

46. *By the Chairman.*—That gives you about 7,000 tons altogether, does it not?—Yes.

47. That being the case, how much do you think would be taken from Moira if the Tongala line was made?—Very little of it. There is very little cultivation there.

48. Is there not some on this side of the creek?—Yes.

49. I will give you fifteen miles of the line with this 7,000 tons, at 1s. 3d. a ton, how much would that give for revenue?—Something over £400.

50. What other produce would be raised?—The redgum.

51. You say you are not in a position to say how far that forest would come in?—No.

52. Do you think there is any other produce that would be raised within that area?—I have no doubt the railway will increase the cultivation area.

53. We were told it will grow vines?—Yes, we can grow anything under the sun; we can grow fruit trees; there are two or three orchards doing splendidly, with very large yields. The vines are doing well, and all kinds of fruit—[*the witness produced some apples*].

54. Where were these grown?—At Picola West, three miles from the proposed railway. We can also produce better.

55. Would you have a creamery?—Yes, several.

56. What else?—There is a lot of stock; there are two commons.

57. Is this land nearly all in small freeholds?—The whole of it is in small holdings; there are no large estates.

58. Is there a family to almost each selection?—There are seven State schools between Nathalia and Barmah.

59. What is the average attendance?—Twenty to thirty, nothing less.

60. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—How far is the saw-mill from the survey?—Six miles.

61. Is there any supply of timber coming from that part?—Yes.

62. Do you know anything as to the possibilities of the traffic from that source, you know it comes along that route?—Yes, from two saw-mills.

63. In the event of this line being constructed, are there two saw-mills that will send their produce?—Yes.

64. *By the Chairman.*—What will the passenger traffic be like?—I could not say.

65. Would you get any passenger traffic from the other side of the Murray?—Yes.

66. Any goods?—The Aboriginal Mission Station, with 200 people, is over there.

67. How far on the other side is that?—About half-a-mile.

68. Why do you think they would come to this railway?—They have to cart their stuff now from Echuca or Moama.

69. Let us see what this line will cost. The estimate before us represents 15 miles 60 chains, and the estimated cost is £95,508 4s. 10d. Do you think, as a business man, you can raise enough revenue to pay the interest on that?—I could not say.

70. What do you think the interest would be, to begin with, on that £95,000?—About £4,000.

71. The working expenses come to about 60 per cent. Do you think we would be justified in recommending to Parliament the expenditure of that money on this proposed line?—I am not prepared to answer that question.

72. Do you think this estimate is too high?—I do.

73. Why do you say so?—Because the country is exactly similar to that from Nathalia to Numurkah, and that line was constructed for half that estimate.

74. Do you know that?—I believe that is correct.

75. If the line could be constructed at £2,500 a mile, do you think it would pay to make it?—Yes.

76. Are you sure the people would be content to take a light line without fencing, light engines, and all that?—Yes.

77. Do you know on what terms the people would offer the land to the Government for making the track?—I believe they would want the market value for the land.

78. What is that?—I believe it is worth from £6 to £7 an acre.

79. Including severance?—No.

80. If we recommended the line, and the contract exceeded the price named by 10 per cent. it could not be made. What do you think we would have to pay for the land and severance per mile for the railway track, taking 15 acres to the mile?—I do not know the cost of severance.

81. Have you made inquiries on the subject?—The farmers say the market value.

82. Shall we put down we can get the track from £6 to £7 an acre, and there is no talk of severance in that, or is the market value not including severance?—I think severance would have to be added.

83. Can you give us an idea of how much it would be?—I cannot.

84. Do you say that the £6 or £7 is the value of the land all the way to Barmah from Nathalia?—Yes, with one or two exceptions.

85. That includes the whole way?—Yes.

86. Would it be increased in value at all if that railway was constructed?—Yes, I should say it would be.

87. How much an acre?—From £1 to £2 an acre.

88. May I take £1 10s. as a fair average?—Yes.

89. On how many thousand acres?—I have not the total acreage here, but other witnesses can give it.

90. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Have you had any conversation with the people along the line about the differential rate?—Yes, we have discussed that matter.

91. What do you understand by that term?—It means that in the event of that line not paying they would be prepared to pay an increased rate.

92. Suppose the Committee recommended to Parliament that this line should be constructed on the condition that the rate was 2d. a mile instead of 1d. as on the main lines at present, would that be an acceptable proposition?—I believe they would be prepared to pay that.

93. That is until it is a paying line they would pay 30d. for the fifteen miles instead of 15d.?—Yes, I believe they would do that.

94. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—How many shires are interested in this line?—Two; Numurkah and Echuca.

95. You have made a calculation with the aid of the Chairman as to the revenue from the traffic, and it only shows £500 or £600 as the revenue. How do you propose to meet this £4,000 interest?—The redgum trade will be a very heavy traffic.

96. You have only given us this £400 or £500 revenue. Now, supposing the line could be constructed at £2,500, you still have a large deficiency to meet in interest and the average working expenses, which are 60 per cent. of the takings; how do you propose to meet that as secretary of the league?—We have not allowed for live stock. I think other witnesses will give that.

97. You say the land-owners require and demand the market value for the land. Is that to be a hard and fast rule among the farmers?—They may be prepared to make a concession. The proposed survey goes for a mile and a half through my land, and I consider £7 is the value of it; land was sold for that. I will sell for £5.

98. How many acres have you?—Three hundred and seventy acres.

99. How many acres would be taken by the railway?—Twenty.

100. You are going to get £455, and you are to make a sacrifice of £100?—No, £50.

101. You are to get 30s. an acre from the Government, and yet you demand this amount?—It would increase in value 320 acres.

102. *By the Chairman.*—In the general questions I put to you, I asked the present value of land over the whole area served by the line?—Within five miles.
103. Is any of this other served?—Just as much as some of it inside that area would be.
104. Would it not increase it 30s. an acre having the railway?—No.
105. Would it not increase the smaller area much more?—No.
106. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—You are gaining from what you said £535 by the making of this line, and yet you intend to demand how much more for this handsome benefit?—One hundred pounds; £5 an acre.
107. Can you explain that to the Committee—what is the meaning of it?—The owners of the land adjoining who would give nothing, would derive equally as much benefit, and would possibly be nearer to a station, and yet I would be giving £2 an acre.
108. But you have got a £400 or £500 increase in the value?—So has he.
109. Would you submit to a betterment tax in order that this railway may be guaranteed to pay?—Individually, I would.
110. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Your land is increased £525, and you are paid £100 for the right of passing through the land, which gives you an increase of £455, would you be prepared to hand over the half of that, £227 10s., and go halves with the State for the making of this railway?—No.
111. What does it cost you to cart per ton now?—Ten shillings.
112. Even with a differential rate that would cost you 2s. 6d. only. You are going to improve your land, reduce the cost of carriage, and notwithstanding all these things you are not prepared to go halves for these benefits?—I consider the State benefits as well. I consider it would be unfair for me to give the department £227, and my neighbour, who is equally benefited, not pay anything.
113. But the neighbour is not to escape?—That requires consideration.
114. You are a member of the council?—Yes.
115. Would it be a fair thing to say the council should buy the right of passing through this shire, and make the whole of the shire contribute?—I could not speak on behalf of the council, but individually I would be in favour of that, and I think the people would be. I think a special rate would be a fair thing.
116. The improved value on the land would be a very good sum to be handed over by the State, as you would increase your assessment all along that route?—No doubt.
117. You would not object to it over that increased assessment?—It appears fair.
118. *By the Chairman.*—Is any of this country in the irrigable areas on the lines I have mentioned?—Not on this side of the Goulburn.

The witness withdrew.

William Bodkin, sworn and examined.

119. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—I am a farmer.
120. Where do you reside?—In the parish of Narioka.
121. How many acres do you possess?—Nine hundred and twenty.
122. Obtained by purchase or selection?—Partly both.
123. By recent purchase?—Within the last eight years.
124. What is the nearest station to you?—Nathalia.
125. I suppose you are in favour of the line from Nathalia to Barmah?—Yes.
126. How far from Nathalia do you reside?—Eight miles. I believe it would be a good "spec." to make the line as it passes through good agricultural country, and the development of the country has been retarded for want of communication. It is impossible to send a ton of hay or straw to market at a profitable figure. The hay I sold, I got £200 for, and if I could have got it to Melbourne, I would have got £300 for it, for I had to cart it in the summer time when a good market could not be found for it, but the cost of getting it to a railway precludes the farmer from getting it in. A man is made to grow wheat and barley, and even a quantity of that is kept down as we have to cart our grain when we should be putting in our crops. The timber traffic cuts up our roads. So far as dairying is concerned, if we have an extension to Barmah, dairying could be more profitably carried out, the difficulty is to get live stock such as pigs away. There will be other industries that will spring up, and I think the area under cultivation has been increased through the Government bonuses. The land from Nathalia right down there is the best adapted for intense culture in the county of Moira. There seems to be a difficulty about severance, but I think one of those roads might be followed, and taking a turn at a sharper angle. When a railway comes in at the north-west corner of a man's land and goes out the south-west, it makes it of less marketable value, and more difficult to work.
127. Do you adopt Mr. Moloney's statement that there would be an increase of 30s. an acre?—On good land I believe there would.
128. No, take the average; is there any land worth more than he said?—He put the value at from £6 to £7; there might be a special block worth more.
129. What is your average?—I agree with him that the timbered land is worth from £6 to £7, and the plain land, on which there is very little, £4 10s. to £5.
130. Would the increase be 30s. on the whole area?—Not for a year or two. I think there would be an increase of £1 an acre.
131. There would be an increase in the value of the produce as well?—That would depend on the London market.
132. Now, you spoke of hay, therefore there would be an increased value for the produce?—I think a better price would be got for hay.
133. That was not an exceptional case of yours?—No.
134. Then hay and chaff would be increased in value?—Yes, it would.
135. Would the people be content to have the railway stop at Picola?—I would be perfectly satisfied with the railway stopping there.
136. As a business man, do you think that would be a wise course?—I suppose it might be; it would as far as I am concerned.

137. I understand you know the district pretty well?—Yes.
138. You are eight miles from Nathalia, what would it cost you to bring a ton of wheat to Nathalia?
—Six shillings to 7s. a ton.
139. Thirty-seven bushels to the ton; and supposing eight miles were travelled on the railway, it would cost 8d. to bring it to Nathalia?—Yes, that is all.
140. There would be a great saving?—Yes.
141. Does this railway go through your land?—No.
142. Will you adopt Mr. Moloney's statement that the people will require a fair market value for their land?—That is what any I consulted said.
143. You admit an increase at 30s. in the price of land, and, secondly, the increased value of the produce—will you admit an increased value to the shire?—They are bound to increase our rates.
144. There would consequently be an increased endowment?—Yes.
145. Now you see what happens; with all these things, do you think that would be a good business transaction for the State?—I think it would be a good business for the people to give the land if they got the railway made.
146. You admit all this?—Yes.
147. That being the case, do you think if this railway will cost that sum of money even you would get enough money to pay working expenses on this line to Barmah?—Not on the Government estimate; I believe that is excessive.
148. How much do you think it would cost?—I think it would pay up to £3,000.
149. Suppose it did not pay, and the people in this particular district got the benefit we have agreed on, who should pay the balance?—So far as that goes, you must put it on a differential rating, but I think it is unfair to us to do that; we have helped to pay for the old railways.
150. How much have you, individually, done towards paying for them?—I know a number of the railways do not pay. There is the line from Kilmore to Heathcote, and Heathcote to Sandhurst.
151. Who at present contributes to the loss?—The taxpayers.
152. Including the working man, who has no tax at all?—He pays his share.
153. He gets no increased value?—No.
154. Well, who should pay?—The property owners.
155. As he gets all these advantages?—Yes.
156. What should he pay?—I do not think the property owners should pay the difference, as the Government engineers had been in the habit of squandering moneys on these works.
157. Who ought to pay?—I do not think the working man ought to.
158. You say that at £3,000 per mile the line would pay; is that to Picola or Barmah?—I believe there will be a large traffic in redgum, but I would not say how far that would go in.
159. Could you suggest any means that we could recommend to Parliament as to the way that land ought to be obtained?—Except by the shire council taking it.
160. Like they do the roads?—Yes. I know, as far as this line is concerned, on the Picola-road, when you were the Minister of Railways, the people offered to take £1 an acre and cost of their improvements. I think, perhaps, the councils taking it would be the best way, as they would take it perhaps where it would suit the people.
161. Have you noticed the price that has been paid to owners who have sold land?—I know they have paid excessively—£35 per acre, and I know where I could get it for a tenth of that.
162. I believe a lot of this line would pass through Government land?—None of it.
163. I understood the station was on Government land?—Yes, that is the only piece.
164. Twenty-four pounds an acre, including severance, is what they have put down on the Government estimate?—I do not know what they pay for severance. That depends on how they sever the land.
165. You do not see any objection to the roads being used for railway purposes?—No; where there are two or three chain roads they might do that.
166. Do you think the councils would hand them over?—I do not think they would object. I think it would save them in making roads, and all that.
167. Do you know anything about cuttings, earthworks, and so on?—No.
168. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—You appear to have put particular stress on the fact that you contributed towards the losses on the railway system throughout the colony; you do not think the system that has been suggested is fair?—No.
169. Have you ever reckoned what your loss is?—No.
170. Your share of that loss is 3s. 4d.?—I think you have to pay more than that paying interest.
171. I am dividing £200,000 among 1,300,000 people which brings it down to 3s. 4d. a head?—I do not see why we should not get the railways on the same footing as the other people.
172. What does it cost to bring a ton of hay to Nathalia, eight miles?—I do not know about a ton of hay, about 10s. for a ton of chaff.
173. About the same for a ton of hay?—No one could cart hay at the same price as chaff.
174. What is the difference?—Twelve shillings or 15s. for hay.
175. When you get to Nathalia you have to pay 12s. 6d. to Melbourne, about 24s. 6d.?—Yes.
176. You swore a little ago that you would have got £300 for your hay if you had a railway, and yet you sold it here for £200, that is not business?—You have not counted anything for cutting it into chaff.
177. *By Mr. Tucker.*—You never sent hay in bulk to Melbourne?—No.
178. You said that you thought the line might stop at Picola. That would take you something like seven miles?—Yes.
179. For what reason would you stop there at present?—It would serve the district better than at Nathalia; it would bring it within nearer reach of everybody.
180. Do you mean to say that the district beyond is not so rich a district?—I do not think there is any difference in the quality of the land beyond.
181. You have been in the district fifteen years?—Yes.
182. You have noticed the land go into cultivation?—Yes.
183. Can you say there has been a steady increase?—Yes there has.

184. Was there a large increase last year?—No; the increase is steady now every year. The farmers have got a larger area cleared; they fallow more, and put in a steadier area now than they have done formerly. When the selector first came, he put in 40 acres, and when cleared, he put in another 40, but now when he gets 150 acres cleared he sometimes leaves some of his old land out.

185. Has there been any sign of the land going into cultivation to a greater extent?—No, there is more rotation of crops.

186. Taking the whole length of the line, starting four miles from Nathalia, how much land on each side of the line will be served by this railway?—I should think that from six to seven miles would be a fair thing on each side of the line.

187. But Picola is seven miles from here?—Yes; but there are a number beyond. There are some ten and twelve miles further on than I am; when I spoke of eight miles, I spoke of myself.

188. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—If it went seven miles past Picola it would be close to Barmah?—Yes.

189. *By Mr. Tucker.*—Do you know the proportion of land under cultivation at the present time within the area you say will be served by the railway?—From one-third to one-fourth under cultivation; I think a farmer with 300 acres would have more than 100 acres cultivated annually.

190. What increase do you think you might reasonably say would be brought about if the line were constructed?—About half as much more.

191. Instead of one-third one-half might be cultivated?—Yes.

192. All being land fit for cultivation?—Yes, most of the land is fit for cultivation in that area.

193. Do you know anything about the proposed line from Nathalia to Tongala?—I have not considered that.

194. Would it serve any of the Barmah people?—Very few; there is very little cultivation on the south of the Deep Creek. The principal cultivation would be between Deep Creek and Broken Creek.

195. It would be of no use to the people on the Barmah to Nathalia line?—South of Nathalia it would.

196. Do you know anything of the Kyabram line?—On the south of the river.

197. Do you know anything of the country?—As you get on to the Goulburn it is not of the same quality, there is more of the grazing country down there.

The witness withdrew.

James Nicholas, sworn and examined.

198. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—Saw-miller.

199. Where do you reside?—In Picola.

200. How far from Nathalia?—Fourteen miles.

201. What is the area of your land?—Three hundred and twenty acres.

202. Where is that?—In Picola.

203. How near would you be if the proposed line were made?—Five miles, or a little over.

204. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Your saw-mill is five miles north from the line?—Yes.

205. How many mills are there?—Two.

206. There were four?—There are only two that would be served by this line that I know of.

207. I will read the surveyor's report—[*the same was read*]—There were never four saw-mills to my knowledge to be benefited by this line.

208. Do you agree with the report generally?—Yes.

209. Can you give us on general lines something with reference to your mill?—I wish to state what benefit the gum will be to the line. The quantity we put out the last three years is 1,250 tons per annum, which we have had the pleasure of dragging through the mud bottom up, that has actually gone on your railway.

210. What does that cost from Nathalia to Melbourne?—Three shillings and one penny per hundred.

211. You are giving tons?—A ton is 360 feet super., 11s. 2d.

212. That has been the output?—These are facts. Presuming that my brother mill-owner does the same amount of business as I do, that would be 2,500 tons per annum; he has the same capacity, and the same facility as I have, for carrying on the same amount of traffic per annum. This is not the output of our mill but what is actually trucked, but if we get the benefit of this line we would guarantee on oath to double the amount per annum.

213. How do you arrive at that?—For the very reason that when the line went in to our competitors mills up the line at Cobram at the Government expense, and with the facilities offered them by the railway they were under us in the market at from 1s. 8d. to 2s.

214. And undersell you to that amount?—Yes, a track is run right into their mill.

215. That is Fraser's mill?—There are two or three there. To show that my statement is correct the average timber we sent in, and the average price per ton, as sent in by road by team, is 2s. 9d.—about 2s. 6d. for carriage, and 3d. per ton for loading, that is 2s. 9d. per hundred feet super. The price from Nathalia to Melbourne is 3s. 1d. per hundred feet super.

216. *By the Chairman.*—What is a hundred feet super. in weight?—The third of a ton.

217. A thousand feet will be about what?—About 3 tons. I was stating to you how that places me at a disadvantage, and previous to getting the train they had to pay 2s. 9d. the same as I do, but the moment the Government thought fit to place us at that disadvantage that made a difference of 2s. 9d. super., we are that much crippled.

218. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Are you not nearer Melbourne than they are now?—They are about six or seven miles further. If you would give us this line, I could guarantee the output would be doubled.

219. How do you arrive at that?—Then we could supply the Great Southern line and Birregurra, and now this other mill cuts us out owing to the heavy handicap. It is not a thing of to-day—we have an inexhaustible forest. We are now, to show our confidence in the thing, laying four miles of tram to meet this proposed line.

220. Where does this come to?—The Picola Hotel.

- 221-2. You are within a mile of that with your tram?—Within two and a half miles.
223. Where are you putting it?—Along the side of the road.
224. What is that costing you?—It is all put down for £80 a mile.
225. Will you be able to cart away stuff?—I can bring a load of 30 tons.
226. With horses or steam?—Horses; a horse will move 11 tons.
227. How far does this tram run?—As the timber is being felled we extend our tram, and instead of running the timber into the mills, we run the tram to the fellers.
228. Do you intend to carry this tram any further?—We are running there with the anticipation that you will meet us.
229. Could you continue that tram into Nathalia?—Yes, I will be willing to carry it in if we do not get the railway.
230. You will bring it in to Nathalia at £80 a mile?—Yes, if I could get permission.
231. Would you be willing to construct this at £80 a mile to run at eight miles an hour?—Yes, and charge what we charge for our teams or bullock teams.
232. Not take 2d. per ton per mile?—If I had authority to run on the road, and not trammelled, I would do it. If the Government were going to supervise me, I would not do it with a lot of red tape in it.
233. If you got the concession, the Government would want some consideration?—I would give two trams a day, but with a very heavy load I would not guarantee the speed, but I would go back at that rate; I might bring in 90 tons in a trip.
234. You understand what you have offered?—Yes. It will do for many years.
235. Have you any knowledge of what it would cost per mile to construct a railway in as substantial a way as the railway from Nathalia to Numurkah, how much would you do it for?—Two thousand pounds a mile.
236. Would you be prepared to construct this line at that?—Under certain considerations, but I do not want to have 25 per cent. for supervision, and be dictated to by every Tom, Dick, and Harry.
237. You would ask nothing from the State?—I would put it down for £2,000 a mile, if I got the rails at a reasonable rate.
238. What do you call that?—Cost price. I would not like you to make a profit out of my labour.
239. If you got the rails at cost price you are prepared to construct the line from Nathalia to Barmah at £600 a mile for rails?—I believe it could be done.
240. Any difficulties?—No, that any one knows of.
241. You say you were satisfied with the report. It is said to be £6,000 a mile?—I would do it for a third of that.
242. Is there any necessity for this line crossing the Broken Creek?—I say there is no necessity for crossing that at all. I would not cross the creek at all; I would cross to the left.
243. You would not carry it out for £2,000 a mile if you were crossing the creek three times?—I would say £3,000 would put up the two bridges.
244. Suppose you were to carry out the surveyed line, £3,000 added would enable you to carry out the bridges?—I am speaking approximately. I do not know the length of the bridges.
245. You would recommend us to do without these bridges?—Yes, and to save mileage too.
246. How do you account for them increasing the mileage?—There are many things done in the office I would not like to be responsible for. The line goes by the flour-mill and crosses the creek, and instead of that I would go round by the goods station building and leave the flour-mill to the left; it is the only bit of low ground on the whole of the line, and why they want to go round there I do not know.
247. You would shorten the line?—Yes, by three miles.
248. What could you supply redgum sleepers for?—I will put all the sleepers on the line from end to end at 3s.; the condemned ones will be at my loss.
249. Do you know anything about ballast?—I have no ballast on my own land, but I believe there is gravel in three or four places I know of, where I could obtain beautiful sand.
250. Do you know the cost of handling earth along there?—I have a slight idea of it.
251. What does it cost?—It is mostly skimming. I should think the whole of the earthworks, including approaches to platforms, could be done at 8d. per yard. I have known it to be let for 5d., or somewhere about that.
252. You know the Goulburn Valley line?—Yes, I have been on it.
253. Do you know what that cost per mile?—I cannot tell.
254. The Goulburn Valley is a very suitable line?—It is no better than the one I offered to build, for I will build as good a line as was ever built in the world. The sleepers would be good—I have supplied them for all over the colony. Should the bridge timber be required, I will deliver at the site of the bridge at 14s. a hundred super.
255. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—You are willing to guarantee this line would pay up to the saw-mill. That means, practically, a business line to suit the locality?—Yes, to suit our purpose.
256. How do you regard this proposition of spending £6,000 a mile. Would the Committee be right, considering all things, in authorizing the line at that price?—I would say the gentlemen sitting on the Committee were not worthy of their seats if they did so.
257. You think it is perfectly absurd?—Yes.
258. What would be a fair outlay in your judgment, the most we could safely recommend, considering the prospects of the place?—£2,000 a mile.
259. No more?—It can be done for that; if you wish to give me any more I will take it.
260. About this tramway line of yours at £80 a mile?—I think it cost that.
261. How long will that last?—For twenty years; there may be a broken rail here and there, perhaps.
262. What is the cost of maintenance per annum?—One man would keep the whole lot up the whole year round.
263. Right to Nathalia?—Yes, for the first six or seven years; after that I would recommend light rails to go in.
264. Suppose the line were made with iron rails, what could that be done for?—It would be as safe as any line in the colony at a low rate of speed.

265. How much extra for those rails?—£600 a mile for the rails, and £80 a mile to make it a trifle wider.
266. Say £800?—I will do it for that.
267. How much will it take to maintain that?—It depends on the engine a lot. Say a 30-horse engine of 15 or 16 tons.
268. If it can be done for £800 a mile with the local timber, is there any reason to go to £2,000 a mile?—It will last my time—of course I am getting old.
269. Suppose we are agreed upon a speed of eight, ten, or twelve miles an hour, will this proposed railway, at £800 a mile, be good enough for this district?—Yes, for the next twenty years if they are satisfied with this.
270. You say it is good enough?—If they are prepared to travel at that rate, and not 60 miles an hour. This would be only a makeshift instead of the other at £2,000.
271. What will it cost per ton to take the produce to the railway station at Nathalia on this tram?—About 4d. a bag for grain.
272. What kind of sleepers would you use on that line?—Sleepers like we are laying it down on.
273. But I mean like the Government permanent way?—£250 a mile.
274. That would amount to £1,050 with the other items?—Yes, and then there is the ballasting.
275. We have now got a complete railway for £1,050?—Yes, less the ballast and culverts; a few little ones a foot high would do.
276. Where will you get the ballast from?—Out of one of those gravel pits.
277. What will it cost?—About 4d. per cubic yard.
278. We have now by your reckoning, as a practical man, a railway for about £1,200 a mile?—Yes, about £1,200 or £1,300. I am not quite sure about the ballasting.
279. You would be using the roads for your lines?—I would bring it down the road, and buy a corner here and there; I would want an acre or two.
280. Do you think this would be a popular thing in the district?—I think if this shire made it it would be a grand investment. I do not think there is a ratepayer in this shire who would hold up his hand against me.
281. I understood you to say you are supplying sleepers to the Great Southern line?—Yes, to McNeil and Bath, and Falkingham.
282. You send redgum sleepers to there when they have that fine forest?—Yes, and their bridge timber too.
283. What do they pay you for sleepers?—Three shillings and fourpence here for the special sleepers.
284. At Nathalia?—Yes.
285. Two hundred miles from the Great Southern line?—About 170 miles; we have sent millions of feet there.
286. To that forest, and all that distance?—Yes, and I wish they had another contract.
287. You are sending the timber to a place where they have trees like you have got?—They have not got the quality.
288. What is the difference in the value in a messmate, redgum, box, and bluegum sleeper?—The bluegum sleeper will not last more than five years—the young quick-growing bluegum.
289. I am not speaking of the young timber. You saw Mr. Hodgkinson's report about the bluegum sleepers—do you say a bluegum sleeper will only last four or five years?—Is that the timber that the Harbor Trust asked to have reserved?
290. Yes. What is the life of that?—As a practical man, I would say it is so much softer; it would be absurd to mention it.
291. What do you take as the relative life of the sleepers?—The life of the sleepers is something like this—the bluegum is the worst of the lot among the eucalypti.
292. Would you, if you were making that Great Southern line, use that timber instead of bringing the redgum from Barmah?—I would bring it from Barmah if I could get nothing but messmate.
293. What is the price of a redgum sleeper delivered at the Great Southern line, giving the contractor's profit?—Four shillings and fourpence.
294. And messmate?—Two shillings; that is a big price for it, as it is alongside of the line.
295. I am speaking of the relative values, not where the timber is?—The relative value is that the redgum is worth three of the messmate.
296. And bluegum, how much?—Redgum is worth two of it.
297. And box?—I think that box, redgum, and ironbark are just one as good as the other, and as good as English oak.
298. What is the box worth?—It is good timber; it is not so good for jinker timber.
299. How much less is it worth than redgum?—Not much. I would rather have redgum in driving the spokes; it does not split.
300. Is the difference in value so little that you cannot tell which is the best?—I should think that the three are equally good.
301. Is there any other timber?—There are three Gippsland timbers, and there is a complaint that there is more moisture in it, and that affects its durability.
302. Therefore you think the Railway Department did right in specifying that your redgum should be used for the Great Southern line?—I think they are doing quite right; that money is fairly spent by the State.
303. *By Mr. Groom.*—What experience have you on bluegum timber?—I cut a lot of sleepers for the Geelong and Ballarat line.
304. Where?—On the Campaspe, bluegum and box.
305. Whereabouts?—Between Heathcote and Colbinabbin.
306. What kind of bluegum?—The pure bluegum.
307. What do you mean by that?—What we call the bastard gum, we would not fell it, for in falling it would split to pieces. The bluegum carries a nice long stem as straight as a rifle barrel. You look at it and it is like a good man standing up, he is true to nature and a good colour.

308. What colour is the bark?—A nice green, inclined to be whitish in the distance, and it has healthy spots on the bark.
309. What is the difference in the leaf?—You cannot tell the difference in the leaf, but a botanist might.
310. What about the seed?—You could not tell one from the other.
311. Would you be surprised when I tell you the bluegum which we mean has a seed five or six times as large as the ordinary gum seed; I am speaking of the Tasmanian bluegum?—It is as large as the top of that inkstand—[*pointing*].
312. What experience have you had of Tasmanian bluegum?—I have no knowledge of it.
313. The Gippsland timber is the same?—I have seen the Tasmanian timber and handled it, and it seemed much better than the local bluegum.
314. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—You were saying something about Mr. Hodgkinson and this forest?—I was going to say that he must be a very clever man to have found this new country after all this time, and this new timber after the redgum and box has given satisfaction to everybody. It seems they have seen fit to write off 2,000,000 acres for this new timber.
315. *By Mr. Groom.*—Do you know that Mr. Darbyshire admits that you can get bluegum which is a good timber, but the trouble is to tell the difference between it and other timbers when it is cut?—Can Mr. Darbyshire tell us the difference?
316. Can you?—I can tell within a few days, when the sun gets on it.
317. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Have you any clear and distinct knowledge of the life of this proper bluegum. I do not refer to the bastard or hybrid kind, but the proper Gippsland bluegum?—In a bridge 1,000 feet long, at Barnedown on the Campaspe, they have gum piles 55 feet long, they brought them 24 miles. The bridge has been up eighteen years and the bluegum wood is like a cone; the wood is eaten off 3 inches deep, and the bridge is becoming dangerous. With the ironbark and redgum piles there the wood is as good as when they were put in.
318. *By the Chairman.*—You do not know this new forest of timber discovered in Gippsland?—No.
319. Consequently you will not swear the wood is unfit for sleepers?—I could not swear that; I say it is not as good as the timber mentioned to you.
320. I understand you to say you pay on 1,250 tons 9s. 3d. a ton from Melbourne to Nathalia?—Yes; that is the average output.
321. It costs 2s. 9d. a hundred to bring it from the forest to Nathalia?—The average is 2s. 6d. summer and winter.
322. You say you will double the output with a railway, does that refer to your own mill or to the two?—The two.
323. I understand you would have to pay for this 5,000 tons on the eight miles only?—On the fourteen miles.
324. But the nearest point for you is Picola, and they do not intend to run the railway into the forest, consequently I can only charge you for that length of railway at 8d. per ton?—Yes.
325. Then your 5,000 tons will be at the rate of 8d. per ton, and any credit that the extra traffic you may bring on the main line is all you would bring to the railway?—Yes; all in redgum.
326. That is the total amount you would bring to the railway?—Yes.
327. I understand you have 320 acres of land?—Yes.
328. Will it be increased in value to the extent these gentlemen said to-night if the proposed line is made?—I should think my farm would be worth £1 an acre more.
329. As you only have that small area, what do you think you should contribute in a differential rate in excess of that sum above the ordinary rate charged if this railway does not pay?—I would pay you double for the first ten years.
330. You would be prepared to say that for the other saw-miller too?—Yes; he left the matter solely with me, and he would agree.
331. As to fencing, what is your estimate?—A good fence is redgum split posts 8, 9, and 10 inches wide, a good three-rail fence, and that can be well and faithfully done at £80 a mile, and I would guarantee it to stand for years.
332. What do you think earthworks and cuttings could be done for?—At 8d.; I think I could get it done for that.
333. Have you any doubt about it?—No.
334. Are you justified in making that statement; is your knowledge sufficient?—Yes.
335. Do you know what the metalling will cost for station grounds and platforms to any part of the line?—Proper bluestone metal would cost 16s. to 18s. a yard here.
336. And the ballast, how much would that cost?—Locally on the line from 4d. to 6d. a yard, delivered on the line with the contractor's trucks, adjacent to the line.
337. Can you move anything for 4d. a yard?—Yes; if you have a good pit.
338. What wages would you pay for doing that?—Seven shillings or 8s. a day.
339. How many yards can a man lift in a day; is it possible to do it for that?—I could lift it down.
340. Do you know a pit where you could do that?—I am confident I could find one.
341. Would you be prepared to take it at 4d. a yard, and put it on the line?—I would not unless I found the pit.
342. How much would you put down for the sleepers?—Three shillings each from Barmah to Nathalia, approved sleepers, and I will stand the loss of all the condemned ones.
343. What about the station buildings?—I will give the timber at 15s. per hundred super.
344. Turn-tables?—The same rate.
345. Telegraph poles?—Four shillings and sixpence each.
346. Would you be surprised to know that the figures you have given me would bring the price of the line up to more than £4,000 a mile?—I must apologise if I have.
347. Two thousand sleepers to the mile with siding comes to what?—Three hundred pounds.
348. You said the line was too high by a considerable sum. Now I want to show you you are not much below them. I am leaving out the land?—Yes, I said nothing about that.

349. What is the cost of clearing per chain, for fifteen miles, a chain wide?—About 3s. a chain or 2s. 6d.
350. Ten pounds a mile?—Yes.
351. That is £160 for the lot?—Yes.
352. Your fencing is £80 a mile?—Yes, that is a fence better than on the Victorian railways.
353. I will take the Government fence?—Fifty pounds a mile.
354. That is £100 for the double mile?—I only counted for the one side.
355. For the level crossings and gate-houses, how much?—A cottage for the gate-keepers would be about £12 or £15, and a better one than I have to live in.
356. What will it be built of?—Redgum.
357. The earthworks and cuttings you put down at 8d.?—Yes.
358. The department has got 1s. 3d.; that gives you 7d., making it £600 a mile at your price?—Yes, at their calculation.
359. According to the section 280,000 yards will be required, that is £900 a mile?—Yes.
360. For your side ditches, how much?—That would be earthwork.
361. The metalling you have got 10s. a yard?—That is according to their estimate.
362. With their 8,000 yards at 16s. makes £400 a mile?—Yes.
363. Now ballast—24,000 yards?—Providing the pit could be got adjacent to the line, I would say 8d. a yard.
364. They have got 4s. a yard, and you say what?—Eightpence a yard. I will say 1s.
365. That is about £200 a mile, and the rails are the same as yours?—Yes, that is their estimate.
366. The points and crossings you cannot alter?—No.
367. Laying the permanent way, how much?—I could not answer that.
368. What could you build stations at like the Nathalia one?—The buildings on that station, which would accommodate the clerks and station-master, I would say £100 for—that is the whole lot of buildings on this side of the line.
369. That is £6 a mile?—Yes.
370. And goods-sheds, how much?—Four hundred pounds.
371. About £20 a mile?—Yes.
372. And engineering and surveying the line, what about that?—I could not say.
373. What would you think?—For the shire you could not do it at 5 per cent. I should think on a big job it would be 3 per cent.
374. Then how much a mile for the telegraph?—Four shillings and sixpence each pole on the ground.
375. How much a mile?—Seven pounds ten shillings.
376. What do you say for water supply?—Nothing.
377. That comes up to £3,050 a mile, and then there is 5 per cent. for engineering, therefore your estimate comes to a lot of money?—Yes, but it does not alter our case.
378. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—You would not make a line like that?—No, there is no metal required here.

The witness withdrew.

John Campbell Young, sworn and examined.

379. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—The forester in the Barmah and Yielima State forest. I have been requested to put a few facts before you about the timber in the forest. All told, including the different reserves, we have something over 90,000 acres. An approximate estimate I have made shows that we have at present two trees to the acre, averaging 1,000 feet or 2,000 feet to the acre, which, if disposed of under the royalty system now at present in New South Wales, and which I fully believe it will be the future policy in Victoria, would realize £86,500.
380. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—What is it per 1,000 feet?—Ten shillings per 1,000 feet, after paying the right for an area. The area is put up to auction, and the upset price is £40, besides anything that any one may run you up to after that.
381. Is it super. or 1s. a hundred?—One shilling a hundred for the lineal foot.
382. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Would you advise the State to adopt the same course as in New South Wales?—Yes.
383. Do you know the track for the whole distance for this line?—Yes.
384. How near would the whole of this forest be to it—how much would come to this proposed line?—The nearest point to the line would be where Nicholas' mill is situated at present.
385. How far is that?—Between five and six or seven miles.
386. If this line is constructed, how much nearer will he be to the railway?—It would not bring it any nearer to him at all.
387. If it goes to Picola, would it not be nearer?—Six miles to Picola, I meant to say.
388. If we go to Picola only, do we get the whole of his traffic?—Yes.
389. If we go to Barmah, how much more of the forest will we get?—You will get the whole of Barmah Island, and all the best of a forest of 6,000 acres.
390. Will you get all that whether there is a railway or not?—Practically the forest has been closed as far as possible; the only thing that has been done is the royalty on piles.
391. Supposing we do not construct the line, is there any other mode of carriage?—They can pontoon it down the river; there is no other mode, except by bullock drays.
392. How far would this forest be from this proposed railway?—A mile and a half to the nearest point.
393. Could you suggest another route?—No, that is about the only spot where you could get on where the ground is solid.
394. *By Mr. Groom.*—Is that good forest in Cocomah?—There is not a great deal of matured timber in that district. Then there is good timber right up to Yalca.
- 395-6. Practically a line at Barmah would be of no use to the forest up at Yielima?—No.

397. But you include that in your 90,000 acres?—No, I did not mean that up there.
398. But you included it?—I go up to Strathmerton.
399. *By the Chairman.*—Mr. Fraser, the saw-miller, is using Cobram?—There is no forest there—no quantity.
400. How much of that forest would be tapped at a reasonable distance from the proposed railway from Nathalia to Barmah?—I should say about 75,000 acres.
401. And how many acres are almost inaccessible?—For bullock teams, nearly the whole of it is accessible.
402. Supposing bullock teams were used, could it be taken to the Murray?—Yes, and barged to any spot.
403. Without a railway?—It can be done that way.
404. Do you know what it would cost?—No.
405. Would it not be wise to keep this young timber for a little while, or pitch into it at once?—We want the matured timber taken; it is better to give them away for nothing than leave them as they are, going to waste.
406. *By Mr. Groom.*—Do you know the millers of Yielima?—Yes, I have been over there.
407. Would the line there be any use to them?—Trains to bring the stuff up to Strathmerton would help them.
408. That is a long way away. Would Yalca be a fair centre?—My district extends 23 miles the other side of Barmah, and this way it would extend 25 miles.
409. The bulk of the forest is right north of here?—Yes, it is pretty near north; and if the railway was anywhere near to Picola it would be about the centre. The route would be impracticable for four miles; you would have to run tramways.
410. *By the Chairman.*—Supposing it were turned into that forest, how would that do?—At Barmah the bank is good undoubtedly, and this is the best forest in Victoria at the present day, and the supply of timber will have to come from here and Gunbower in the future.
411. It would be a shorter route to tap the forest due north of Barmah than to go to Barmah?—Barmah is the only landing you can get.
412. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—You could not land at Cocamah?—No.

The witness withdrew.

NATHALIA TO KYABRAM LINE.

Lawrence Hanlan, sworn and examined.

413. *By the Chairman.*—What line do you support?—From Nathalia to Kyabram, by Kotupna.
414. What are you?—A vine-grower.
415. Who are you representing—the Kotupna league?—Yes, as secretary *pro tem*.
416. Have you anything to do with Barmah?—No.
417. What about this line to Tongala?—Tongala and Kyabram, I think, mean one line.
418. They seem to be competitors?—Yes, there is a difference of opinion; there are two leagues.
419. What are your reasons in favour of the line from Nathalia to Kyabram?—I have a few figures. The country to be benefited is ten miles long and twenty miles wide, viz., eight miles east and twelve miles west. There are 128,000 acres and about 400 holdings, which are equal to 32,000 tons per annum. There are 3,000 acres adapted for fruit and vine culture. The price of land for agriculture and grazing is from £4 to £7 per acre. There are 61,000 acres good grazing land capable of carrying one beast to 6 acres, or two sheep per acre. The dairying industry is well established, and it is estimated there are about 1,000 cows being milked. As to butter, at an average of 4 lbs. per cow per week for seven months in the year at an average price of 6d. per lb., would give a return of £2,750 per year. By having railway communication this industry would be increased.
420. I will read the surveyor's report—"The line is 22 miles 1 chain 73 links in length, and passes through very level country all the way. Parts of the land which the line passes through is subject to inundations during the flood times. The most expensive bridge will be the one over the Goulburn; and there will be a great number of smaller ones required, as the line passes over a number of creeks and water-courses." I was told this survey was made in a boat?—And many others at the same time.
421. "For about ten miles, that is from Kyabram to the Goulburn River, the line passes through good land"—is that right?—Yes, the best in the colony.
422. "The first five or six miles is chiefly under cultivation, and from there to the River Goulburn is used for grazing purposes, and belongs to the Wyuna sheep station."—what is the size of that station?—Forty thousand acres.
423. What do they grow there?—Wool.
424. "After crossing the River Goulburn the land is of an inferior quality, and is used for grazing purposes, with the exception of patches of good land which are come across here and there until within three miles of Nathalia, when a ridge of good land is met, and is mostly under cultivation to the end of the line. Settlement.—The land is chiefly taken up in small holdings, and settlement extends for many miles on either side of the line for the whole distance. The principal industry is wheat-growing and dairying, and a few of the settlers are going in for fruit-growing. Timber.—The timber is chiefly box, while the creeks are lined with redgum, and clumps of Australian pines are to be seen in places. Fences.—Post and wire fences appear to be the ones best adapted for this country, on account of the scarcity of good splitting timber." How far is that report out?—There is any amount of good timber. I cannot agree with that report as to this land being only fit for grazing purposes. There are parts that are subject to inundation, but there are other parts that never came under notice.
425. Is there anything else you have to say?—I might state that Mr. Finlay, of the Wyuna estate, has guaranteed the people, if the line should pass by way of McCoy's Bridge, he would be most willing to have the station cut up into blocks.
426. Will we see this country to-morrow?—Yes; you will see the worst of it, I am sorry to say.

427. How many thousands of acres will be served by this line?—Twelve thousand eight hundred.
428. What is the value of the land?—From £4 to £7 an acre.
429. If the railway is made, what would it be worth?—Considerably more, I suppose. I do not know that I am in a position to say what it will be worth, but the land will become very valuable. On a 3,000-acre block there are 200 acres under fruit and vines, and the return of wine is 500 gallons per acre; I had myself 550. There is the return from that 3,000 acres, and I do not think it is more than £1 an acre profit.
430. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Do they make a profit of that?—Yes, but they want railway facilities.
431. *By the Chairman.*—How far is that land now from a railway?—Twelve miles from Nathalia.
432. Is that the market town?—Yes.
433. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Will we see that land to-morrow?—Yes.
434. *By the Chairman.*—Is the road as good as that to Barmah?—Our roads are very bad. I was asked if we got £1 an acre profit from the land.
435. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Do the land-owners realize £1 an acre profit?—If they did not do that they would not be able to exist. That same land planted under vines and fruit will give a return of £45 an acre.
436. Profit?—Yes.
437. *By the Chairman.*—The Tongala line will overlap you; would you be content with the other line?—To go between the two would satisfy all hands.
438. Have you joined forces?—No.
439. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Have you had any conversation lately with the people of this other line?—I have seen the farmers.
440. You have decided to have one line instead of two?—Yes.
441. Would a straight line be a central one between the two?—Central between the two.
442. *By Mr. Groom.*—Would a line straight through the district suit?—Yes.
443. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—You will be satisfied with that?—Yes.

The witness withdrew.

John James Bartrop, sworn and examined.

444. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—I am a farmer.
445. Where do you reside?—At Kotupna.
446. You are now far from Nathalia?—Eight miles.
447. Which line do you favour?—Nathalia to Kyabram.
448. Do you agree with the previous witness?—Not on all points.
449. Where do you differ?—He did not explain the thing quite correctly in the beginning.
450. How far would you be from this proposed line to Kyabram?—About a mile and a half.
451. In which direction?—On the east side of my property towards Kyabram. We take a radius of ten miles in the centre out of the 22, as we consider the six miles on either end are well served. We take a radius of twenty miles; eight miles on the east side of the proposed route will be benefited, and beyond that eastward would have the Numurkah line.
452. You come up to St. Germain's?—Yes. On the west side of this route we take twelve miles wide towards the Goulburn, the junction of the Murray down towards Barmah and across the Goulburn, and get in a portion of Kanyapella, and right on to the Echuca and Tatura line. We have good agricultural land capable of growing cereals with any land in the colony, and also for fruit trees and vines. We estimate the value of the land from £4 up to £7 per acre for grazing and cultivation, and for fruit and vine land from £15 up to £20 an acre.
453. After the improvements are made, when the trees are in, and before they come to perfection?—Yes. In that territory we have 120,000 acres, and in that way have 64,000 acres capable of growing cereals, and if the 64,000 acres were all under crop we would be quite safe in saying it would average half-a-ton per acre, which would mean 30,000 tons.
454. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Tons of what?—Cereals, grain, and chaff. At the present time whatever we grow we have to cart to market in the summer time; although some are 8, 10, 12, 14, and 15 miles away from a railway station, we cannot get there this time of the year owing to the roads. If we had railway facilities we would put more land under cultivation. At the present time some of the farmers are giving up growing cereals owing to the carriage difficulty. After deducting this 64,000 acres, the balance of the grass land is thoroughly good, capable of carrying two sheep per acre, or about one beast to 6 acres. The other 3,000 acres of this is fit for fruit and vine culture. The crossing on the Goulburn the surveyors considered the best crossing. Mr. Finlay will sell his land for farms.
455. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Suppose he does sell his land for farms he will get a profit?—Yes.
456. What will be the increase in the value of the land by making a railway?—About £1 an acre.
457. How many thousand acres are there in that estate?—About 30,000 acres, perhaps.
458. Why should the State give £30,000 to anybody. Would the owner not cut up this estate to get the enhanced value?—[*No answer.*]
459. What is the depth of water on this route in flood time?—Some of the track is dry.
460. What amount is under water?—About three or four miles, which is inundated for a few days only.
461. *By Mr. Groom.*—To what depth?—Three feet by the creeks.
462. *By the Chairman.*—What revenue do you think we would derive from this line if it were made?—I think the revenue would be very satisfactory; I have never put it into figures.
463. It will cost £144,000 according to our estimate, that comes to £8,000 a year expenses—would we be justified in expending that money?—I think that is too much.
464. Why do you not bring an engineer to give us information. Would you spend that money?—No.
465. Do you approve of the evidence of the previous witness, who says that you are willing to take a straight line?—No; for the simple reason that I know we would not get one of them. I think our league would take the line from Nathalia to McCoy's Bridge.

466. What about this proposal from Mooroopna to St. Germain's?—That would answer us too.
 467. But by itself?—I believe it would.
 468. A better road?—Yes, I believe it would suit far better.
 469. Better for everybody?—Yes, by McCoy's Bridge.
 470. And then they would want a line afterwards to get to Nathalia?—That would be an after consideration, but I do not know that we would need it.
 471. Where would it go to subsequently?—At some future date, to Nathalia.
 472. Is there anything else?—There is a saw-mill not very far off that line to Kyabram, distant fifteen miles to Mooroopna.
 473. Would not this be a competitive line, and take the traffic off the existing line?—Yes, I suppose it would.

The witness withdrew.

Henry Julius Laphorne, sworn and examined.

474. *By the Chairman.*—Where do you reside?—At Kotupna, near McCoy's Bridge.
 475. Which line are you in favour of?—Kotupna to Nathalia.
 476. What do you think about this other line?—Providing we get the Mooroopna line we would be satisfied.
 477. Do you agree with the previous witnesses, or do you want to supplement their evidence?—I think if we have that line across from Kotupna to Nathalia it would act as a link line; it would be cheaper and suit more than any other proposal. The distance is twenty miles, the first ten miles is level country, and the crossing to McCoy's Bridge was said to be the best within twenty miles. After you get over the river the line is along the highest country in the locality. If the line were made lower down it is patent the difficulties would be much greater, as the flood waters would be augmented by the overflow of the Goulburn River. It would become a link between the various railway systems. Although the country may not be able to pay the interest, the advantages of this cross-line would be such as to compensate for that. With reference to the differential rate, I do not think we would be adverse to that if it were general. I do not think it is fair we should have to pay now, especially while the people near the seaboard have got lines.
 478. What about the Tongala proposal?—I do not approve of that, because I think it would be much more expensive to make the line lower down.
 479. If Tongala is selected, you will not like it?—No.
 480. I understand the one from Mooroopna on to St. Germain's would be as good as any of them?—Yes, I think the station at McCoy's will serve people five or six miles on this side of Nathalia, and five or six on the other side; my contention is that the line from Kyabram to McCoy's Bridge would suit as well, and it would be cheaper still—it is only half the mileage.
 481. It is about ten miles; if that were made it would suit all requirements at present?—Yes, we contend for a cross-line to connect the two systems. If Parliament would make a spur to stop at McCoy's Bridge of course that would do; but if not we think we have a good case for a connecting link.
 482. Your idea is that the construction of ten miles at present would help you over the bridge?—Yes, that is my view.

The witness withdrew.

Richard McCoy, sworn and examined.

483. *By the Chairman.*—Is this bridge we have been speaking of called after you?—I am one of the same family.
 484. What have you to tell us?—I am in favour of this proposed line from Kyabram to Nathalia.
 485. Does this line go through your land?—No, it is three miles away.
 486. Do you agree with the previous witness's evidence, or do you wish to alter it in any way?—I think the last witness who said that the proposed line from Kyabram to McCoy's Bridge would suit us is correct.
 487. Are the Nathalia people desirous of keeping the traffic?—I cannot say.
 488. Will anybody hold a different opinion to you?—Of course.
 489. You know the whole district?—Yes.
 490. What is the best line from a public point of view, the assistance to the population in improving the land, and generally the most economical in construction, and making the most revenue to the State?—There is one thing, in running it right across, there would be the connexion of the two lines.
 491. Quality of soil, convenience to market, and all that?—Yes.
 492. Have you adopted the increased value evidence?—Yes.
 493. Do you fall in with the views about the betterment tax of the differential rates?—I think the people of the district would be very glad to do that.
 494. Which do you prefer?—How far does that deal with people away from the line?
 495. It takes the average increase on the area?—Suppose you are five miles away from the line?
 496. It is not so much then, but what do you do in the shire council; does the valuer value the property all alike?—According to improvements.
 497. But leaving that out of the question, nearness to a railway station, and the quality of the land is concerned?—He might take into consideration the quality of the land.
 498. Not nearness to market?—I do not think so.
 499. Is there anything else?—There is a lot of grazing carried on through this district.
 500. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—You agree to a differential rate?—Yes.

The witness withdrew.

Adjourned.

(At Tongala.)

FRIDAY, 8TH MAY, 1891.

Members present :

The Hon. T. BENT, in the Chair ;	
The Hon. J. Buchanan,	Mr. Groom,
The Hon. D. Melville.	Mr. McIntyre,
	The Hon. A. L. Tucker,
	The Hon. J. Woods.

NATHALIA TO TONGALA AND KYABRAM.

Ambrose Peach, sworn and examined.

501. *By the Chairman.*—What are you ?—A farmer, residing in Moira.

502. Which line do you favour ?—Nathalia to Tongala. The reason is that it is the most central, and will be more likely to pay as it passes through good country, as far as I know, all the way. If the stations are made in the proper places it will suit nearly every one in the district. There is another thing, it will be a connecting link between two existing railways, and would be a short distance for the Government to take their rolling-stock across. It will benefit Echuca and Hay, the up-country town, as far as Sandhurst by bringing those towns into touch with us. We have bad roads to travel, and the railway will be the only thing of any benefit to us to take our grain to market. We can get 2d. a bushel more by bringing it here than by taking it to Nathalia.

The witness withdrew.

Hamilton Elrington, sworn and examined.

503. *By the Chairman.*—What are you ?—Farmer and contractor.

504. Where do you reside ?—At Narioka.

505. How far from Tongala ?—Sixteen miles.

506. What area have you ?—Five hundred and thirty-seven acres.

507. Does any portion of this line go near your land ?—Yes, within half-a-mile.

508. How near are you to an existing station ?—Thirteen and a half miles. With reference to the evidence given last night, I might say that I took round a petition in favour of a line from Nathalia to Tongala *via* Picola.

509. We have not that before us at all ?—It is a pretty generally conceded idea that the people of Picola are entitled to accommodation in the way of a railway, and I took round this petition, and it was extensively signed, and signed by some of the gentlemen who gave evidence on the line to Barmah.

510. At present the lines submitted to us are Nathalia to Barmah *via* Picola, Nathalia to Tongala, and Nathalia to Kyabram. From Picola where would you go to ?—Make a detour.

511. To touch the southern portion of the Picola territory ?—Yes.

512. Further west ?—Yes.

513. Where would it cross ?—It crosses the three-chain road at Fogarty's selection. It would put a large district in connexion with the railway. I advocate the construction of the line to Tongala as being nearer to Echuca, saving the distance to run down the Tatura line to Kyabram. We claim that Echuca is our best market at the present time for the sale of our wheat. We also claim it is the best market we can possibly have, and we are shut out from it now owing to the badness of the roads. Being a large port, a tremendous amount of produce is sent away to New South Wales, and it would open up a magnificent market for us by sending oats and chaff to Echuca. We keep the centre of the line with this detour, a radius of six miles, that would bring everybody within five or six miles of the line; in fact the whole of the Goulburn Valley could utilize this line.

514. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—You point out that the whole value of the construction of this line is to run the things on the New South Wales lines ?—To Sandhurst as well.

The witness withdrew.

Harry Broom, sworn and examined.

515. *By the Chairman.*—What are you ?—I am a farmer.

516. Where do you reside ?—My land is partially in Kotupna, and partially in Narioka; my house is in Kotupna. The geodetic goes through my land.

517. Which line are you favouring ?—The line from Nathalia to Tongala. I have been fifteen miles from a railway for 27 years.

518. What is your nearest station ?—I am fifteen miles from Tongala and fifteen miles from Nathalia. I sent all my grain to Nathalia this year. I am greatly handicapped owing to the distance I am from a railway, and it takes one-ninth of my produce to get the whole of it to a railway station. That is about 3d. a bushel, and unless there are facilities to get my grain to the railway my offspring will have to leave the place. I am scry you did not drive through the proposed route on the eastern side from Nathalia to Tongala, as you then could see the land on the east of the Goulburn is second to none in the Goulburn Valley district. I know every inch of the country.

519. Which way do you think we ought to have gone ?—You ought to have travelled from Nathalia to Tongala, and crossed the Goulburn punt.

520. Then we would not have seen the other route at all?—No, but if you see one route you ought to see the other.

521. You heard the evidence last night?—Yes.

522. Now it is for you to show the other side?—We will have 10 acres under cultivation if the railway is constructed where we have one now. This tract of country from Nathalia to Tongala, on the east side of the Goulburn, is far superior to the track you came this morning.

523. Is it true we were shown the two points at Wyuna where the lines crossed?—There is no doubt the estimate for many things for the line is excessive. With reference to fencing and earthworks, I know, from practical knowledge, that the estimate is too high. The fencing estimate is £130 a mile, and we would put it up for £45. I put up a fence for £33, and I put down the additional amount for cartage. The earthworks I put down at 1s. 5d. a yard. I say it can be done for one-third or less.

524. What are your qualifications to enable you to say that?—I have been a shire councillor for years.

525. Are you now?—No, they have a better man to take my place.

526. Are you an engineer?—No; but I know the locality, and also the price of contracts let in the shire of Echuca. This line will pass within two miles of Mr. O'Shannassy's property, and he is the man who has spent so much money in irrigation. He has 600 acres under cultivation. Last year he had a special train with machinery alone, and this is all the better for this line. His property is within two miles of this route.

527. What area has he?—About 5,000 acres.

528. *By Mr. Woods.*—On the Victorian side of the river?—Yes. We are prepared to meet the Government with respect to the price of land. I would give the land myself.

529. Does the line go through your property?—Yes.

530. Where?—In the parishes of Narioka and Kotupua. We are prepared to meet the Government in every way; we think we are bound to do everything we can.

531. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—A differential rate for instance?—Yes.

532. *By Mr. Woods.*—And a betterment tax on the Wyuna run?—I cannot answer that.

The witness withdrew.

George Bishop, sworn and examined.

533. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—A land-owner.

534. What representative capacity are you in this morning?—I am representing the Kyabram Railway League.

535. Were you at Nathalia last night when the Committee were taking evidence?—Yes. On commercial principles neither of these Tongala lines will pay, for this reason, that between Nathalia and the bridge whichever route you take there is too much flooded country; if you take the lower route, or the Tongala route, there are twelve or fourteen miles of flooded country. There are five or six bridges between Nathalia and McCoy's Bridge, and it will cost more money than the revenue will pay the interest of. I say either make a line from Mooroopna or from Kyabram, so long as you tap all that agricultural country from Mooroopna right down—say you get six miles from Mooroopna.

536. We have a proposed line from Mooroopna to St. Germain's?—I would support a spur line from Kyabram to McCoy's Bridge for this reason, that on either side on the eastern side it would serve half-way between Mooroopna and Echuca. Below that there is not so much cultivation as would pay.

537. I understand you support a line from Kyabram to McCoy's Bridge?—Yes.

538. You know the country between Mooroopna and St. Germain's?—Yes.

539. You put that line aside?—Yes, because the other would serve more people.

The witness withdrew.

Neil McNair, sworn and examined.

540. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—A farmer, residing at Wyuna.

541. How far are you from an existing station?—Eleven miles.

542. Do you come here with your produce?—No, we generally send our grain to Echuca. We advocate a line through there because we reckon to send our produce there far better, because when the roads are bad it costs more to send than the grain is worth. There are 100 acres of vineyards within five miles of the Tongala and Kyabram lines in Wyuna parish.

543. You do not agree with the last witness?—As far as Mr. Bishop's remarks are concerned about the flooded country, I suppose you will see the engineers report about it. Mr. Finlay's manager of the Wyuna estate was supposed to be here, and he sent in this statement of what he pays to the Government yearly for carriage—[*producing a paper*].

544. Where does this stuff come to?—He has been sending some to Tongala, I suppose. The Chairman said he could not accept the paper as the witness could not swear to it.

545. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—How much land is under grain on this Wyuna estate?—One hundred and sixty acres this year.

546. What does he do with his grain?—I believe they send some of it away.

547. The carriage last year is said to be £5 8s.—that is very small?—Yes.

The witness withdrew.

Thomas Young, sworn and examined.

548. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—A farmer.

549. Where do you reside?—My land is in Moira and Kotupua.

550. How far are you from an existing railway station?—About fifteen miles; about mid-way between Tongala and Nathalia, and bad roads both ways.

551. Where do you go to now?—To Echuca.

552. Would the line to Barmah help you?—No.

553. Nor the line to St. Germain's?—Not at all. The line goes through my property.
554. How can you be fifteen miles each way?—I have to go round about to the punt.
555. We were told the punt was the shortest route?—I have to travel round about with a heavy load to get to Echuca.
556. What is the nearest station you could get?—Nowhere under fifteen miles.
557. Which survey goes through your property?—The Tongala to Nathalia line.
558. How far are you from a proposed station?—I do not know where a proposed station is.
559. What is the size of your holding?—One hundred and sixty-seven acres.
560. What are you using it for?—For grazing, and a small amount of cultivation; but with a railway I would go in for a vineyard and wheat-growing. The line from Tongala to Nathalia is a good, high, and dry route right through; there is little or no flooded country on the route at all. When the flood was high we could get round from Tongala to Nathalia, while the mailman had to swim his horses from Nathalia to Kotupna. There are many miles of that line flooded, but our line is on high and dry ground. The only expense on the line is the bridge on the Goulburn. Just round my own immediate neighbourhood I took the trouble to go round and collect statistics. We have 18,851 acres available for cultivation, and 3,894 under cultivation, only yielding 11,914 bags of grain. You will see the difference between the land available for cultivation and the amount under cultivation. There are 359 horses, 1,507 cattle, 10,000 sheep, 390 pigs, and 87 acres of vineyard which produce 15 tons of table grapes to be sent to Melbourne. If we had railway facilities we could produce fruit with any district in the colony. I intended to put in 15 or 20 acres of vines myself, but having to cart the fruit over rough roads it hardly pays one. Off this 87 acres of vines 10,000 gallons of wine has been made, and there is the fruit to add to that.
561. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Which of those lines do you think, from your knowledge of the country, should be the least expensive to make?—The Nathalia to Tongala.
562. That is estimated to cost £7,426, and Nathalia to Kyabram £6,499 per mile?—If we got a deviation of the existing survey there would be a great expense saved.

The witness withdrew.

Hamilton Elvington, further examined.

563. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—You want to say something about the redgum?—I heard Mr. Nicholas last night make a statement about the durability of the redgum forest where he is working, and as to the amount of timber he would send by rail. I have been engaged these last 28 years in that business myself, and his statements were totally at variance with facts.
564. Was the redgum not as good a timber as he described?—There is not a fifth of the quantity in the forest.
565. Where is your forest?—On the New South Wales side.
566. *By the Chairman.*—Do you say this forest you heard the forester and Mr. Nicholas speak of is now nearly worked out?—Yes it is. I do not mean to say that it will not recuperate itself in time; but the statement they made of, the amount of timber available on every acre was entirely wrong, and at variance with facts.
567. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Then that man is putting down a tramway in the face of the fact there is no timber there?—That tramway comes out half-a-mile towards Nathalia and stops dead.
568. The man swore he was within a mile of that house we were at yesterday?—It is only half-a-mile from that mill.
569. *By Mr. Woods.*—You say you will get the timber on the New South Wales side?—Yes.
570. Will they allow you to take it there?—The company I represent pay 12s. 6d. a 1,000 feet for royalty, and we cart it a long distance on the New South Wales side. We would not do that if there was timber in Victoria.
571. You do not get it for nothing?—No; we pay 1s. 6d. a hundred.
572. *By the Chairman.*—The forester told us 1s. a hundred?—I think he made a mistake. When you buy an area in New South Wales you pay 1s. 6d. a hundred for it.
573. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—That makes it 15s. per 1,000 feet instead of 10s.?—Yes; but when you take it under special area you pay 10s. for each of your men, and I then get it for 1s. 3d. a hundred, and sometimes under, while we pay nothing for the men felling the timber.
574. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—What is the price of sleepers. In Mr. Nicholas's evidence he said 3s. each, and deliver them along the line—is that right?—No, I should say not; but that it was totally inadequate.
575. Do you know anything of the bluegum?—I could tell a bluegum leaf if I saw it.
576. Is that wood good for sleepers?—The true bluegum is.
577. What is the difference between that and the other wood for sleepers?—My experience has been in Bullarook, and I have tested bluegum as far as coach building and work of that description goes, and I say it is a very hard and durable timber.

The witness withdrew.

George Bishop, further examined.

578. *The Witness.*—Some of these lines were surveyed in a boat, it was said last night, and so they were; it is an absolute fact.
579. *By the Chairman.*—Which line was surveyed in a boat?—Both lines; the Kotupna and the direct route from Nathalia to Kyabram. The route of this other line was followed, and they traced the pegs something above 10 feet long; there were three men in a boat. The water ran from 10 inches to 12 feet deep.

The witness withdrew.

George Flack, sworn and examined.

580. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—I am Mr. Finlay's bookkeeper. I wish to corroborate Mr. Finlay's figures which were produced about the railway freights.
581. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Did you take these figures out of his books?—Yes.
582. This item of £5 8s. for the carriage of grain, is that all you send away per year?—[*No answer.*]
583. What is the area of the Wynna estate?—Twenty-five thousand five hundred acres.
- 583A. All in fee simple?—Yes.
584. We have been told, and it also appears on a printed paper circulated, that the area is 30,000 acres; is that wrong?—Yes.
585. How far does the railway travel through it?—Two to three miles; it goes through the corner.
586. What is the length of the estate from end to end?—Eight miles.
587. That is more than a third of the whole length of the route from here to Nathalia?—Yes.
588. The total cost of the line is estimated at £160,000, and you are going to give the railway £300 a year out of that?—[*No answer.*]
589. *By the Chairman.*—How long have you been there?—Nine months.

The witness withdrew.

Stephen Harris, sworn and examined.

590. *By the Chairman.*—Where do you reside?—In Kyabram; I have obtained the certificate for the best managed farm.
591. How far are you from an existing station?—As far as I am concerned it does not trouble me much, I am only four and a half miles out.
592. What do you wish to tell us?—I think the line would be best from Nathalia direct to Kyabram. Just a mile and a half behind where we turned off the farms commenced and go right through to Kyabram.
593. From there to Kyabram, how far is it?—About eight miles.
594. You will admit that from Nathalia to that point we saw all we could see?—I was not with you.
595. We were told we must come to McCoy's Bridge, could we come any other way; was there a better route we could have come?—I think you came the best road.
596. The only part we did not see was the eight miles from the Wynna estate to Kyabram?—Of course the Committee were with the big fellows, and they had their say.
597. What do you mean; what did the "big fellows" say?—Mr. Simmie said when we stopped there, "That is too low."
598. I will defy you to say that Mr. Simmie ever spoke to me?—I was alongside of Mr. Simmie when he said, "This is too low, this won't do, to the left of us it is nice and high dry ground."
599. Mr. Simmie did not say anything to me of one sort or another?—He said that.
600. You gave us the impression from what you said that some big man was warping our opinions?—[*No answer.*]
601. *By Mr. Woods.*—Did anybody else hear it?—I could not say.
602. *By the Chairman.*—What do you wish to indicate or wish the public to believe in connexion with this matter. There is no doubt the object of your remark was to discredit us?—I beg your pardon.
603. Whatever object had you in view in saying that?—I had nothing in view; I will withdraw it. The suggestion was really thrown out.
604. I say no man can influence this Committee, and we want to go upon evidence only. Is there anything you can tell us about this line?—I do not propose to go into those things in any shape or form. I advocate the line from Nathalia to Kyabram. I think it would be the cheapest and best.
605. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—I was the only one of the Committee who was with Mr. Simmie, and could have heard that remark, and I did not hear it. At what part of the road did this occur?—We stopped at the first peg, and he merely shook his head and said, "This won't do."
606. I cannot remember at any part of the road Mr. Simmie describing the country to us at any part, and we had no advice from Mr. Simmie?—[*No answer.*]
607. *By the Chairman.*—Supposing you had to write a report to-morrow to Parliament as to these lines, what would you say?—That takes a good deal of consideration; I never was educated.
608. Do you think you have heard anything this morning that would justify the Committee in making this line?—No. As far as regards myself I could not give any report at all.
609. Where do you reside?—In Kyabram.
610. How far from an existing station?—Four miles and a half.
611. You do not want a station at all?—No, I am quite near enough.
612. Do you know what traffic is likely to be received?—No.
613. No matter whether the ground is flat or high you think we would be flats to make it?—Yes, if it was made on low ground.
614. Do you know anything about the surveys being made in boats?—They went over in a boat, the people said.
615. Can you give any evidence that would justify us in reporting to Parliament in favour of making the line?—I believe it would pay; that is the route which comes across McCoy's Bridge from Kyabram.
616. You would not touch the Tongala line at all?—No.
617. Do you think your evidence would justify any line at all?—I think it would pay; I have not gone into figures.
618. Have you ever been a shire councillor?—No.
619. Do you think we might make the line on speculation?—Most things are done on speculation in this country.

The witness withdrew.

Adjourned to Echuca.

(At Echuca.)

FRIDAY, 8TH MAY, 1891.

Members present:

The Hon. T. BENT, in the Chair;	
The Hon. J. Buchanan,	Mr. Groom,
The Hon. D. Melville.	Mr. McIntyre,
	The Hon. A. L. Tucker,
	The Hon. J. Woods.

David Stratton, sworn and examined.

620. *By the Chairman.*—What do you wish to tell the Committee with regard to the Tongala and Nathalia route—that is the route you are in favor of?—Yes; it might be as well if I just said a few words so as to let you understand our position. The railway leagues have written to the Echuca league asking if we would give them our support. The people were always doing business with us, and we naturally agreed to do what we could in support of the line. I am managing director of a large milling company in Echuca, and I have large business relations with the farmers and know their requirements pretty well, and I can say that the line as proposed from Nathalia to Tongala would offer a great convenience to the people living along the proposed route. It is hardly possible to cart their grain in the winter, and they have to keep it till the spring to cart, and they are in consequence unable to participate in the rises that take place. I believe a line running through this district would pay the interest if not more. As an instance of the quantity of wheat grown in the neighbourhood for the past two months of this year, from 1st January to the 28th February, we brought from Tongala and Nathalia alone 21,600 bags, and from Barmah 5,150 bags. I merely mention this is an indication of the large amount of grain there. A large quantity also goes to Melbourne in addition. We believe here, in Echuca, that if the line were constructed there would be a very large increase of traffic. A special leaves Toolamba for Echuca each week, and 40 passengers come to Echuca. There is also the stock and dairying produce to be considered, and these people want facilities. The shire councils cannot make their roads, and it is only at one time they can get to market. It is a very fertile spot, one of the most fertile in the Goulburn Valley. Taking the route in question, I think the Committee would be perfectly justified in recommending the line to the Government. There was one point not elicited at Tongala, and that was that the farmers said they were quite willing to guarantee any loss to the Government till the line paid. It shows that the farmers do not want a line made that will bring a loss to the State.

621. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—We had no evidence of that fact this morning?—This was stated by the witnesses afterwards, and that is correct.

622. Could you swear if the Committee recommended this line that any loss would be paid by the people benefited by the railway?—I can swear this man told me this. I would suggest that a document should be drawn up and sent to them to sign; I will communicate with them to that effect.

623. *By Mr. Woods.*—Does the line go through any proposed irrigation area?—There is Mr. O'Shannassy's land.

624. Through the State irrigation works?—I do not think so; there are proposed works coming down there between Kyabram and Tongala.

625. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—If this area is within the irrigation area, I think Mr. Woods wishes to point out that the land is already mortgaged?—No, that is not so; that is on this side of the Goulburn where that happens. There is another point that I wish to mention, that Mr. Grey, the shire engineer, was to be present, but he is unavoidably absent. He gave evidence before the No. 2 Sectional Committee, and showed the estimates of the Government were too high. If you had the true estimate of the cost of the earthworks, reducing the cost of the line 30 or 40 per cent., it would have great weight. I would wish you to refer to Mr. Grey's evidence given previously. He said the works on the line cost 100 per cent. more than the shire works did.

626. More than 100 per cent.?—Yes, I believe so. If those high estimates are made it is misleading to the Committee. There is another point I wish to draw attention to, and that is the number of people coming to Echuca with their produce. It is a good market, but you will see if we make the line for the people to run to Echuca that would not serve the Victorian Railways, but it would be better to go a longer distance. If that has taken hold of your minds I would like to disabuse your minds on that subject. The flour-milling capacity of Echuca is something over 1,000 bags a day, and so you must admit that Echuca would use a very infinitesimal quantity of that wheat, and it would have to be sent away. We send to Western Port, Beechworth, Yackandandah, Gippsland, western, south-western, and eastern portions of the colony, and all over the colony. There would be a benefit gained by using the rail into Echuca, and then afterwards over the other lines. This, therefore, would not be a short railway only for Echuca, but would add to the revenue of the Victorian Railways.

627. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—£6,700 is the interest on the money to be expended on this line. You have not produced any evidence before us on that point. Supposing it costs £159,000, tell us, as a business man, would you recommend this Committee to expend such a sum of money for the purpose indicated by you?—I will answer in this way, it is notorious that evidence has been adduced, at places where the Committee have gone, that the estimates are altogether too high.

628. Do you think, as a business man, in asking this Committee to spend this sum of money on that railway, you are doing right?—The best answer to that is that the men on that line are willing to guarantee that they will make up any loss sustained by the working of the line.

629. I ask you as our witness if, in your judgment, this enormous sum of money should be recommended by the Committee to be expended?—I do not say the Committee should recommend a line where there was a certainty of loss accruing, but if these men take the whole responsibility of that loss, what is it to the Committee, if the Government are guaranteed against loss.

630. I ask you again, considering the enormous sum of money involved, do you come here to justify that expenditure?—I do not assume this is built for a profit—

631. *By the Chairman.*—What is the answer, yes or no, to this question about the cost?—As a business man, I should recommend—

632. On that £160,000 would you advise it?—I fail to see the object of the question as put in that way.

633. If it were true, and there were no guarantee, would you do it. Yes or no?—I could not, from my own previous knowledge, say that the traffic would warrant an expenditure of such a large amount.

634. Would you, as managing director of a milling company, advise them in a case of this kind to do such a thing as that?—I could not advise a private company in that way.

635. Do you think it would pay on the sum stated?—I do not think it would pay immediately.

636. I will take your answer as “no”?—It is impossible for a man to give an answer one way or another. If the estimate is £159,000, you have a larger capital to pay on.

637. Supposing it were put in that bald way, do you think from a traffic point of view it would pay?—I do not think it would pay on £7,000 a mile.

638. The answer is “no” at that money?—Yes.

639. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Knowing the country and traffic, some 21,000 bags of wheat, which would be produced, what is the amount of money you would recommend the Committee, as a business man, to lay out on such a line as this?—I think, if you could get a line built for £3,500 a mile, it would pay you in the very immediate future.

640. Does this line pass through that large property, the Wyuna estate?—It skirts it, I believe.

641. How many acres?—I heard it was 25,000.

642. Would it improve it in value?—Yes.

643. To what extent?—From £1 to £1 10s. an acre.

644. In what aspect do you regard these large estates; do you think they should contribute towards the construction?—I do not know that you should single out one estate. I believe if the railway were to pass in close proximity to these large estates that it should increase the value of the land, and the proprietors would be willing to sell it, and we would have farms where there are squatters' runs.

645. Take £40,000 or £50,000 increase, do you think the State is justified in going into that speculation without compelling these parties to do something?—I believe the land within a certain radius of the line ought to contribute something towards the construction of the line.

646. You would be therefore in favour of a betterment tax?—I would certainly favour the land in proximity to the line to be on a sliding scale, the land nearest to the line to pay the most, the land furthest away the least.

647. How is it there is not more cultivation on this line from Tongala to Echuca, is that increasing or decreasing; how much produce has come from that locality for the last three or four years?—I think there is as much under cultivation now as then.

648. The same quantity as three years ago?—I should say, from general observation, we have as much.

649. Have you as much now as you had three years ago from that locality?—Taking the crops all round, I think there is as much under cultivation as there was three years ago.

650. Are you getting as much wheat from the Tongala district as you did four years ago; you have indicated it comes from Barmah by drays?—No, by steamer; the river was unusually high.

651. What would it cost the Kyabram people to bring it from Tongala?—Three shillings a ton.

652. But their cartage to Tongala, what would it cost?—According to the distance from the station, from 6d. up to 9d. and 1s. a bag.

653. What from Barmah?—In buying wheat there we have our own steamer, about 6s. the ton, 8d. the bag.

654. Has the railway from Tongala to Echuca brought about more cultivation along the line; if so, how much?—This country was settled before the line was made, about the same time as it is now. The farmers cultivate about the same every year. There is no new country opened up, and they have not such long distances to bring their wheat, so they would not be similarly situated as those people in the Goulburn Valley were, they cannot get that.

655. How is it that you have not had a development on this line of the production?—They have greater facilities for going to market than along this line here, but if a man is in a place where he has bad roads he will not cultivate a large area.

656. This will occur on the line you are advocating; what about your production, about the increased cultivation?—I say these people have greater difficulties in getting to market than the people on the Tongala line should. The line is much superior there than between here and Tongala. There is a good deal of squatting property between here and Tongala. The land cannot be opened up till it is disposed of. It is a well known fact that cultivation follows railways.

657. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—Twenty thousand six hundred bags, what is the tonnage of that?—Nine bags to the ton, and 3s. a ton.

658. From where?—Kyabram or Tongala—3,000 tons in round numbers.

659. Four hundred and fifty pounds is paid for freight per year?—No; two months.

660. Your passenger traffic is only 40?—That is only one train.

661. Once a week?—Yes, but there are two ordinary trains every day.

662. Do you ever see any passengers in them?—There is a very large passenger traffic.

663. Will it be increased?—I cannot say.

664. How many passengers will you have in a week?—I cannot give that.

665. Do you not get all your grain in in that two months?—No.

666. Would you have six times that in the year?—Our traffic last year was 16,000.

667. You are speaking of the firm?—Yes.

668. What is the average all the year round?—I cannot tell that. We had four trucks yesterday, and then we go as far as Maryborough, Mooroopna, Shepparton, and Numurkah, and all along the line where there are stations. If I could get into this Goulburn Valley line I would not have to go so far afield.

669. It does not come from these other places at present. Do they not cart it to Tatura?—You lose the carriage that would be gained if a railway were constructed. You would get the whole of that.
670. Where is that carted to?—To Nathalia and Tongala or Echuca.
671. Say Tongala. If it is carted there, and we construct this connexion, it should not alter that traffic in the least?—You would get an increased traffic from their homes.
672. Only a few miles out, at 1d. a ton per mile. Can you show us how that would pay?—The price is on the sliding scale, according to the distances.
673. *By the Chairman.*—Less than 1d.?—No, more; 1½d. the ton a mile for short distances.
674. Is the average less or more?—From Tongala to Echuca is sixteen miles, and the freight is 3s.—nearly 2½d. a mile.
675. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Is that not the minimum you are going on?—From Kyabram, 23 miles, they charge the sum you would have to take a ton 20 miles for, 3s., so that is nearly double what you put down.
676. If 50 miles, what then?—Considerably more.
677. It is about 2d. a mile, according to you?—If it were a long distance it would be about 1d. perhaps.
678. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—We are talking of a short journey. You intersect the traffic from Nathalia. What would it cost you to bring the proposed goods to Echuca to mill if the line were made to-morrow?—From 3s. 6d. to 4s.
679. About 38 miles in round numbers?—That is, 28 miles, 3s. 6d.; 56 miles, 6s. 6d. It would be about 5s. to Nathalia across the direct route that way.
680. I presume you are one of the biggest buyers here?—Yes.
681. You could tell us what there would be in the way of carriage from here to Tongala?—Yes. That would not be a fair distance, for we bring our stuff from a distance beyond Tongala.
682. *By Mr. Woods.*—Will you show whether you are dealing with a fresh quantity or the existing quantity?—With both.
683. The quantity of production?—No; we would be taking a lot of stuff we do not take now.
684. Where does it go now?—To Nathalia.
685. You cannot show the Committee that the bulk of the produce will be increased except by prediction?—You have heard the farmers give evidence to-day.
686. The same predictions were hazarded on the Toolamba to Echuca line?—I cannot say.
687. Have they been carried out by that line?—All I can say is that that is one of the paying lines of the colony, and inferentially the predictions have been carried out.
688. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—How do you know that it is a paying line?—I found that the Toolamba to Echuca was not included in the non-paying lines, and if that line is paying, it does not pass through better country, and some of it passes through worse country than this proposed line.
689. *By Mr. Groom.*—Take this line from Echuca to Toolamba, would you be surprised to learn that the total earnings were only £11,400 for the year ending June, an average of about £229 a mile. Therefore, for that line to have paid, it should have cost only £2,290 a mile, and therefore it must be a losing one?—That was not on the list.
690. What prospect is there of this paying?—If the line were made on cheap principles, they would be content with a train running at fifteen or sixteen miles an hour.
691. *By Mr. Woods.*—What do you think is the furthest distance that producers ought to be supposed to cart their produce to a line?—Eight miles.
692. What do you think of those poor fellows who have 25 miles to cart?—There are some on the west side here who cart 30 miles.
693. Do you think it would be wisdom for Parliament to make a complete network of lines in this neighbourhood, make one place complete and another place with an average of 25 miles?—There are places where one man can cart 25 miles better than another can cart ten miles.
694. Your roads are good here; it appears here that you are twelve and a half miles from a line, between two lines?—That is hardly a fair way of taking it; they have to come 20 miles in this district, and it is a very difficult country to get out of.
695. Do you know what is about the load an engine takes to Sandhurst?—I should think from eighteen to twenty trucks, the longest trains I have seen run from here to Sandhurst.
696. Supposing they take 25, how many trains of that description (because the same levels would obtain) would it take to exhaust all the produce you can gather in that district in twelve months?—If you put the question in that way, I do not think you would construct a line in any part of the colony.
697. Would the traffic require 25 trucks a week—one train—what do you think?—Some months in the year that would not be sufficient, but in the other months there would be nothing in the way of trucking.
698. Take an average?—That is hardly a fair way of putting it. I want to calculate the area and amount under cultivation, the yield per acre, and so on.
699. Could you load more than 25 trucks a week now?—The people in the neighbourhood could prove that, and give quantity of ground under cultivation, and the amount per acre, and the estimate of the amount of stuff to be carried away.
700. You do not know?—I cannot tell you.
701. Are you aware that the working expenses are the first charge on a railway?—Yes.
702. Do you know what the average charge for that is now on the railways?—I dare say they average more than they ought to.
703. Supposing it were 68 per cent., how much would be left for paying for the lines?—I am certainly of opinion that the expenses on this line would be less than on the other lines. We would not want any large stations or platforms or sheds. The working expenses could be reduced.
704. Assuming the working expenses were cut down to the lowest point consistent with efficiency, leaving you say with 60 per cent. to take out of your gross revenue, and 40 per cent. to go to the interest on £7,000 a mile, how far would this balance of 40 per cent. go to pay interest on the money?—I would estimate that instead of taking off 68 per cent. you ought to take off 50 per cent., and it would be nearer to the mark.
705. Do you speak with authority?—It is patent to any one.

706. Do you know any line in the world, or have you ever heard of one, that is worked for 18 per cent. of the gross takings on that particular line?—When I say 50 per cent., it leaves 34 per cent.

707. It leaves 18 per cent.?—I meant to take off one-half of the 68 per cent.

708. Where is there one working at 34 per cent.?—I know of none; I believe the country lines could be worked on that.

709. *By the Chairman.*—You say an increase of 20s. to 30s. the acre, does that include the whole of that area?—I would say the land adjoining would be increased more than the other; but I think a fair average would be 15s. an acre for five or six miles back.

710. As to this guarantee, would you be justified in saying Mr. Finlay, of the Wyuna estate, would give a guarantee?—I cannot say; but the farmers would.

711. Do you think Tongala property will be increased in value?—The land will not.

712. The property?—I dare say it would increase its value.

713. Would Echuca property increase in value?—It would be an advantage to retain the business here; if it is diverted it would do an injury to Echuca.

714. Supposing it is done, it would not increase the value of property?—It must; it would prevent the property from being depreciated.

715. If it still remained as at present, would that be an increase?—I do not know that you could put it that way. If the trade were diverted it might be reduced.

716. Would it be a fair thing to put the portion of this betterment tax upon Echuca property?—I do not think it would be fair to Echuca.

717. Because a depreciation would not occur?—I do not think it would be a fair way.

718. As to grain, I did not understand the answer to Mr. McIntyre; I understood the traffic was 450 tons for the two months?—Yes; for those two stations.

719. What would the average be for the remaining ten months approximately?—I will ascertain the exact amount for last year before you rise.

720. Would there be a considerable reduction in the other months of the year?—A considerable reduction.

721. You said some of this was brought from Barmah by steamer. Is the river generally up sufficiently high to take away any produce that may be raised, such as timber on Barmah Island, or wheat about there?—It is not navigable at the time of the year when the wheat is available. This was an exceptional year; I do not remember the river so high for ten years. To provide against that, I have built a large store at Barmah to store wheat.

722. If the line were made to Picola instead of Barmah, would it meet the case?—I do not know the country about Barmah; I know it five miles from the river.

723. What about the forest about there, how do they get the timber out now?—The district I travelled was all under agriculture.

724. How many months in the year is the river navigable to Barmah?—About seven or eight months.

725. Have you any doubt about that?—Of course it varies with the seasons, some years the time is shorter.

726. You do not think the people about Barmah are suffering much for a railway, seeing they have the river communication?—I saw the necessity for erecting a store and have done so, and I can leave the wheat there until the river is up.

727. Are you able to give as much at Barmah as at Nathalia?—I take 1d. a bushel off.

728. It would only mean 1d. if they have the railway?—One penny or 1½d.

729. It would cost more than that by rail to Barmah?—Of course it would.

730. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—You would still be a competitor by water?—No; if the railway were there I do not think I should be.

731. *By Mr. McIntyre.*—What is the distance by water to Echuca?—About 30 miles, I should think.

732. Do you mean to say that would not be a competing power with the railway?—I do not think we would use the river if there were a railway.

The witness withdrew.

Michael O'Brien, sworn and examined.

733. *By the Chairman.*—You are a storekeeper, at Echuca?—Yes.

734. Do you approve of the previous evidence, or have you anything new to offer?—I have not followed the evidence very closely. I know the district, and most of the settlers, and they are connected very closely with Echuca. In my opinion the railway in the direction mentioned will pay. It is country that can be improved; it is not properly opened up yet, and I think the traffic will increase wonderfully.

735. What would you say about a line from Mooroopna to St. Germain's. What do you think of that in preference to the line from Tongala and Kyabram. Supposing you had a clean piece of paper, and were recommending a line, which would you pick out?—I think the Tongala line ought to pay; it is good country.

736. Better than the others?—I cannot say.

737. Is the land not better on the Mooroopna line, the holdings smaller, and the people more in number?—Yes.

738. Would not the prospect of paying better naturally follow?—Yes. It is a different district. I would not think it would suit the people in the parishes of Barmah, Picola, and Narioka. From my experience those people would wish to keep their commercial relations with Echuca. In the first place they say they get a better price for their produce. At the present time produce is coming in within seven or eight miles of Nathalia.

739. Is there anything else?—No.

The witness withdrew.

Timothy Murphy, sworn and examined.

740. *By the Chairman.*—You are going to speak as to ballast, are you not?—I was not aware I was asked to give evidence on that, but I know where the ballast is. It is on the other side of the Goulburn. There are a number of sandhills, and as far as I know the proposed route to Tongala comes by them.

741. *By Mr. Woods.*—The little islands off the Tongala line?—No; on the other side of the Goulburn, close to the river. I think that sand would be quite good enough for some time as ballast. There are also the gravel pits that the ballast for the Echuca and Tatura line was taken from; it is near Koyuga station.

742. *By the Chairman.*—Do you know anything about sleepers on that line?—I know what sleepers cost in other places not so well situated for getting them as here. There is a large redgum forest up at Barmah. I know what sleepers cost at Rushworth, and I think they should be got from 2s. 9d. to 3s. on the line; to a certain point on the line.

743. Is there anything else?—As regards earthworks, from what I have heard of the Railway Department's estimates, I think they could be done for less. The side cuttings required on the proposed line could be done at a profit at from 6d. to 7d.—6½d. all round.

744. What do you mean about the departmental estimate?—I know the excavations taken on public works by contractors, and carried out by sub-contractors.

745. Where?—In this colony.

746. Does sub-contracting take place?—It does, but it is not perhaps known by that name.

747. You have known it done?—I have known it done.

748. Not lately?—No.

749. How long ago?—Three or four years ago.

The witness withdrew.

Andrew William Henry White, sworn and examined.

750. *By the Chairman.*—What do you wish to tell the Committee?—I was asked to speak as to the value of land. I should estimate it at from £3 10s. to £8 an acre, a mean of £5 10s.

751. Have you valued the Wyuna estate by itself?—I have not.

752. Is the average of that above or below?—About the average, I think. I have gone through all the country on this side of the Goulburn.

753. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Does it extend more than three miles on the other side?—For the whole district, there is very little difference.

754. *By the Chairman.*—Do you consider the making of a railway will increase that land in value?—I should say from £1 to £1 10s. per acre.

755. What would the anticipation of a railway be worth?—It would be worth something.

756. What?—More than the actual result.

757. Take this particular railway after this trip of ours, in anticipation what do you take it at?—Not very much.

758. Very good, I see we understand each other?—Yes. With regard to the two particular lines under consideration, I do not think it has been brought out why the Echuca league supported this Tongala line. The Echuca league was a portion of a railway league for the purpose of getting railway communication from Wodonga to the South Australian border, and this line was supported in preference to the Kyabram line, as being more direct. That is how it was proposed that the line from Nathalia should be carried on further; that was the reason why that line in particular was supported, and that would be an argument against the line from Mooroopna to St. Germain's.

759. Do you think this would increase the value of property in Echuca itself?—I should think it would. Regarding the betterment principle, I think that would be a good thing.

The witness withdrew.

Peter McBride, sworn and examined.

760. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—A builder and timber merchant, in Echuca.

761. What do you wish to tell us?—With reference to the cost of the railway, it is the opinion of a number of people in this district that the amount, as put down, is too high, and it is thought by some that, if the tenders were let for new railways in sections, the people could get the work done more economically than it is at present. There are people who are quite capable of taking any amount of earthworks, culverts, and bridges, or different parts of the construction such as those. There is not the slightest doubt that the large contractors do sublet their work, and a large amount goes into their pockets. The farmers have a lot of stock they would use for the work; they have their sons to help them, and they would be prepared to take the work.

762. The contractors do "sub" them you say, as a matter of fact?—They do.

763. We asked one of the leading engineers last Monday, and he denied it?—I know it has been done.

764. You do know that?—I do.

765. Do you think the Railway Department could get the works done cheaper if, instead of "subbing" under the rose, they had it done openly?—I think it should be allowed.

766. What were you going to tell us about the estimate, and what part of it?—I consider fencing could be done much cheaper.

767. At what per mile?—I think suitable fencing could be erected for £60 a mile.

768. What class of fence?—A top-rail and five wires, and possibly they might do away with the rail and adopt a barbed wire. The earthworks could be done much cheaper. I heard 1s. and 1s. 3d. was put down for that.

769. Do you say which you prefer of the two lines?—I think the Tongala line is preferable.

770. The side cuttings and back cuttings are 1s. 3d. a yard?—That is too high; 10d. a yard is enough.

771. You knock £10,000 off by that at one hit—what else?—I think pretty nearly all the material, leaving out the rails of course, is down too high.

772. These people would be favorable to a low rate of speed, and without fences, on a pinch?—Yes, on a pinch. I am not sure they would like that.

773. What about a light engine travelling at eight miles an hour?—They would accept that.

774. That being the case we could rub off a lot of things?—Yes.

775. They would not want station-masters with brass buttons—just have a man selling tickets in the van, and that sort of thing?—Yes. I know the district well, and it is a very difficult district to travel in.

776. I understood you to say the people of this district just want an iron road, even if you stop your subsidy in some cases to get that iron road?—Yes.

777. *By Mr. Woods.*—Allusion was made by the Chairman about subletting on the line, do you think the fact that the original contractor has done that in a clandestine way causes him to add to the price for which the department pays?—No, I hardly think that.

778. Suppose this line of 22 miles is to be let, and you are a tenderer for the line in one contract, the formation and laying of the line, would you tell us, supposing you got the contract, and subletting were allowed openly, that is recognised by law, whether you would sublet?—I would try and sublet all I possibly could.

779. Supposing it were let in sections, or rather classes of work; for instance, if the earthworks were let in one quantity to one man, and other portions of the work to another man, and the culverts, viaducts, and bridges to a third man, do you think that would cause any confusion among the contractors themselves?—It might possibly a little, but that could be overcome.

780. Supposing you have a cutting and embankment, of course your balance of earthworks, that is what you take out of the cutting, is put into the embankment, and the next contractor has to pass over your section and you over his, or there is an interchange of plans, is that likely to lead to any unpleasantness?—It might in that case, but I think it might be avoided. I would not let them anything shorter than five miles. I do not see why they should overlap except where they join together.

781. If you were acting as an engineer, and had to decide whether the contract was to be let in sections and sublet, what would you do?—Advertise to sublet in sections. There are a number of farmers who would go in together. They would say, "The line is near our doors, we will go in for it," and five or ten miles further on there may be others.

782. You are perfectly satisfied you would prefer to let in four sections of five miles than in one contract?—I would let it in sections.

The witness withdrew.

Walter William Moore, sworn and examined.

783. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—A builder.

784. You have heard the evidence of the various witnesses?—Yes, I agree with what they have said. There is only one thing I would like to say, that is that I know nearly all the farmers that live in that locality, Kotupna, Barmah, Picola, and all round there, and I know the greater portion of them are anxious to get a line that could be constructed as cheaply as possible, and to travel at a low rate of speed. I know that they are under the impression that even stations might be done away with. I heard one remark, that the line from Tatura to Echuca does not pay. You can see that there are stations there that can be done away with; there are gatekeepers cottages, and it is pitiful to see them. After you get a mile out of Adelaide on the Broken Hill line, where I have travelled, you do not see a gatekeeper's cottage.

785. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Do they fence?—Up to Petersburg I think it is fenced; after that I think it is not.

786. *By the Chairman.*—You are finding fault with the management, not with the construction?—I think the railway could be constructed at less than the departmental cost, and be worked at considerably less than the Victorian lines are worked now.

787. *By Mr. Woods.*—You would have platforms to suit the public convenience instead of the present stations, and let the guard sell the tickets?—The same as on the New South Wales railways.

The witness withdrew.

Adjourned to Rochester.

APPENDIX.

STATISTICS OF PROPOSED RAILWAY FROM NATHALIA TO BARMAH.

From Census Returns of 1891.

Population	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1,399
Live Stock—									
Horses	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1,854
Milch Cows	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	960
Other Cattle	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	6,682
Sheep	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	16,863
Pigs	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1,984
Acres occupied	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	71,907

From Agricultural Statistics of 1891.

Number of Cultivated Farms	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	165
Cultivation.			Acres.					Produce.	
Wheat	...	...	12,273	...	...	...	...	214,797 bushels	
Oats	...	...	512	...	...	...	...	14,202 "	
Other Cereals	...	...	4,538	...	...	...	...	82,646 "	
Root Crops	...	...	2	...	...	...	...	4 tons	
Hay	...	...	1,099	...	...	...	...	1,315 "	
Other Tillage	...	...	3,763	...	...	...	...
Total	...	...	<u>22,187</u>						
Estimated Value of—									
Rateable Property—Total Value	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£244,850	
" " Annual Value	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£12,240	
Improvement on Farms	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£55,487	
Farming Machinery and Plant	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£20,119	

Office of the Government Statist,
Melbourne, 10th August, 1891.

H. H. HAYTER,
Government Statist.