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1903.

VICTORIA.

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# REPORT

FROM

## THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS

ON THE QUESTION OF

### RAILWAY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN WESTERN DISTRICTS AND MILDURA VIA HOPETOUN;

TOGETHER WITH

### MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

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*Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 25th November, 1903.*

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MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(Sixth Committee.)

A. W. CRAVEN, Esq., M.L.A., Chairman ;

The Hon. J. H. Abbott, M.L.C.,  
The Hon. G. Graham, M.L.A.,  
W. B. Grose, Esq., M.L.A.,  
P. McBride, Esq., M.L.A.,

The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C.,  
The Hon. E. Morey, M.L.C. (Vice-  
Chairman),  
T. Smith, Esq., M.L.A.,  
E. C. Warde, Esq., M.L.A.

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# EXTENSION OF THE HOPETOUN RAILWAY.

## REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the Western Districts of Victoria with Mildura and the Darling River by means of a railway from Hopetoun to a suitable point on the through line to Mildura, has the honour to report as follows :—

1. This subject was referred to the Committee in the form of a general question, the terminal point of the proposed extension of the Hopetoun railway not being specified in the resolution of the House. Mr. F. Rennie, the then Engineer-in-Chief of the Victorian Railways, when giving evidence, expressed a preference for Gorya as the junctioning station with the Woomelang-Mildura railway. He pointed out that Gorya would be a convenient place to tie, not only the proposed extension of the Hopetoun line with the Mildura railway, but also the contemplated extension of the Sea Lake line, making a common junctioning station at Gorya for the Western, Midland, and Northern railways of the State. It was ascertained that the survey between Hopetoun and Gorya had not been completed by the Railways Department, but Mr. Rennie estimated that it would be necessary to construct 21 miles of railway, at a cost of £48,300, to carry the Hopetoun line as far as Gorya.

Length and cost of connecting line.

2. For a few miles north of Hopetoun, the land is of fairly good quality, suitable for wheat-growing and grazing, but towards Gorya the railway would cross a broad belt of poor sandy country, which would contribute little or no traffic to the line.

Country traversed.

3. Evidence given to the Committee showed that the proposed railway was not asked for on local grounds. Those living in the district admitted that the line, if constructed, would serve very little additional land of any value for cultivation purposes, the requirements of the locality being already met by either the Hopetoun or Woomelang-Mildura railways. The line was advocated as a connecting one to give direct and rapid means of communication between the western districts of Victoria and the Northern Mallee as well as Mildura and the Darling River. Representations were repeatedly made to the Committee that the proposed connexion should be regarded more in the light of a "national railway" to facilitate the interchange of stock and products between the places named than as a line to meet mere local requirements.

National aspect of the line.

4. Witnesses at both Hopetoun and Minapre urged that, as the line could not be considered in any other aspect than a connecting one, the shortest route and, consequently, the least expensive line, namely, from Hopetoun to Minapre, should be recommended. That connexion would involve but 16 miles of construction, and it would pass through much better country than that on the Gorya route.

Alternative route.

5. An experienced officer of the Railways Department who specially inspected the district also preferred the Minapre route to the Gorya one, if a connexion had to be made. He pointed out that not only would the Minapre line be 5 miles shorter to construct, resulting in an expenditure of £11,500 less, but a water supply would be obtainable near Minapre from a channel fed from Lake Lonsdale Reservoir, thereby avoiding the necessity of the locomotive hauling water for its use from Warracknabeal, as would have to be done if the Gorya route were selected. Moreover, a station would have to be created at Gorya if it were made the point of junctioning with the Mildura railway, it being at present a ballast siding only.

Water supply of Minapre route.

6. The officer further reported that the proposed Minapre connexion, judged from the stand-point of the local traffic, would be an unprofitable line, inasmuch as the revenue, after being credited with the carriage over existing railways of 40 per cent. of the new traffic created by the line, would amount to £671 per annum, while the yearly working expenses and maintenance were estimated at £1,218, leaving an annual loss of £547, exclusive of interest (£1,472) on the money expended in building the railway, or a total annual loss of £2,019.

Loss in working line.

port trade. 7. It was stated that if the Hopetoun line were extended to the Mildura railway it would result in lambs, wool, and wheat from the Northern Mallee and Darling River being sent by way of Hopetoun to Portland for shipment to Europe. As will be seen, however, from the following table of distances prepared by the Railways Department, it would be  $372\frac{3}{4}$  miles from Yelta to Portland, *via* Hopetoun, while it is  $353\frac{1}{2}$  miles to Geelong by way of the existing railway through Woomelang and Maryborough, and  $367\frac{3}{4}$  miles to Melbourne by the same route.

PROPOSED RAILWAY FROM HOPETOUN TO MILDURA LINE.

Route.	Through Distances by shortest available route from Yelta to—					
	Melbourne.	Ballarat.	Geelong.	Portland.	Warrnambool.	Port Fairy.
	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.
<i>Via</i> Woomelang .. ..	$367\frac{3}{4}$ *	$298\frac{1}{4}$	$353\frac{1}{2}$	$430\frac{3}{4}$ †	$438\frac{1}{4}$ †	$439\frac{3}{4}$ †
<i>Via</i> Hopetoun and Gorya ..	$383\frac{1}{4}$	$309\frac{1}{4}$	$364\frac{1}{2}$	$372\frac{3}{4}$	$380\frac{1}{4}$	$381\frac{3}{4}$

\**Via* Castlemaine and Maryborough.  
†*Via* Ararat and Maryborough.  
For through distances to Mildura deduct  $16\frac{1}{2}$  m.

8. The Committee is not favorable to the centralization of the export trade of the State at either Melbourne or Geelong, but it cannot overlook the fact that producers and shippers would naturally select the shortest route to the sea-board, particularly if that route terminated at a market or port which was equally as good, if not better, than Portland. Under these circumstances, the Committee is of opinion that there would not be much export traffic over the proposed connecting line between Gorya and Hopetoun, or between Minapre and Hopetoun, and that view was strongly supported by Mr. Tait, Chairman of the Victorian Railways Commissioners.

9. Turning to the other claim put forward in support of the extension of the Hopetoun railway that it would, by shortening the distance between the Western and North-Western districts of Victoria by rail by 58 miles, lead to a saving in freight and the interchange of products, the Committee ascertained that, owing to the tapering rates charged by the Railways Department, the saving in freight would be so very small that it would not be likely to influence trade between those districts.

The following table, based on the increased freights recently adopted by the Railways Department, shows the difference in charges per ton on produce sent from Yelta to the Western district, and *vice versa*, by way of the existing railways through Woomelang and Maryborough, and by the proposed connecting line, *via* Hopetoun.

RETURN SHOWING DIFFERENCE IN FREIGHT PER TON ON PRODUCE FROM YELTA TO UNDERMENTIONED STATIONS, *VIA* WOOMELANG AND *VIA* HOPETOUN.

<i>Via</i> Woomelang to—	Miles.	Rate per ton Grain, Potatoes, Chaff, and Fodder.	Rate per ton Green Fruit.	<i>Via</i> Hopetoun and Gorya.	Rate per ton Grain, Potatoes, Chaff, and Fodder.	Rate per ton Green Fruit.	Difference per ton on Grain, Potatoes, Chaff, and Fodder.	Difference per ton on Green Fruit.
		s. d.	£ s. d.	Miles.	s. d.	£ s. d.	d.	s. d.
Hamilton .. ..	377	15 0	1 16 3	319	14 3	1 12 4	9	3 11
Portland .. ..	431	15 6	1 19 11	373	14 9	1 16 0	9	3 11
Port Fairy .. ..	440	15 6	2 0 6	382	15 0	1 16 7	6	3 11
Koroit .. ..	429	15 6	1 19 10	371	14 9	1 15 11	9	3 11
Warrnambool ..	438	15 6	2 0 5	381	15 0	1 16 6	6	3 11

The difference of 6d. and 9d. per ton on grain, potatoes, chaff, and fodder, and 3s. 11d. per ton on green fruit, is equivalent to less than  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per bag on chaff and potatoes, and about 1d. per case on green fruit.

10. When questioned as to the saving in time that would be effected in the transport of stock and produce between the Western and North-Western districts of Victoria if the proposed connexion were made, Mr. Tait replied that there would be very little saving in that direction, because the train service on the Hopetoun line would be a very limited one.

11. Mr. Tait, Chairman of the Railways Commissioners, thus summed up the views of himself and his colleagues on the proposed connecting line :—“ I can see no justification whatever for building a line from Hopetoun to Minapre, much less to Gorya, for any through business there will be in our time, and neither is there any justification from the aspect of the local business. . . . I do not think it can be justified from a ‘ national ’ aspect either, whatever that may mean.”

Views of the  
Railways  
Commissioners.

12. The Committee is of opinion that, in view of the small traffic there would be over the proposed connecting line, and the little difference in the freight on produce and fruit which would be sent over it, compared with the charges by the existing railway *via* Maryborough and Ararat, it is inexpedient to extend the Hopetoun line to the through railway to Mildura.

Decision of the  
Committee.

13. The evidence given by Mr. Rennick, when Engineer-in-Chief of the Victorian Railways, and of Mr. Tait, has been printed with this Report, but in order to meet the desire of the Government to curtail the printing expenses as far as possible, the evidence taken at Hopetoun, Minapre, Beulah, Warracknabeal, Stawell, Ararat, and Ballarat has not been put in type, but will be laid on the table of the Legislative Assembly.

Printing  
evidence.

14. The following extracts from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Committee show the divisions that took place during the consideration of this question :—

Divisions, *vide*  
sec. 5, sub-sec.  
(5), Act No.  
1177.

WEDNESDAY, 18TH NOVEMBER, 1903.

The Committee proceeded to consider the evidence taken regarding the question of connecting the Western districts of Victoria with Mildura and Darling River by means of a railway from Hopetoun to a suitable point on the through line to Mildura.

Mr. Melville moved, That, in the opinion of the Committee, it is expedient to connect the Hopetoun railway with the through line to Mildura by the construction of a railway from Hopetoun to Minapre.

Debate ensued.

Mr. Smith moved, as an amendment, That all the words after “ is ” be omitted, with a view to insert in place thereof the following words :—“ inexpedient to connect the Hopetoun railway with the through line to Mildura.”

And, after further debate—

Question—That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question—put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 2.	Noes, 7.
Mr. Melville,	The Chairman,
Mr. Morey.	Mr. Abbott,
	Mr. Graham,
	Mr. Grose,
	Mr. McBride,
	Mr. Smith,
	Mr. Warde.

And so it passed in the negative.

Question—That the words proposed to be inserted in place of the words omitted be so inserted—put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 7.	Noes, 2.
The Chairman,	Mr. Melville,
Mr. Abbott,	Mr. Morey.
Mr. Graham,	
Mr. Grose,	
Mr. McBride,	
Mr. Smith,	
Mr. Warde.	

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

Question—That, in the opinion of the Committee, it is inexpedient to connect the Hopetoun railway with the through line to Mildura—put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 7.	Noes, 2.
The Chairman,	Mr. Melville,
Mr. Abbott,	Mr. Morey.
Mr. Graham,	
Mr. Grose,	
Mr. McBride,	
Mr. Smith,	
Mr. Warde.	

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

Ordered—That a Draft Report be prepared and considered at the next meeting.

A. W. CRAVEN,  
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,  
State Parliament House, Melbourne, 24th November, 1903.



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MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

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## LIST OF WITNESSES.

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# MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 4TH FEBRUARY, 1903.

*Members present :*

Mr. CRAVEN, in the Chair ;

The Hon. J. H. Abbott, M.L.C.,  
The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C.,  
The Hon. E. Morey, M.L.C.

Mr. Graham,  
Mr. Grose,  
Mr. McBride,  
Mr. Smith,  
Mr. Warde.

Francis Rennie, sworn and examined.

1. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—Engineer-in-Chief of the Victorian Railways.
2. Have you been over the proposed route between Hopetoun and Gorya?—Yes.
3. Will you describe the character of the country it would pass through—starting from Hopetoun?  
—The line would go through about 10 miles of fairly good country, and then through some sandhills with flats intervening, till it reached the Mildura line.
4. Those flats are in the vicinity of a place called Wathe?—Yes; and there is another place called Yallum.
5. Is the good country you speak of, with the good flats intervening, near to Wathe and Yallum?—Wathe is at the north end of the good country, nearly.
6. Do you think the good land only extends about 10 miles from Hopetoun?—Yes.
7. From there on to Gorya, what is the nature of the country?—Portions of good country—flats—but, except for a couple of miles near the Mildura railway, the rest is chiefly sandhills.
8. Have you had a survey made of it?—No; the party has just gone up, and is about to start the survey.
9. On that line?—Yes.
10. That will be in addition to the party working on the route from Sea Lake?—We have not got any authority to do the Sea Lake survey.
11. I understood it was in progress?—No.
12. Would you mind giving a general description of the country on the line from Woomelang through to Mildura?—Quite 80 per cent. of the country is fairly good and would grow wheat with proper rainfall; and the other is sandy country.
13. To what distance on each side of the line would that 80 per cent. extend?—Probably from 5 to 10 miles; I could not say exactly.
14. There are 10 miles marked by the red dotted line on the plan?—Yes.
15. What is the object in not going in a straight line from Hopetoun to Gorya?—The object is to serve the best of the country, as well as to connect with the Mildura railway.
16. What would be the length if you went direct from Gorya to Hopetoun?—It would not be more than 1 or 1½ miles shorter.
17. There would be no great saving in going there direct?—No.
18. Do you prefer the acute intersection with the main line at Gorya to going further south, near Minapre?—Yes; because it will be a shorter distance by the new line to Mildura.
19. What would be the estimate of the cost per mile, of this connexion?—No estimate has been made, for two reasons—one because we have no survey; and another, and a very important reason, is that it will depend on what we have to pay for rails when this line is made, if it should be made. With second-hand rails we can do it for £400 a mile less than with new rails; so that is a very important factor in the estimate of the cost.
20. *By Mr. Graham.*—What would be the weight of the rails?—Sixty-pounds steel—either new or old.
21. *By the Chairman.*—Have you plenty in stock?—No; very few. Therefore, we cannot say what the position will be when this line is authorized for construction.
22. Will your having any in stock depend upon the pulling up of a lot of old lines and the re-laying with new rails?—Yes; entirely. They are importing some now under a new contract. Those would be 80-lb. rails.
23. Are there sandhills more easterly, between there and Minapre?—Very few; the Minapre route is all pretty good country; but that is already served by the two existing railways.
24. Would there be any sandhills further on towards Gorya—striking Gorya from Hopetoun—or is it pretty easy country?—No; the sandhills make it difficult.
25. What is your experience, so far, with regard to those sandhills during heavy gales?—They blow all over the country—the sand does.
26. Is that of such a nature as to be a serious matter in so far as it necessitates clearing the sand away?—In the case of the Mildura line, our experience is that the sandbanks, where they are very much exposed, are blown to one side. A good deal of the position, or formation of the line, is really changed by a yard or two on either one side or the other, according to the direction of the wind, which is generally

westerly. We obviate that by covering the sandbanks with clay obtained from the flats, perhaps necessitating 2 or 3 miles engine haulage. But, as regards the rails, when the banks are all covered and secured, there will always be the risk of the sanding of the rails or between the rails; and that will have to be attended to in the maintenance of the line.

27. Do you anticipate that as being a very serious matter in future years?—I do not think so.

28. The sand is cheaply removed?—Yes.

29. Would breakwinds, of say 3 chains of mallee scrub on each side of the line, be a good thing?—Yes; vegetation such as mallee scrub or other scrubs growing close to the line would have a very great effect in keeping the sand off. In lots of that country there is a dense vegetation.

30. Would marrum grass be of any use?—I have not had sufficient experience of it to say. It is splendid stuff on the coast; but I do not know whether it would grow inland. But there are plenty of native scrubs that grow in that country, and, if they were encouraged in the bare places, I have no doubt they would be a great protection to the lines.

31. Have you had any difficulty with regard to the sand blowing on the rails on any other of the mallee lines?—On the Swan Hill line, where there is great exposure and no protection by scrub or trees, it has become serious occasionally.

32. Has there ever been occasion to clean the sand off the rails before a train could go along?—According to the newspaper reports they have had to do so. That work is out of my jurisdiction. The Existing Lines Branch deals with matters of that description.

33. Are any precautions being taken to leave the scrub intact along the route of the Mildura line?—We do not clear it away, only sufficient for the railway.

34. What width do you reserve for the railway?—We clear, perhaps, half a chain on each side; from that to 1 chain.

35. Would it not be a good plan to ask the Lands Department to have a reserve set apart on each side of the line of, say, 3 or 5 chains?—It certainly would.

36. Suppose this connexion were made with Gorya, would there be any difficulty with regard to getting water for the locomotive?—It would water at Hopetoun, and take sufficient water to return from Gorya; but in the event of Gorya requiring to be supplied with water, a tank would have to be excavated in the nearest catchment.

37. Then you would have really to carry the water there?—Yes; there would be no difficulty in that. The engine would take enough in the tender for a 50 or 60 miles trip.

38. Is there a good supply at Hopetoun?—Yes, a very good supply.

39. With regard to the land you have obtained from the Board of Land and Works for the mallee railways, how has it been done?—It is vested in the Board of Land and Works, Railway Construction Branch, and afterwards handed over to the Commissioner and vested in him.

40. Will there be any difficulty with regard to purchased land along this route?—Some will be purchased land. It is Mr. Lascelles' country.

41. Have you any idea of the nature of the title Mr. Lascelles holds for the land?—I think it is chiefly selected.

42. *By Mr. Graham.*—He has not got a freehold?—I am not sure. He may have of some; probably at Hopetoun and one or two other places; but I think, generally, that he has subdivided the country, and it is occupied by selectors.

43. *By the Chairman.*—Do you think existing rights have grown up rather strongly now, and that they would be a bar?—I have not inquired into that aspect of the case.

44. You do not know whether the Crown could resume possession unless compensation were paid?—I do not know that the Crown could for a number of years.

45. What will be the character of the proposed line with regard to the gauge; I suppose it would be a 5ft 3in. gauge?—Yes.

46. The weight of rail, you say, would be 60 lbs., and the ruling grade 1 in 75, the same as Mildura?—Yes.

47. Then as to the general equipment, would there be any station in between, or would the line run right through to Gorya?—There would be a station at about 8 or 9 miles.

48. In the estimate for this line, would you make any allowance with regard to Gorya itself. Would that cost be charged to the through line to Mildura, or any of it charged to this line?—Gorya is proposed as a future station on the Mildura line, and that would be charged to the Mildura line. The junction, of course, would be a charge to the Hopetoun line.

49. Do you know the nature of the country for, say, 10 or 15 miles west of this route in the direction of Lake Albacutya?—I have been to Patchewollock.

50. That is not directly west from Wathe?—North-west; I have been to Yallam. I have also been from Hopetoun to Pine Plains, and that would be west of Wathe.

51. What is the character of the country there?—Generally sandy—sandhills.

52. It is said that some of them are 200 feet high?—I think that 100 feet would cover the height.

53. Is any of the land in there occupied, do you know?—The block-holders have it. I think it is pretty well all in occupation as mallee blocks, terminating this year—1903.

54. If this line were constructed, would it enhance the value of the adjoining land—the land that would be accommodated by it?—It would raise it 10s. an acre, I should think. That would be a very low estimate.

55. Do you think it would increase the value of the land on the eastern side—between there and Woomelang?—I think it would for 2 or 3 miles.

56. To the same extent?—Yes.

57. What do you estimate the cost at per mile right through from Hopetoun to Gorya?—No definite estimate has been made, because we have no survey, and there is also the question of the rails. The Mildura line is costing, with partly second-hand and partly new rails, about £2,300 per mile; and this line would cost quite as much under the same conditions. But there may be different conditions, and we may have to use new rails. I may say the duty under the Federal Tariff adds £90 a mile to the cost of new rails.

58. Of course, we get a certain proportion of that back again?—I do not think the Railway Department will get credit for it.

59. What is the ruling up and down grade from Yelta, *viâ* Woomelang, to Maryborough and Ballarat?—I have here a list of ruling grades for the information of the Committee, which I will hand in. There is also another table showing the distances to the different ports by the various routes.—[*The witness handed in the same as follows:—*]

Board of Land and Works,  
(Railways Construction Branch),  
Spencer-street, Melbourne, 2nd February, 1903.

## RULING GRADE.

	Up.	Down.	
Ballarat to Maryborough ...	1 in 45	1 in 40	} Ballarat to Yelta, <i>viâ</i> Woomelang, 1 in 45 Up. 1 in 40 Down.
Maryborough to Donald ...	1 in 50	1 in 50	
Donald to Birchip ...	1 in 160	1 in 100	
Birchip to Woomelang ...	1 in 100	1 in 75	
Woomelang to Yelta ...	1 in 75	1 in 75	
Ballarat to Ararat ...	1 in 50	1 in 50	} Ballarat to Yelta, <i>viâ</i> Hopetoun, 1 in 50 Up. 1 in 50 Down.
Ararat to Murtoa ...	1 in 100	1 in 100	
Murtoa to Hopetoun ...	1 in 100	1 in 80	
Hopetoun to Yelta ...	1 in 75	1 in 75	
Ararat to Portland ...	1 in 50	1 in 50	} Ararat to Warrnambool, 1 in 50 Up. 1 in 50 Down.
Ararat to Hamilton ...	1 in 50	1 in 50	
Hamilton to Koroit ...	1 in 60	1 in 60	
Koroit to Warrnambool ...	1 in 50	1 in 50	} Ballarat to Geelong, 1 in 52 Up. 1 in 71 Down.
Ballarat to Warrenheip ...	1 in 52	Unlimited	
Warrenheip to Geelong ...	Unlimited	1 in 71	} <i>Viâ</i> Bacchus Marsh.
Ballarat to Melbourne ...	1 in 49	1 in 48	

## PROPOSED RAILWAY FROM HOPETOON TO MILDURA LINE.

Route.	Through Distances by shortest available route from Yelta to—							Construction Mileage.	
	Melbourne.	Ballarat.	Bendigo.	Geelong.	Portland.	Warrnambool.	Port Fairy.	Hopetoun to Gorya.	Sea Lake to Gorya.
	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.	Miles.
<i>Viâ</i> Woomelang ...	367 $\frac{3}{4}$ *	298 $\frac{1}{4}$	297 $\frac{1}{4}$	353 $\frac{1}{2}$	430 $\frac{3}{8}$ §	438 $\frac{1}{8}$ §	439 $\frac{3}{8}$ §	21	22 $\frac{1}{2}$
<i>Viâ</i> Hopetoun and Gorya ...	383 $\frac{1}{4}$	309 $\frac{1}{4}$	363 $\frac{1}{2}$ *	364 $\frac{1}{2}$	372 $\frac{3}{4}$	380 $\frac{1}{4}$	381 $\frac{3}{4}$		
<i>Viâ</i> Sea Lake and Gorya ...	367 $\frac{3}{4}$ *	317 $\frac{3}{4}$ †	267	373†	450 $\frac{1}{4}$	457 $\frac{3}{8}$	459 $\frac{1}{4}$		

\* *Viâ* Castlemaine and Maryborough.† *Viâ* Inglewood and Maryborough.‡ *Viâ* Inglewood and Dunolly.§ *Viâ* Ararat and Maryborough.|| *Viâ* Inglewood, Maryborough, and Avoca.For through distances to Mildura deduct 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ m.

60. What is the distance between Mildura and Yelta?—Sixteen and a half miles. The distances are all given in the table.

61. What is the distance from Yelta to Geelong, say *viâ* Woomelang and Maryborough?—Three hundred and fifty-three and a half miles.

62. And from Yelta to Geelong *viâ* Gorya and Hopetoun?—Three hundred and sixty-four and a half miles.

63. So that it is really shorter to the sea-board by the present line, through Woomelang, which is being made, than by the proposed connexion?—Yes, by 11 miles; and by the Sea Lake and Gorya route the distance would be 373 miles to Geelong.

64. As far as our calculations in the matter are concerned, we could leave out altogether this Hopetoun and Gorya connexion as regards getting to Geelong and Melbourne?—Yes; of course, with the western ports it makes a difference.

65. As regards the Darling River traffic, do you think that would go down the line that you are making to Geelong?—It would be shorter than to go to Portland or Warrnambool.

66. For shipment there?—Yes.

67. As far as Geelong is concerned, you would use the present line?—Yes.

68. What would be the distance to Portland from Yelta *via* Gorya, Murtoa, and Ararat?—*Via* Woomelang it would be 430 $\frac{3}{4}$  miles; *via* Hopetoun and Gorya, 372 $\frac{3}{4}$  miles; and *via* Sea Lake and Gorya, 450 $\frac{1}{4}$ . The latter route would be *via* Inglewood, Maryborough, and Avoca. By the first-named route it would go through Ararat and Maryborough.

69. Then, as a matter of fact, it is further to go to Portland than to go to Geelong, even if this connexion were made?—Yes; the distance to Geelong *via* Woomelang is 353 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles.

70. Would not you have the greater advantage at Geelong of a better class of ships calling for exports than at Portland or Warrnambool?—I do not know exactly—Portland is a very good port.

71. Are there not lots of boats taking goods for export from Geelong that do not go near Portland at all?—I think so; yes.

72. You would have a greater number of vessels to load into?—Yes.

73. Will you tell us on what ground this connexion has been advocated—from Hopetoun to Gorya?—For the interchange of products of the two districts—that is, the Western district with the Darling River district—for the supply of fodder and stuff from the coast country to feed the starving stock—I suppose it would be on the Darling; and the taking of Darling River produce or Mildura produce down to the western ports.

74. Do you think there would be a good deal of interchange of that sort?—I think in the future there should be.

75. What do you mean by that—ten years?—Perhaps twenty years, allowing for development.

76. Would you advocate the immediate construction of this connexion?—I am not prepared to give an opinion, because I have not really considered the utility of the line.

77. Would there be any real advantage in the interchange of rolling-stock—would that come in in any way?—There might be.

78. You do not attach a great deal of importance to that?—No.

79. Here is an extract from the *Ballarat Star*, of Monday, 19th January, 1903:—“Those responsible for making the extension from Woomelang apparently regard it as another of the railways required only for light local traffic. The line from Woomelang to Birchip and *via* Maryborough to Ballarat is capable of carrying only a 300-ton load, the section between the two first-named places having the distinction of being the cheapest broad-gauge line in the State. It will be seen at once that such a line is not suitable, for the most obvious of reasons, to serve as an Inter-State railway. It has been estimated that to make the Woomelang-Maryborough line capable of carrying heavy traffic would cost £70,000.” Have you any remarks to offer with regard to that?—No; I do not know anything about that.

80. *By the Hon. J. H. Abbott.*—It was not your estimate?—No; that means to convert it from a light railway to a very heavy one.

81. *By the Hon. E. Morey.*—The rails are the same?—Yes; I do not see any force in that.

82. *By Mr. Smith.*—There is no estimate to guide us at present?—No; not beyond the general estimate of £2,300 a mile if it were constructed the same as the Mildura line, with a portion of old and a portion of new rails.

83. Is this cost of £2,300 a mile for the Mildura line within the estimate of the Department?—Not within the Committee's estimate.

84. I said within the estimate of the Department?—Yes, quite within my estimate.

85. Do you remember what your estimate was?—Yes, I think so. When the standard wage was 6s. a day, and taking all new rails at the prices then, my estimate was £2,250 per mile. You will see that if you refer to the Committee's Report. The raising of the standard wage from 6s. to 7s. a day will add £160 per mile to that; and then the Federal Tariff will add another £90; that is £250 altogether.

86. Those two items, of course, would have to be added to your original estimate of £2,250 per mile?—Yes.

87. So that, when it is now estimated to cost £2,300 per mile, that is well within your estimate?—Yes; but it will not provide for three or four years' development, which my estimate did. £2,300 per mile will open the line to Mildura; but, for additional stations and accommodation if the traffic grows, there would be no money to provide for that. The Committee recommended that the line should be built with second-hand rails, provided it could be done for £2,000 a mile.

88. As a matter of fact, it has been built by using partly 60-lb. rails and partly 66-lb. second-hand rails to get to Mildura?—That is not to Yelta. We have not started the Yelta section yet.

89. As regards the extension from Birchip to Woomelang, do you remember what that cost?—No; that was cheap. The rails were second-hand cheap rails, and the works very light. You can get that by referring to the annual Report. That will give you the cost.

90. You are certain, all things considered, that this proposed extension would cost a good deal more now than it would two or three years ago?—I am sure of it.

91. And the prospects of traffic are poorer than they were two or three years ago?—I would not like to say that. It is a drought-stricken district at present.

92. *By Mr. Graham.*—Have you any idea as to the depth of cutting that would be required to go through those sandhills; what is the deepest on the Mildura line?—Thirty feet, I think.

93. Would there be any difficulty in regard to the sand shifting in the cuttings during a high wind?—Not if the mallee scrub is left.

94. That would apply to this line?—Yes.

95. How do you propose to carry out the work on this line—day work?—Not day work only; it is what we call the “butty gang” system and day work combined.

96. You are still convinced that you could carry it out as cheaply by that system as by the contract system?—I think so.

97. *By Mr. McBride.*—What is the difference in the construction of the Warracknabeal to Hopetoun line and the Birchip to Woomelang; is one line a better class line than the other?—One has better ballast. That is the chief difference; and also more works, more accommodation.

98. What do you estimate the capacity of the Warracknabeal to Hopetoun line at. What is that built to carry—how many tons?—That depends on the grade. All those lines are equal to the heaviest engine on the Victorian railways; what they call the “V” class, a new consolidation, and that weighs about 55 tons.

99. We had a statement yesterday that the Warracknabeal to Hopetoun line was built to carry 750 tons, and that the Birchip to Woomelang line was built to carry only 300 tons. Is that correct?—I do not think so; but those loads would depend on the ruling grade.

100. It has been said that the Hopetoun line was constructed to carry 700 tons, and the Birchip line was built to carry only 300 tons?—That is quite a mistake. The ruling grade on the Birchip to Woomelang line is 1 in 100 up, and 1 in 75 down.

101. With regard to the Warracknabeal to Hopetoun line, I would like to know whether it is true that the difference exists?—I have not got the figures for Warracknabeal to Hopetoun, but I have Murtoa to Hopetoun, and the gradients are practically the same; so the statement is evidently inaccurate.

102. What is the average load carried over those lines; is that in your Department?—No.

103. *By Mr. Grose.*—Have you ever taken any steps to prevent the sand shifting?—No.

104. Have you had any assistance from the experts of the Agricultural Department?—No; it has not become an evil until lately.

105. If you called on Mr. Williamson Wallace or the other experts in that Department they might be able to advise you?—They might.

106. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—You remember the time of the proposed projections from Hopetoun northwards?—Yes; I think I do.

107. It was your policy to strike at a common point with all those lines converging?—Yes.

108. Had we originally accepted your suggestion of connecting Hopetoun with that common point, would that have saved any money?—I do not think it would.

109. Would it have been necessary to have constructed that section from Woomelang to Lake Hattah, if you had made for that common point from Hopetoun?—I am not sure whether the Woomelang to Mildura and Woomelang to Lake Hattah lines were contemplated at that period. The idea was to go from either Sea Lake or Ultima; and then, with either of those carried out, the common point of Lake Hattah would be a very suitable place for all the lines to join.

110. I understand that your policy, suggested to the Committee, was to connect the west with this common point?—Yes.

111. And ultimately we had to go back to it?—Yes; that is part of the original scheme.

112. Now, when this is carried out—this 22 miles—will it not give your estimated traffic some impulse, in being connected with the rich west?—It should be of great benefit to the two districts—the rich west, and also to the Darling country.

113. The cost of this 22 miles, then, is insignificant, having in view the ultimate good to the main line and to the west?—I think that ultimately there will be a very large traffic from the Darling country towards Melbourne and the Victorian ports, and *vice versa*.

114. And, notwithstanding the work which has already been done in the way of multiplying these lines, this, in your opinion, is still essential to the development of trade?—It will be, I consider. But it is a question of time as to when. If Victoria was increasing in population by 3 or 4 per cent. per annum, it would not be many years before all those western mallee lines would be justified; but as we are not in that position at present, it is hard to say when further mallee railways should be made.

115. But, as I view it, and as it would appear from your advice, the line from Hopetoun to the centre point was a necessity, on the general outlook, and provided normal conditions prevailed?—Yes; I think so; and another line that will be absolutely necessary, when we take a spurt, will be from Horsham to Hamilton. That will lessen the distance still to the western ports.

116. Then, this is the "missing link" to connect the west?—I think so.

117. I understand that the people who have developed this agitation were disappointed in not having the line from Hopetoun onwards to your common point constructed?—Well, I need not tell you that there was a great struggle over the Mildura line—as to where it should go from.

118. This 22 miles would bring peace?—Partial peace.

119. Do you think that if the 22 miles now proposed were constructed it would finish the business?—No; you will have Bendigo wanting the Sea Lake extension, or some other.

120. *By Mr. Graham.*—Will we not have the people still agitating for that other connecting link you spoke of—from Horsham to Hamilton?—I think so.

121. That is "in the air," and likely to be kept there till carried out?—Yes.

122. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Under normal conditions, the Hopetoun line is a success?—Yes; I have always seen it stated, as the result of the Commissioner's investigations, that that is a *bonâ fide* success—a paying railway.

123. I think it was suggested by those people, and has been suggested this morning, that this proposed connexion—Hopetoun to Gorya—would make it still more a paying railway?—It should help it.

124. *By Mr. Warde.*—What do you mean by a "paying railway"—paying working expenses and interest as well?—Both.

125. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—That is your opinion—that it has been a successful railway, paying working expenses and interest all through?—Yes.

126. *By the Hon. J. H. Abbott.*—As to the rate of wages, what are you paying now?—Seven shillings a day.

127. You did not come down to the 6s.?—I have not received any orders to change the rate.

128. It is still 7s.?—Yes.

129. The extra price will be paid on this new line?—Yes; my estimate would be based on 7s.

130. What weight of new rails would you use if you cannot get second-hand rails?—60-lb.

131. Something was said about the reserves along the line. Do you always have reserves?—Where we have to buy the land we "cut our coat according to the cloth;" but where we are not restricted—where we go through Crown lands—we take a good width, not any extravagant width.

132. A good deal of this land is mallee land?—Yes.

133. You said you did not know the conditions, so you do not know the width you would reserve?—We could not use more than 1 chain on each side, except for station accommodation.

134. Is there any cultivation at all on this proposed route of 22 miles?—Yes; for 10 miles north of Hopetoun.

135. What is the character of the land beyond that again?—Cultivation ends there. Beyond that the land is too far from an existing railway station.

136. Is this sand you speak of of a shifting nature?—Yes; it is a white sand on the big hills. It blows a good deal where it is exposed; but where there is vegetation covering the country, it does not blow so much.

137. Would you propose to spend something on the sides of the line to keep the sand from shifting?—It would be desirable in the bare spots.

138. Have you prepared any estimate of what that would cost per mile?—No; that would be one of the future improvements.

139. I understand you to say that the survey had been started?—Yes; a party has gone out.

140. When will the report of that survey be ready?—They will be there for two months before the field work is done.

141. You will not be able to give any further particulars of the line till then?—No.

142. *By the Hon. E. Morey.*—According to the plan, you have about 10 miles of good land before you come into the sand?—Yes.

143. By going more to the right hand—to the north-east—could you not keep clear of that sand, and come to the more settled land?—That would be a bad route for the railway.

144. Why?—It would not decrease the length much, and it would increase the distance to travel to Mildura considerably.

145. It is marked 20 miles on the plan?—That is practically the length of the route shown.

146. If there are 12 miles of sandy country, would it not cost a good deal to keep that portion of the line in repair?—There are not more than about 8 miles in the sand, because there are patches of good flats, and also a couple of miles near to the Mildura railway that is fair country.

147. In making these lines, are the men cautioned about destroying the scrubs along the line—where it is supposed to be fenced in?—We are not fencing the Mildura line at all.

148. Do the people destroy the undergrowth?—No people could do it except the railway workmen, and they are not allowed. We clear sufficient for the line.

149. Do you caution the workmen?—Yes; we take every care.

150. You would suggest that there should be some stuff planted to stop the shifting of the sand, if possible?—Yes; in the bare places. In many places it is fairly supplied with scrub all along till you get near to Mildura.

151. Would you not want more than 2 chains—I understand the sugar gum grows very fast in Western Australia?—It is all Crown lands, and the Lands Department and the Forests Department together, I should think, would take steps to conserve the scrub, or even to plant.

152. Do not you think it would be well for you to recommend that that should be done?—I am afraid that the railway money would not stand that. However, I do not look upon it as a very great risk, as long as the sandbanks are covered.

153. *By Mr. Graham.*—Are you aware that it has cost the Wimmera United Waterworks Trust £1,600 this year to keep the shifting sand out of their channels. Do you not think there is a danger of the same thing occurring so far as the railway cuttings are concerned?—If a couple of chains of scrub are reserved along the line it will meet that difficulty.

154. Would it not be better for the Railway Department to reserve, rather than trust to other Departments to do it?—Of course, it would be necessary to move the Lands Department to reserve a strip of the mallee scrub on each side of the railway.

155. You could take it in the first place, as being necessary for your railway?—They do not allow us too much scope in that way.

156. *By the Chairman.*—Do not you think a wider strip would be very much better—say something like 10 chains on each side from the centre of the line?—But I am afraid if the Railway Department were to apply, they would not get it. It is a point open to consideration.

157. Are you prepared to take any steps in reference to that?—I can feel my way.

158. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—What is the average depth of these sand cuttings?—In a great part of the sandy country, not more than 2 or 3 feet—sometimes not more than 1 foot. But, in the white sand country, in the very high hills, very often the sand is quite the full depth of the cutting—from 10 to 20 feet. But that is in very few places.

159. What sort of soil do you reach when you get through the sand—is it the ordinary soil of the mallee—a chocolate soil?—All good soil—splendid soil to all appearance.

160. So that the illustrations supplied by the ant hills—where the ants bring up a coffee coloured soil to the surface—prove correct, and show that there is a good soil under the sand?—In most cases.

161. Does the vegetation growing in these sandhills perish with the drought?—No; it seems to stand it. You will see the roots of the mallee scrub to a depth of 15 or 20 feet in the cuttings.

162. The drought does not kill it?—The roots go down to the moisture.

163. Has the bluebush or saltbush died off with the drought?—I do not know much about that, but I should think it is eaten off. I do not think it dies off at all.

164. And that the roots are still in the soil?—I should expect it.

*The witness withdrew.*

*Adjourned.*

THURSDAY, 5TH FEBRUARY, 1903.

*Members present :*

MR. CRAVEN, in the Chair ;

The Hon. J. H. Abbott, M.L.C.,  
 The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C.,  
 The Hon. E. Morey, M.L.C.

Mr. Graham,  
 Mr. Grose,  
 Mr. McBride,  
 Mr. Smith,  
 Mr. Warde.

Ernest Selk, sworn and examined.

165. *By the Chairman.*—What are you?—Officer in charge of the Mallee Branch in the Lands Department.

166. How long have you had charge of that particular part of Victoria?—Between four and five years. I have been in that branch since 1888. I have a plan—[*producing the same*].

167. Taking a point 5 miles north of Hopetoun along this road that will connect with Gorya and then going eastward to a point about midway between this proposed route and the Mildura railway, then following generally in a north-westerly direction midway between the two lines (that is the Mildura line and the proposed connexion) to a point about 5 miles south-west of Gorya and then westward to a line about 10 miles west of the proposed route ; then coming down parallel to the line again to this particular point—what area would there be in that?—About 110,000 acres altogether.

168. That is the land that would be served by this particular railway route?—Yes. About 102,000 acres of that are held under allotment lease and the balance under block lease, about 8,000 acres.

169. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Explain the difference between the two?—A block lease is practically a grazing lease ; no one has the right of selecting out of that. The holder of a mallee allotment lease has the right of selection up to 1,600 acres according to classification, and may eventually obtain the freehold.

170. *By the Chairman.*—In what class have the classifiers placed it?—Only what is coloured there has been classified ; the uncoloured has not. The purple is “third-class” land ; the brown is “second-class” land ; the white has not been classified, but that is very poor, the worst part of it.

171. A great deal of the area here through which this route would run, all this from Campbell's holding, is “white”?—That is very poor country. It belongs to Mr. Lascelles, who has not considered it worth while to subdivide that apparently. That is an allotment ; he has the right to subdivide.

172. The fee-simple of the land is obtainable from the Crown on payment of 10s. an acre?—That is for the third-class land extending over 40 years. The second-class land is 15s.

173. How much per acre do you consider that the land within the area mentioned would be enhanced in value if the line were constructed?—It seems to me very doubtful whether it would have any increased value. If you look along any of those other lines where the Mallee Classification Board has been, they have classified nearly all the land alongside existing railway stations as third-class land ; that is at 10s. If you look along the Mildura line, that is practically all third class land, and that by Watchupga is fourth-class.

174. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—If Mr. Lascelles holds the right to subdivide, then the men going in on the subdivision have the right of owning?—Yes.

175. So that all along the line someone has the right of ownership?—Yes, all along that proposed line.

176. Even if it is fourth-class land?—Yes.

177. *By the Chairman.*—Can the Crown under the conditions on which the land is let at present apply the betterment principle if it desires?—That is very doubtful. Section 419 of the *Land Act* 1901 deals with the question, and the clauses seem to me very contradictory. I should like the Crown Solicitor's opinion to be got on that. Mr. Lascelles is objecting to the introduction of one of those clauses in his leases, and that has been submitted to the Crown Solicitor, who has not given a reply yet. In sub-section 1 of section 419 it says that “the Governor may by Order in Council published in the *Government Gazette* declare that the value of such lands of the Crown is so enhanced” (that is, by the construction of a railway or any work), “and shall in such order specify the nature of any such works as are hereinbefore-specified by which the same is so enhanced.” Then sub-section 5 goes on to say—“Such Order in Council shall not affect the right which any person as a Crown lessee at the date of the making of such an Order in Council or any person claiming through him may have to select any lands.” It says it shall not affect the right “nor apply to any such selection ;” but further on it is rather contradictory.

178. Then, on the face of it, it looks as if the Crown had parted with its right to bring in the betterment principle?—It looks so, according to that. This is since the 29th December, 1891. That is the date the betterment principle was first made law. There are three clauses on that betterment question—“nor apply to or affect any grant or lease of any lands which any person may be entitled to by virtue of such lands having been selected by him or by the person through whom he claims before the making of such Order in Council.” Then the next is—“Where the annual rent or licence-fee payable under any lease or licence of any lands of the Crown is taken in part payment of the purchase money of such lands such lease or licence shall contain a covenant or condition that such lands shall be during the currency of such lease or licence (as the case may be) deemed lands of the Crown within the meaning of this section ; and that upon the making of any Order in Council under the provisions hereinbefore in this section contained the enhanced rent or licence-fee thereof fixed by such Order in Council shall be payable in respect of such lands as though such rent or licence-fee had been so fixed prior to the making of such lease or licence.” It is rather an involved matter to follow, I am afraid, but it does not make any exception. It says the annual rent is to be increased without making any exception, but the previous part seems to except all those that were held prior to the making of the order. Of course, no order has been made yet.

179. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—Is not that enhancement periodic?—It is enhanced by the making of a railway, or water works, or any public work.

180. Have you not in the Act particular periods at which that can be done?—No ; it is to be done by an Order in Council.



181. Enhancement of rent?—Under perpetual lease, that is every ten years. That would apply if they selected under perpetual lease; it would not to an agricultural lease.

182. Every one would be under a perpetual lease?—No, very few are taking under that. They take a mallee allotment lease and then they can select out of that an agricultural lease, and that may become a freehold.

183. Can you mark off any blocks we have free?—You have none up to Gorya, not a single allotment. The 8,000 acres will be free at the end of this year, that is the block alongside; it is a little triangular piece just at the north corner—[*showing on the plan*—]—in the parish of Denmying.

184. *By Mr. Grose.*—What would you assume the land to be worth there?—I have not any personal knowledge of that, only I know that getting further eastward just on the Mildura line is the worst part of those blocks that are subdivided. All those west of Lake Tyrrell have been subdivided, and the most of that, supposed to be the worst part of it, has not been classified.

185. *By the Chairman.*—If Mr. Lascelles subdivides, then we have lost that also?—Yes.

186. How long is it since you asked the Crown Law Officers to give an opinion?—Some weeks ago. We may have it any day.

187. Do you think that, under the present conditions, any of this land is likely to revert to the Crown?—Of course, I cannot say. It depends on Mr. Lascelles. He is praying now to get the Government to extend the mallee allotment leases, saying, if he gets that he will probably subdivide this further.

188. What is the average size of holdings in the area?—Mostly 480 acres; that is those that Mr. Lascelles has subdivided.

189. And lots of those have the right to select?—Yes, all.

190. If we revert to good seasons, do you think they will exercise that right?—Yes, I should think so. We have about 40 applications in from his holders to select.

191. When do the leases expire?—On the 30th of November this year.

192. Have the settler's wife or family a right to select prior to an outsider?—Yes; out of the father's holding.

193. Then, under those conditions, will not the whole of that land, if it is worth while, be mopped up by the present holders with their families?—That is so. Under Mr. Lascelles, I think, the present holder can select all that he holds. They do not hold very much individually.

194. How many acres of third-class land can a man select?—One thousand two hundred and eighty acres.

195. A selector then, with his wife and family, will mop up the whole of that country?—Yes.

196. Has the Crown a right, under the existing conditions, to resume any of the land for railway purposes without paying compensation?—Yes, excepting so far as that relates to the homestead or any improvements connected therewith. The Act does not say whether they would have to pay compensation for those, but just excepts them from resumption. The leases will expire on the 30th of November this year unless they are extended, but there is a provision in the present Act allowing for an extension up to the area that a person may select. If he gets an extension the Act says you can resume for railway purposes without paying any compensation whatever; so that will meet his case, and he gets a month to remove his improvements. It is the Third Schedule of the Act. It applies to any man who gets an extension of his mallee lease.

197. The Committee has only started to investigate this line. Assuming that it came to the conclusion that it would not do to recommend the line for five or six years, would there be any obstacle to the State resuming then?—I should think it would be better to do it now if the line is to be surveyed, and not have the land selected.

198. If that were done would that involve any claim on the people to make the line at once?—That I could not say.

199. *By the Hon. E. Morey.*—Mr. Lascelles will demand so much if you run the line there?—Oh, no, certainly not. You can resume for railway purposes, and if there were no improvements you would have nothing to pay; a fence would not trouble us; we frequently resume for railway lines without paying any compensation.

200. Would they have to pay anything on the back blocks?—I only say for the purposes of a railway line. There would be no compensation unless there were improvements.

201. Those are all small allotments?—Yes, 480 acres.

202. And a lot under cultivation?—Yes. You see the present clause says only the homestead and improvements connected therewith. It is a little bit vague. We have resumed a lot for railway purposes and have never had a claim for compensation.

203. *By the Hon. J. H. Abbott.*—What amount of land would be bettered by this railway that the Government could calculate on?—About 8,000 acres.

204. They are not allowed to cultivate the allotments?—Oh, yes. There are large allotments and small ones. On all the blocks they can cultivate by paying 1d. an acre for the right. They have to get the consent of the Minister.

205. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—You are appointed in charge of the mallee specially?—Yes.

206. Do you draft those Acts of Parliament, or what position do you hold in the business; do they take your advice?—That is all. I do not draft them. Mr. Carlile or Mr. Brown does that. Anyhow, that clause I read was drafted in 1891.

207. How does it come to be involved?—I think Mr. Carlile would be able to explain that.

208. On whose responsibility was that?—I was not in charge when that was drawn out.

209. You are in charge now?—Yes.

210. Can you tell us how far does Mr. Lascelles' influence extend along this line. Is this the only part he controls now?—Yes, that is the only part on that line.

211. Could you mark on the map for us how many Lascelles giants there are who have a hold on the line?—He is the only one; the others are merely block-holders, which expire this year.

212. How far does the influence of this one man, Mr. Lascelles, extend?—Only the 20 miles of that line. The Mildura line, after it passes Gorya, does not go through any of the Lascelles country. It goes through a lot of unoccupied Crown lands in the shape of mallee allotments that have never been selected, and of mallee block leases that expire this year, which the Government can cut up if they think fit.



213. Do you know the names of the block-holders?—Yes. The brothers Carter hold the blocks adjoining Mr. Lascelles; then next the Australasian Agency Company, who hold through to Mildura; then Chaffey; and then comes the Mildura settlement.

214. Then, literally, three or four men control all the country up to Mildura?—They are not proposing to extend the block leases, only the allotment leases.

215. How many allotment leases will there be controlling the country?—I see that line goes through three large allotments there. Those are all held by Mr. Lascelles. I know that it goes through small Crown allotments till you get away towards Mildura. Then it goes through the big mallee block leases of Carters and the Australasian Agency Company.

216. How much does Mr. Lascelles pay for this great lot; how much comes in?—I cannot give that from memory; I can supply it.

217. How much money is coming in for the quantity of land he controls per annum, and beyond that how much are we getting in. Are those rents being paid?—Not particularly well. I can tell you what arrears there are; on his allotments about £2,132 arrears.

218. Then is this the fact—they have their fingers on it and do not pay the rent?—They are all in the same boat, practically, the mallee holders. They have had such bad seasons the Minister is not pressing them.

219. *By Mr. Graham.*—Mr. Lascelles is not the only one?—No; it applies to all of the others, practically.

220. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—When a man does not pay the rent, what do you do?—We send him an arrears circular; but this year they have not been sent out. The Minister has decided not to press the mallee lessees this year.

221. How much is owing approximately on the whole of the mallee?—About £70,000.

222. Is that on the entire mallee?—Yes, that is an approximation.

223. Are there arrears on the agricultural allotments?—They are of such recent date there are hardly any arrears; there may be a twelve month of arrears.

224. Then the mallee is comparatively free of arrears?—Seventy thousand pounds is a moderate amount, because the annual receipts are about £12,000. We reckon they are about five or six years in arrears.

225. Have you any orders from head-quarters as to how you are to deal with them?—Only a verbal instruction that they are not to be pressed this season.

226. Do you understand that the Act is in operation?—Yes.

227. Who has superseded it?—The Act does not say that they are necessarily to be forfeited because they are in arrears.

228. Are you carrying out the Act?—To the best of my ability.

229. The Act does not enable you to go to a company, one of the big companies you have named, and demand your rent, say the Australasian Agency Company?—I do not say they are in arrear. There are exceptions. I doubt very much whether they are in arrear. The others on the north-west are never in arrear—men like Mr. Barr-Smith and Mr. Crozier. We make inquiries through the bailiff, the police bailiffs, as to a man's ability to pay.

230. Those names you mentioned are all wealthy men and wealthy firms?—Yes. I do not think that company is in arrear, from what I remember.

231. What impression do you want to convey, that those are poor men and that they cannot pay, and therefore you have let them off?—It is mostly in the mallee allotment leases that the arrears are, not with the block-holders. There are very few block-holders, only 50 or 60 altogether. The great mass are the smaller holders, and they are in arrear.

232. Are you advising the Government to abandon this money?—It is impossible to get anything out of them; they have not anything to give.

233. If it is impossible?—You can get very little.

234. How much are you getting, roughly, altogether?—About £12,000 a year.

235. And you have £70,000 owing?—Yes.

236. And you are pushing all you can?—Any one over five years in arrear is being pushed pretty hard still. They all make excuses and say they have not got it. Where we are doubtful we get reports from the bailiff, and they generally bear them out that they cannot possibly pay, and you cannot turn them off; it is no use doing that.

237. Can you give a good argument for the construction of this railway under those circumstances?—I am sorry to say I cannot.

238. *By Mr. Grose.*—Have you had any conference with the Railway Department. Are you aware whether your Department confers with the Railway Department as to dealing with those lands?—No; the only way I get to know is the Railway draughtsman coming to get information as to how the land is held.

239. The Lands Department is not officially aware there is a Railway Department?—I do not know whether they are officially aware or not. I suppose sometimes we must be aware, as we communicate officially.

240. *By Mr. McBride.*—Are there 91,000 acres of land that would be benefited?—About 12,000; it depends on what area you take in.

241. That would be enhanced in value. Did you give this value, "£46,262," mentioned on this return from the Lands Department as the value of the 91,200 acres?—That would be from the Railway Department. I suppose that is taken from the classification. It says—"Fixed by the Lands Department." I could not say who did it.

242. Suppose this valuation is correct, will it be increased at all by this railway?—I am very doubtful about it. I do not think it will, for the reason that the classifiers, who understand the value of mallee land, classified the lands against the existing railway lines as third and fourth class land—10s. and 5s. an acre.

243. *By Mr. Warde.*—This 8,000 acres of Crown land will not be enhanced in value at all by the railway?—No, I think not.

244. You said that one of the allotment holders owed £2,130; what is the next largest amount owing by any individual?—There are some adjoining, all included in the area, three allotments held by

Carter Brothers, but I think they have practically abandoned them. We have had hard work trying to get the money, and they have not paid up. They owe something like £1,300.

245. Are there any others owing large amounts?—There are others, but I have not the names with me.

246. The principle of the Department is to get the money from the people if they only have means?—Yes.

247. Do the Department think that Carter Brothers and Mr. Lascelles are not able to pay?—Mr. Lascelles, I know, has the bulk of this amount on his to pay. He had an order ready to pay when the previous Government went out. He had a certain promise from Mr. Duggan about the extension of his leases if he paid up. As soon as they went out he did not know that the Government that came in would carry out that promise, so he withheld the money for the time being.

248. *By Mr. Grose.*—Was it a written or a verbal promise?—Written, so he has been at Mr. McKenzie for a long time, trying to get this thing settled. I know he was prepared to pay up that as soon as he got something definitely settled.

249. *By Mr. Warde.*—Would you classify him as man who ought to receive consideration?—Yes.

250. Is he not in a position to pay?—I know he is in a position to pay that amount, as he told me he had the money.

251. Have you heard rumours that some of those men are in the habit of investing their money to earn interest, rather than paying rent, as the Government did not force them?—I have heard of that outside the mallee; but I do not think that is likely in the mallee, they have had such bad years.

252. You do not think a railway will improve the price of the land?—No. It is only an opinion, but I base it on the classifiers' report.

253. *By Mr. Graham.*—Mr. Rennick, yesterday, here stated that the land between Hopetoun and Gorya would be enhanced in value for 5 miles out on the side of that line, to the extent of 10s. an acre; you do not agree with that?—No.

254. For the reasons you have given?—Yes.

255. According to what you state, those mallee allotment holders are placed in a better position for getting improvements in the event of the land being taken for railway purposes than the 32nd section holders, because you say they will be paid for the improvements if you come against their homesteads?—Yes. The Act is very indefinite.

256. You know the 32nd section holders in other parts simply get notice to remove their improvements?—Yes. It never has occurred that any one has received any compensation where we have resumed for railway lines.

257. If this line were constructed would there be any difficulty in getting a width of land on each side of the railway to make wind-breaks?—I do not see that there should be any difficulty.

258. Mr. Rennick was doubtful whether the Lands Department would allow it?—The Railways Construction Act usually gives large powers to take what land they please. If the line is to be constructed it would be a good thing to have it surveyed and noted in the Department; then they would not permit the area to be selected.

259. As to the Mildura line beyond Gorya, would there be any difficulty in the Railway Department getting a strip right along the line to protect the line?—None at all—it is practically all Crown lands—if they make an application for it.

260. *By Mr. Smith.*—Have you a personal knowledge of this mallee country?—I have been through from Hopetoun to Swan Hill; I was up in the Kerang office, and through from there.

261. You have not been in this particular part?—No, not north of Hopetoun.

262. Were you a sort of under-study to the late Mr. Hayes when he was there?—Yes.

263. You say that some of the classified land alongside railway stations is classified fourth class?—Yes.

264. Is that since the railway has been opened?—Yes, on the Rainbow and Jeparit line by the Pullut station. That was available for selection as fourth-class land, and it was a long time before any one took it up. That was available for a couple of years, and has only just been taken up.

265. Then does your experience lead you to believe there is no enhanced value in connexion with railways in the mallee?—Yes.

266. Who are those mallee land classifiers?—The chairman is Mr. Tobin; the others are Mr. Sampson, Mr. Dudley, Mr. Urbahns, Mr. Thomas, and Mr. Scott.

267. Do they go singly?—No, they are divided into three boards. One on each board is not an official; Messrs. Scott, Thomas, and Urbahns are not officers of the Department.

268. Is there one examination only, or are there periodical examinations?—There has been one, and then the lessees have had the right to appeal to the whole board. In a number of instances they have appealed, and in some cases they have reduced them, but in very few. There have been 290 appeals, and only ten were granted.

269. The value having been once fixed, is there any further examination?—Every successive period of ten years. That only applies to the perpetual leases, not the other. The other is a fixed amount of purchase money. The perpetual lease is so much per acre per annum. Agricultural leases become freehold at the end of 34 years.

270. Does Mr. Lascelles hold those lands in one way?—All are held under mallee allotment lease around there.

271. And for the first 20 miles in this proposed line, how long has he held it?—Since 1892, his mallee allotment leases, but he held them as blocks before that, since 1884.

272. It would require an Act of Parliament before there can be an extension?—The present Act allows an extension up to the amount the holder can select.

273. But the Crown lands falling in this year, there can be no extension there without a further Act of Parliament?—In those allotments there can be, but not the blocks. There must be an Act of Parliament before the lease can be extended for the blocks, but the holder of an allotment can get an extension of the area he is allowed to select up to 31st December, 1907. Of the Hopetoun land he held about 300,000 acres, near where this line goes, and he has transferred about 76,000 acres of that to selectors.

274. In addition to that what does he hold?—There is the Mallee Agricultural and Pastoral Company, of which he is the chairman of directors. That is on the east of Tyrrell. They hold about 187,000 acres, and he holds some more blocks further to the westward. There may be another couple of hundred thousand acres in those.

275. About how much altogether?—Nearly 700,000 acres that he is interested in.

276. You spoke just now of a sort of bargain or promise that the late Minister had made, that there would be an extension to Mr. Lascelles if he paid the arrears?—The Cabinet were favorable to that at the time.

277. To what land did that refer more particularly?—The allotments at Hopetoun.

278. This 20 miles we are inquiring about would come in?—Yes.

279. Beyond this 20 miles of admittedly good country, what is your opinion as to the other 21 miles between that and Gorya; is there any prospect of that being taken up?—It is only 21 miles altogether between Hopetoun and Gorya.

280. The top half of the 10 miles, is there any prospect of that being taken up?—Since that Mildura line has been in course of construction there have been about half a dozen applications for land alongside of it, but they did not seem anxious to get it. Just a few have taken allotments near the station, but I do not think this "white" land is very good. It is the worst part of Mr. Lascelles' allotments.

281. *By the Chairman.*—As to this very poor land classified so low, there is some more between Gorya and Minapre?—Yes, there is a lot of fourth-class land there. Those that are coloured brown between Minapre and Gorya have since been reduced to third-class on appeal.

282. Can you suggest any way by which that land could be occupied; would it do to let it out for a grazing right, with a view to deal with it in later years on better conditions for the Crown?—That seems to be the only way, so long as you do not give too long a time. Give it with the right to resume—say a five years' tenure.

283. Could you get any one to take it at that?—For the poor part of the mallee I doubt whether we would. We have had a lot of land there further westward that has always been open to offer, in the county of Weeah, west of Albacutya. We have let land, a couple of hundred square miles, for £5 an annual grazing licence, and then there is a lot left that no one would touch up there. That is south-west of the Kow Plains.

284. Who owns Albacutya?—That has been abandoned by the New Zealand Loan Company. Where the station is has been subdivided and let by the Department as agricultural allotments, in small farms of 640 acres.

285. What is the southern boundary of what you call the mallee that you are treating under similar conditions?—Commencing at the junction of the mallee with the South Australian border, it goes down southward to 20 miles south of the Serviceton station; then eastward to the Wimmera River; thence down the Wimmera River to Dimboola, and it would then go in a north-easterly direction to Warracknabeal, and from there eastward to St. Arnaud and Birchip railway line, thence along that line to Birchip; thence it would go eastward to the Wycheproof and Sea Lake line.

286. *By Mr. McBride.*—It does not come down as far as St. Arnaud?—No. Then in a north-easterly direction to Quambatook, and then it would turn south-easterly to Boort; thence northerly to the Kerang and Swan Hill line, and along that line to the Murray River (the Kerang line does not quite go to that but a bit south of Lake Charm), then along the railway line to Swan Hill, and along the river to the commencing point.

287. Is all that area treated under the same conditions, or do you make a distinction between the southern portion and the north?—No; there is only the distinction between blocks and allotments.

288. The southern portion is a lot better than the northern?—Yes; that seems to get a better rainfall.

289. Have you heard of the difficulty of the sand blowing over the railway lines?—Yes.

290. If 10 chains were reserved on each side of the line, would there be any difficulty in getting that?—I think not.

291. I mean on the Mildura line?—There should be no difficulty there; it is all Crown lands there.

292. Would an application require to be made to the Lands Department?—Yes, and furnish a plan showing what would be required on both sides.

*The witness withdrew.*

*Adjourned.*

TUESDAY, 17TH NOVEMBER, 1903.

*Members present:*

MR. CRAVEN, in the Chair;

The Hon. J. H. Abbott, M.L.C.,

The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C.,

The Hon. E. Morey, M.L.C.

Mr. Graham,

Mr. Grose,

Mr. McBride,

Mr. Smith,

Mr. Warde.

Thomas Tait, Chairman, Victorian Railways Commissioners, sworn and examined.

293. *By the Chairman.*—On the 7th September last, the Committee wrote to you concerning the proposal to extend the Hopetoun line northwards to connect it with the Mildura railway, and set forth the arguments used in favour of the proposal. Probably you will prefer to make a general reply to that

rather than to have questions asked?—Possibly the better way will be for me to make a general reply, and then I shall be glad to answer any questions that may be asked. By my direction a representative of the Department visited the locality, and went over part of the proposed route, and I have his report before me, which, with your permission, I will read:—

Chief Traffic Manager's Office,  
Melbourne, 10th November, 1903.

Memo.

Secretary's '03.11402, *re* proposed extension of line from Hopetoun to connect with Mildura line at Gorya, a proposed new station about 7 miles beyond Gama; (2) at any other point on Mildura railway.

I have to report examining the district to be served by proposed line, and submit herewith a plan showing—

- (a) In blue, approximate route of direct line to Gorya.
- (b) In red, suggested route of connexion at existing station at Minapre.
- (c) Area to be served by projected extension—neither line has been surveyed.

Beyond the road coloured brown on plan, about 8 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles north of Hopetoun, the country is unoccupied, and consists of dense mallee, with high sandhills and flats of sandy loam. The land is of poor quality, and settlement on it is unlikely as long as land of good quality is available to the south and east.

From local sources no additional traffic would be derived for years to come, and from this point of view there is nothing to warrant construction.

This line (a) would be 21 miles in length, and is estimated to cost £48,000, and would require to earn a net revenue of £1,920 per annum to return 4 per cent. on cost of construction.

To construct a line merely to give interchange of trade between the Mildura and Western districts, a junction could be made *via* Minapre. This route would entail through goods paying for an additional haulage of 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles than if sent *via* Gorya.

The route suggested is shown in red, and runs parallel with the 3-chain road. It would be preferable for the following reasons:—

- (1) It would be about 5 miles shorter.
- (2) Would cost £13,500 less, and a strip of land a chain wide could be taken from the road; no land would require to be purchased, and there would be no severance.
- (3) A water supply to proposed station at 8 miles could be obtained from channel leading to Crosbie's dam at a small cost.
- (4) It would not be necessary to haul water from Warracknabeal for engines (as proposed by Locomotive Branch). Engines could water at tanks at Minapre.
- (5) There would be no necessity to create a new station on Mildura line at Gorya.
- (6) The line would pass through a settled district, and traffic would be gained at the proposed station at 8 miles.

In the area coloured blue, which would be served by the 8-mile station, there are 25,300 acres, 40 per cent. of which (as shown by figures in circles 300) is at present under cultivation, equal to about 10,300 acres.

In the normal years the average yield was 2.37 bags per acre, which, less 160 tons retained for seed, would provide 2,629 tons of freight.

The population is about 90, and more land is in course of clearing and settlement.

None of the farmers carry any live stock beyond that required for domestic use.

In estimating the probable revenue, the normal yield averaging 2.37 bags per acre is taken, and for passenger traffic, each head of population has been allowed five journeys per annum to Hopetoun, the market town.

No allowance has been made for live stock traffic, or for interchange line freights, as no data is available.

Raising the cost of construction to be the same as for Gorya connexion, the cost would be £34,500; to return 4 per cent. on capital cost, a net revenue of £1,380 per annum would require to be earned.

Assuming that the construction would lead to increased production of 10 per cent., the new traffic created would be 262 tons, which has been apportioned equally between Geelong and Melbourne.

From the suggested station at 8 miles, the distances would be—

To Geelong, <i>via</i> Hopetoun, 244 miles	..	..	..	..	} Grain rates equal. } Grain rates 6d. per ton less.
To Geelong, <i>via</i> Minapre, 241 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles	..	..	..	..	
To Melbourne, <i>via</i> Hopetoun, 285 miles	..	..	..	..	
To Melbourne, <i>via</i> Minapre, 256 miles	..	..	..	..	

The producers in this area are within reasonable distance of either Mildura or Warracknabeal lines, and for local reasons there would be no justification for construction of this line, and it must be from a purely national point of view that the estimated annual loss of £1,927 must be considered.

Yours obediently,  
C. H. BARBER,  
Special Traffic Officer.

R. Lochhead, Esq.,  
Chief Traffic Manager.

That is the report of an officer who has looked into traffic questions of this kind in the past. The estimate accompanying this report is as follows:—

ESTIMATE OF REVENUE.					
Area in cultivation	..	..	..	..	10,300 acres.
Average yield in normal seasons	..	..	..	..	2.37 bags per acre.
Total freight	..	..	..	..	24,411 bags, or 2,789 tons.
Less retained for seed—58 bushels per acre, 4.25 bushels to bag, 8.75 bags per ton	..	..	..	..	1,405 bags, or 160 tons.
					<u>23,006 bags, or 2,629 tons.</u>
LOCAL LINE RATES.					
2,629 tons for 8 miles, at 2s. 3d. per ton	..	..	..	..	£295 15 3
Parcels, £8 per mile, for 15 miles	..	..	..	..	120 0 0
Mails, £9 per mile, for 15 miles	..	..	..	..	135 0 0
Passengers, 90 at five journeys each per annum, 450 at 1s. 7d.	..	..	..	..	35 12 6
Goods, 45 tons at 2nd class, 8 miles, 4s. 5d. per ton	..	..	..	..	9 18 9
NEW TRAFFIC OVER OLD LINES.					
Ten per cent. increase—262 tons—					
131 tons to Geelong, 234 miles, @ 14s. 2d.	..	..	..	..	£92 15 10
131 tons to Melbourne, 248 miles, @ 14s. 4d.	..	..	..	..	93 17 8
					<u>£186 13 6</u>
Forty per cent. of new traffic revenue	..	..	..	..	74 13 4
					<u>£670 19 10</u>
Balance, loss per annum	..	..	..	..	1,926 11 2
					<u>£2,597 11 0</u>

## WORKING EXPENSES.

Four per cent. on estimated cost of construction, £34,500	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	£1,380	0	0
Traffic working expenses	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	116	19	0
Locomotive working expenses	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	275	12	0
Maintenance expenses	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	825	0	0
								£2,597 11 0		

I put this report and estimate in and indorse for the Commissioners as far as they go. Now, I think you asked me for a statement of the difference in freight per ton on produce and stock *ex* Yelta to certain stations, *via* Woomelang, and *via* Hopetoun and Gorya. I put that in as follows:—

## RETURN SHOWING DIFFERENCE IN FREIGHT PER TON ON PRODUCE AND STOCK FROM YELTA TO UNDERMENTIONED STATIONS, VIA WOOMELANG AND VIA HOPETOUn AND GORYA.

Via Woomelang to—	Miles.	Rate per ton, Grain, Potatoes, Chaff, and Fodder.		Rate per ton, Green Fruit.	Via Hopetoun and Gorya.	Rate per ton, Grain, Potatoes, Chaff, and Fodder.		Rate per ton, Green Fruit.	Difference per ton on Grain, Potatoes, Chaff, and Fodder.		Difference per ton on Green Fruit.
		s.	d.			£	s.		d.	Miles.	
Hamilton .. ..	377	15	0	1 16 3	319	14	3	1 12 4	9		3 11
Portland .. ..	431	15	6	1 19 11	373	14	9	1 16 0	9		3 11
Port Fairy .. ..	440	15	6	2 0 6	382	15	0	1 16 7	6		3 11
Koroit .. ..	429	15	6	1 19 10	371	14	9	1 15 11	9		3 11
Warrnambool ..	438	15	6	2 0 5	381	15	0	1 16 6	6		3 11

## LIVE STOCK.

Via Woomelang.						Per truck.	Via Hopetoun and Gorya.					
							Per truck.		Difference per truck.			
						£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	
Hamilton .. ..	..	..	..	..	..	10	11	0	8	19	0	1 12 0
Portland .. ..	..	..	..	..	..	12	1	0	10	9	0	1 12 0
Port Fairy .. ..	..	..	..	..	..	12	6	0	10	14	0	1 12 0
Koroit .. ..	..	..	..	..	..	12	0	0	10	8	0	1 12 0
Warrnambool ..	..	..	..	..	..	12	5	0	10	13	6	1 11 6

Then you asked for the estimated cost of the maintenance of the proposed line. The estimated cost of the maintenance of the proposed line between Hopetoun and Minapre would be £55 per mile per annum until such time as renewals commence, and thereafter the maintenance expenses would be increased to approximately £85 per mile per annum. Then I put in a statement of the average yield of grain per acre from the Government Statist's Branch for the whole of the county of Karkaroc for the years 1891-2 to 1902-3, as follows:—

Chief Traffic Manager's Office,  
Melbourne, 14th November, 1903.

Memo.

*Re* estimate of average yield in normal seasons for district in area from Hopetoun to Minapre.  
From Government Statist's Branch I have obtained the following data for the whole of the county of Karkaroc:—

Normal years—

1891-2 .. ..	..	..	..	..	bushels.	..	bags.
1892-3 .. ..	..	..	..	..	8·07	..	2·01
1893-4 .. ..	..	..	..	..	11·30	..	2·82
1894-5 .. ..	..	..	..	..	10·42	..	2·61
					8·13	..	2·03

— Average bags per acre, 2·37.

Drought years—

1895-6 .. ..	..	..	..	..	2·37	..	0·59
1896-7 .. ..	..	..	..	..	2·66	..	0·66
1897-8 .. ..	..	..	..	..	0·99	..	0·22
1898-9 .. ..	..	..	..	..	3·38	..	0·84
1899-1900 ..	..	..	..	..	2·93	..	0·73
1900-1901 ..	..	..	..	..	6·41	..	1·63
1901-2 .. ..	..	..	..	..	3·77	..	0·94
1902-3 .. ..	..	..	..	..	0·22	..	0·05

— Average bags per acre, 0·70.

The average quantity of seed sown per acre for Mallee districts is 0·58 bushels, and for the whole State, 0·82.

C. H. BARBER,  
Special Traffic Officer.

R. Lochhead, Esq.,  
Chief Traffic Manager.

294. *By Mr. Graham.*—Does that include the drought years?—Yes. The average of 2·37 bags per acre was only for the normal years of 1891-2 to 1894-5. During the drought years, from 1895-6 to 1902-3, the average yield was seven-tenths of a bag per acre. In the year 1901 the yield was 1·63 bags; but in no other case during those drought years did it reach one bag per acre. Now the only point not covered by these returns is as to the probability of through traffic between the points named. I have been recently over the line to Mildura, and have seen the development there, and I should say that a cart

once a week, if not once a month, would carry all the through business that there would be. I can see no justification whatever for building a line from Hopetoun to Minapre, much less to Gorya, for any through business that there will be for years. The Mallee territory from Minapre onwards is absolutely unproductive at the present time till you reach the Mildura settlement; and fruit is about all they have there for shipment. The fruit-growers at Mildura are, generally speaking, turning their attention to the production of raisins and dried fruits, so that the quantity of dried fruits consumed in the districts south of Hopetoun would be about the extent of the traffic from Mildura, *via* the proposed line.

295. *By the Hon. J. H. Abbott.*—There is not much settlement on that route?—Practically none north of Minapre till you reach Irymple, which is 4 miles from Mildura.

296. *By the Chairman.*—You are very emphatic that there is no justification for the line?—Yes; neither for local business nor for through business.

297. *By the Hon. J. H. Abbott.*—What about the “national” aspect?—If you will kindly explain what the “national” aspect means in this case, I may then be able to answer.

298. *By Mr. Grose.*—Have you considered the Darling country in connexion with the through traffic—on the other side of the river?—Yes.

299. Statements have been made to us that store sheep and a lot of produce would come there; that there would be an interchange of produce between the Western district and the Darling country?—I think that such a traffic would be extremely limited and very problematical; moreover, there is rail connexion already to Mildura from the Western district, *via* Maryborough, only a few miles longer than by way of Hopetoun.

300. Not sufficient to justify this connexion by way of Hopetoun?—Certainly not.

301. *By the Hon. D. Melville.*—This railway has been asked for by somebody—the people in the Western district and at Ballarat want this loop?—Ballarat has an excellent direct connexion with Mildura without building this line from Hopetoun.

302. In the letter which the Committee sent you it was stated that—“The extension of the Hopetoun line has not been urged on local grounds as nearly all the country that would be opened up by it is already served by either the Hopetoun line or the Mildura railway. The advocates of the proposed extension declared that it would be a ‘national line,’ inasmuch as it would give the residents of the Western districts of Victoria, and also those of the Northern Mallee, Mildura, and Wentworth, a rapid and cheap means of interchanging products and stock.” What is your answer to that?—My answer to that is that there is no traffic of that kind to be developed that can not be carried by the existing line *via* Maryborough, as you will see by a glance at the map.

303. That takes us to the whole Mallee question. Do you count that the Mallee lines are paying?—I do not think that is within the scope of the inquiry I was asked to deal with this morning. I would prefer not to go beyond that.

304. I suppose you have gone into the question of the paying character of the present Mallee lines, and the average that would be likely to accrue to this proposed branch?—Yes; there is no point on the line between Hopetoun and Minapre that would be 8 miles from an existing railway station.

305. Then you do not at any point see anything that you can do to comply with the desire of the people of Portland and Hamilton, and round that way, to give them more rapid communication?—The building of this railway 15 miles long would not be justified for that purpose.

306. Is not £34,000 a mere bagatelle?—It is £34,000.

307. I suppose you have taken into account the statements as to shipping lambs to England, and bringing stock down to the fine grasses, and better rainfall?—Yes. There is a route now *via* the Mildura and Maryborough line that will admit of any such shipments being made—[*showing on map*].

308. What about the saving of time by the proposed line?—My answer is that there would be very little saving, if any, because the train service on the Hopetoun line, and on this projected line, would of necessity be a very limited and slow one.

309. *By the Hon. J. H. Abbott.*—Did you read the evidence that was taken by this Committee at various places in favour of this line?—I did not read it in detail. I preferred to approach the question with an unprejudiced mind; but I have been through the Western district—a large part of it—and up the Mildura line, and am able to form a fair and, I think, unprejudiced opinion of the value and need of this railway.

310. Certain reasons were brought before the Committee?—I was aware of those reasons.

311. *By the Chairman.*—According to this return you have given, from Yelta *via* Woomelang, say to Hamilton, Portland, or Koroit, as against *via* Hopetoun and Gorya, you make a difference of simply 9d. a ton?—Not as much as that in some cases.

312. In the other cases, Port Fairy and Warrnambool, it is 6d. per ton; and to the whole of those five stations I have mentioned it would only come to 1d. a case on fruit; do you think if people have to pay 6d. to 9d. a ton more on grain, potatoes, chaff, and fodder, and 1d. per case on fruit, over the charge on existing lines, that it would in any way injure those industries?—I think not; because the over-sea shipment of those commodities from Western district ports is very problematical. The experience of the past shows that grain, potatoes, chaff, fodder, green fruit, &c., would be shipped either by way of Geelong or Melbourne for export.

*The witness withdrew.*

*Adjourned.*