

WESTERN HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS COMMISSION.

R E P O R T

OF THE

C O M M I S S I O N

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO

CERTAIN MATTERS AFFECTING THE INTERESTS OF
THE POPULATION

OF THE

WESTERN HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS OF
SCOTLAND.



L O N D O N :

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Warrant appointing the Commission, with a Copy of the Instructions issued to the Commissioners.

WHEREAS it has been deemed expedient that a Commission should issue to inquire into certain matters affecting the interests of the population of the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland, I, the Most Honorable Schomberg Henry, Marquis of Lothian, K.T., Her Majesty's Secretary for Scotland, do hereby appoint Spencer Walpole, Esquire, Lieutenant-Governor of the Isle of Man, Sir James King, Baronet, Dugald Mackechnie, Esquire, Advocate, Sheriff of Chancery, Commander Arthur M. Farquhar, Royal Navy, John Wolfe Barry, Esquire, Civil Engineer, and Malcolm McNeill, Esquire, to be Commissioners for the purposes of this inquiry; the scope of which is more fully set forth in a letter of even date annexed hereto.

The said Commissioners are hereby empowered to summon before them such persons as they may judge necessary, and to call for such books, documents, papers, or records as they may require.

They are also authorised to visit and personally inspect such places as they may deem expedient for the purposes of their inquiry.

Given under my hand and seal at Whitehall, this 27th day of December 1889.

LOTHIAN,
Her Majesty's Secretary for Scotland.

(SEAL.)

Office of the Secretary for Scotland, Whitehall,
27th December 1889.

GENTLEMEN,

HER Majesty's Government have been pleased to appoint you to be Commissioners to inquire into and report upon certain matters affecting the interests of the population of the Western Islands and Islands of Scotland, and I have to furnish you with the following instructions for your guidance in conducting your investigations.

The area to be covered by the inquiry is primarily, the islands on the west coast of Scotland extending from latitude 58° 38' in the north to latitude 56° 16' in the south, and in a secondary degree the districts on the mainland which are adjacent to the west coast and which are likely, either from their relation to the islands, their situation, or local peculiarities, to be affected by considerations similar to those which present themselves in the islands.

Much destitution and consequent discontent exist among the population of these districts, and the objects which Her Majesty's Government have in view is to ascertain whether any, and, if so, what, measures can be adopted to remedy these evils by developing the natural resources of the districts in question, or otherwise.

Various schemes and proposals which have already been made on the subject will be laid before you; but you are at liberty to consider and report upon any others which may suggest themselves to you in the course of your inquiry.

The proposals to which I have more particularly to direct your attention in the first instance are those which refer to a possible development of the fishing industry in the Western Islands. On this point you will inquire:—

- (1.) Whether adequate evidence can be adduced of the existence of a sufficient quantity of fish in the seas adjacent to the islands to employ remuneratively a proportion of the population materially larger than that now engaged in the fishing industry.
- (2.) If so, what steps can be taken to develop the industry, either by—
 - (a.) affording further assistance in obtaining suitable boats and tackle;
 - (b.) additional or improved harbour accommodation, piers, landing-places, lighthouses, and beacons;
 - (c.) greater facilities of transport to the southern markets, whether by land or sea carriage;
 - (d.) increased telegraphic and postal communication; or
 - (e.) in any other way.
- (3.) How far these objects require to be carried out or assisted by grants from public funds, and what co-operation may be looked for from local sources.

As regards this head of your inquiry, it is proper to state that Her Majesty's Government do not contemplate any expenditure of a purely charitable character, or such as merely aims at the relief of temporary distress or the temporary employment of labour. Nor do they wish to establish at the public expense any competition with existing private enterprise. It is their desire to consider only such proposals as are directed towards the initiation or development of an industry which, once established, affords a prospect within some reasonable period of being self-supporting, but which, owing to the absence of capital or some similar cause, is not at present able to establish or develop itself.

Her Majesty's Government also desire that every opportunity (consistent with the speedy prosecution of your labours) should be given to the inhabitants of the districts in question to offer suggestions on their own part, and to express their views on the several questions submitted to you. It will therefore be desirable that you should personally visit as many of the localities as possible, and take evidence on the spot. The Board of Admiralty have been requested to place one of Her Majesty's ships at your disposal for this purpose.

As the matters above referred to are of some urgency, Her Majesty's Government would be glad to receive your report at as early a date as possible, and it would render them material assistance in considering any recommendations which you may make if you would state your views as to the relative importance of the several measures, and the order in which they should be undertaken.

Mr. G. H. Murray, of the Treasury, has been directed to act as your secretary.

I am, &c.

(Signed) LOTHIAN.

To Spencer Walpole, Esq., Sir James
King, Bart., Sheriff Mackenzie,
Commander Farquhar, John
Wolfe Barry, Esq., and Malcolm
McNeill, Esq.

Office of the Secretary for Scotland,
Whitehall, 2nd April 1890.

GENTLEMEN,

By my letter of the 27th of December last the area to be covered by your inquiry was defined within prescribed limits.

I have now to inform that Her Majesty's Government have been pleased to extend the area of inquiry so as to include certain localities in the north coasts of Sutherland and Caithness, and in the Orkney and Shetland Islands.

I am, &c.

(Signed) LOTHIAN.

To the Members of the Highlands and
Islands Commission of Inquiry.

Office of the Secretary for Scotland,
Whitehall, 22nd May 1890.

GENTLEMEN,

REFERRING to my letters of the 27th of December last and the 2nd ultimo, I have now to inform you that Her Majesty's Government have agreed to an extension beyond the southern limit formerly fixed for the area of your inquiry, so as to include Portnahaven in the Island of Islay.

I am, &c.

(Signed) LOTHIAN.

The Members of the Highlands and
Islands Commission of Inquiry.