

863. The Committee understand that if a few hanks were merely drawn out of a line—say, one in ten or one in fifty bales—there would be no additional charge?—No additional charge, except in the case of flax in the stack, when it would have to be broken out of the stack, and in that case we charge just the bare cost of labour. No charge is made for drawing a single hank out. I may say I think that hank is apt to get wasted.

864. It has been stated in evidence that bales of different quality are often dumped together by the Harbour Board men?—Not recently. At first that practice was pursued, but when my attention was drawn to the matter I gave orders that it should not be continued, and these orders were carried out, and I am quite certain it is not done now. I do not think there is any case recently where bales with different marks have been dumped together. I am quite clear it is not done, unless by direction of the flax-owners, or under instructions from the ship. The instructions are that all bales with similar marks shall be dumped together, and not bales with separate marks. That is carried out. I am quite clear about that.

865. Can you give the Committee any information as to the possibilities of moist flax firing?—I am very doubtful myself about it. We took a bale of tow, which had been disowned, a couple of years ago, and I tried an experiment with it. I put it in a 400-gallon tank and let it lie there for some time, and on examination we found there was no heat; the flax was simply rotten. I do not think there is much chance of moist flax firing. We have had bales brought to us which have been very wet, and we have had to throw them on one side.

866. In cases where wet flax is sent down from the mills you do not ship it?—No. We call the attention of the Marine Surveyor, Captain Bendall, to it, and, as the men who are engaged on the work are very careful, I have no reason at all to doubt that this wet flax is stopped.

867. *Mr. Walker.*] Do you consider 2s. per bale a fair charge for opening the flax?—We tried an experiment to find out how many bales we opened in the day, and we thereon concluded to adopt that charge, and it has been proved that the charge is not too high. We make very little out of it. The stuff is very much scattered about in examination, and it has to be readjusted and carried to the press.

868. Are the men who bale baling all day?—Recently they have been, because so much has passed through. I do not say the men have been engaged the whole day, because they have other work to perform, but they are pretty well occupied at the work all the day.

869. Compared with the wool charge it is a high charge?—With wool there are no individual hanks. You must not compare baling with dumping. In the case of flax, the hanks which have been strewn about have to be collected and all laid out in order in the box and pressed down by hand. It is then taken afterwards and dumped, if it is to be dumped, in the hydraulic press. I do not see how the work could be done more cheaply. There is one other point I would like to call attention to. I think that a great deal of the flax is wetted unnecessarily in coming down by rail. A very large quantity of wet flax comes down by the railways. There seems to be great carelessness somewhere. It may be that the stuff is loaded wet at the other end. I do not know that it is the fault of the railways. When the stuff has arrived here it has had to be opened out; and you can see all along the fences near the railway the flax hanging and strewn about for the purpose of drying it. We have to rebale that, and we charge the railway people for doing it.

870. Is that owing to insufficient storage-accommodation at the various railway-stations?—It is either that or carelessness on the part of the millers, or some of the people connected with the transmission of it; possibly they have not tarpaulins provided and do not cover it up. I think it is unfair to the industry, because all damaged stuff, when rebaled like that, is not the same as when it is baled at the mill. For instance, our sized bales are not the same size as the bales used by some of the millers. I consider that there should be a standard-sized box amongst the millers up country.

871. *The Chairman.*] If the trade were developed there is no doubt you would have bale-accommodation the same size as is in use in the country?—We took what was a mean size when we had our first press made. Subsequently, finding it was slightly different from most of the bales, I ordered the second press, so as to better average the size of the millers' bales. The bales vary very much in weight, width, and height. No two millers send the same class of stuff down.

872. It is important to the industry that the bales should be of uniform size?—I think so, undoubtedly. I do not think there is any question about that.

873. What sized bale, as regards weight, do you recommend—from $2\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. to 4 cwt.?—I do not see any from this district as low as $2\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. We have a penal clause that if a bale exceeds $4\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. it is charged one and a half rates.

874. *Mr. Walker.*] Are your charges by the bale?—All by the bale. I do not see how we could make a tonnage charge.

875. Are the railway charges by the bale?—They charge 1s. 6d. per ton haulage—five bales to the ton.

876. Have they got a penal clause as to weight?—I do not know.

877. They have in the case of wool?—Yes.

878. They charge double?—I am not aware. We found it necessary to make such a penal clause: it was principally through wool it was enacted. Some of the wool bales became enormous— $7\frac{3}{4}$ cwt.—and we had to stop it. I do not see my way to make a tonnage rate, because of the difficulty and great extra work it would entail in the way of clerical work and everything else. A bale charge seems to me to be the simplest plan. About five weeks ago I had all the flax in the shed examined, and an average weight taken, and the weight exceeded $3\frac{3}{4}$ cwt. I do not say that was a true average, but it was sufficiently approximate for the purposes for which I wanted it.

879. What was the weight?—Over 3 cwt. It was $3\frac{3}{4}$ cwt. 3qr. 18lb.

880. *Major Steward.*] The average weight of a bale should be really 3 cwt. or 4 cwt.?—Yes.

881. *Mr. Walker.*] Do you not think that the method of charging by the bale has rather induced them to pack as heavily as they can?—I think that is desirable if you can get the bales