

Well, the statement was that it would make a difference of £5 or £6 a ton. If we could be certain of every bale there would be a difference of £5 or £6 a ton. There has been a great deal of uncertainty about the flax coming in. I must confess some of the bales looked very well outside, but when opened up are not good inside. Some is scutched immediately after being taken from the field; therefore damp. I do not think there is much intentional dishonesty on the part of the millers. Unless the Government or some other authorised body were to grade the flax it would be utterly impossible for private individuals to grade it with any satisfaction to the trade, because, if I grade flax in three different qualities—one, two, and three—my next door neighbour might grade his as equal to mine, and there would be, perhaps, no uniformity in the grading. The only way in which I can see an approach to uniformity would be to establish a certain number of grades, taking samples of them, and sending them all over the world—to London, New York, and Boston—as standards; also sending the same to correspondents in New Zealand; and I should insist on every bale being cut open and examined.

316. *Major Steward.*] How many grades—two or three classes, or more?—I think about five classes.

317. Where should the grading take place?—At the ports of shipment.

318. How many?—Three or four ports of shipment would be ample at present, at any rate. I believe the cost to the Government would be nothing, because the fees would pay for the guarantee that the flax had been examined, and was as represented.

319. And would the fee recoup the Government?—Well, a very small sum, about 2s. or 3s. a ton, would produce about £4,500 per annum. As to the cost of opening the bales and rebaling them and redumping them, it could be amply made up by the present Harbour Board charges, which are excessive.

320. *The Chairman.*] Would the inspection be compulsory?—No; that is quite unnecessary; from the fact of it being ungraded flax it would not be bought at all.

321. In opening the bales, which you say would have to be done, where would the inspection take place. You would have to cut the lashings and rebale too?—Yes, cut the lashings. I may say the whole cost of hanking and putting in bales at the present time is something like 10s. a ton, and we pay 10s. for dumping alone after it comes to Wellington.

322. Do you think it would be well for the flax to be classified before being put through the machine?—Do you mean as to lengths?

323. Not only as to lengths, but as to quality?—I do not know. I have seen it done, but I have not seen any practical advantage in the way of increasing the value. Even now no one dresses the flax without cutting out the spoiled and decayed leaves. The only advantage in cutting the flax the same length is that it is scutched more regularly. I do not think there is very much in that. The Government could not interfere in any way with that. The grader would have to put his seal on the bale to say what it was.

324. In reference to the quality of the fibre, do you not consider it depends very much on the class of flax, seeing the difference in sorts?—I cannot say. I may tell you this: that in the month of December, until the beginning of March, the flax generally is much more brittle, dry, and powdery than in any other part of the year. That is rather a peculiar thing, but I can hardly tell you the reason of it.

325. Your attention has never been drawn to the difference in the various varieties of flax, and you have never made experiments?—No, never.

326. *Major Steward.*] One witness told us yesterday that he was shipping flax in 5cwt. bales: what is your size of bale?—From 3cwt. to 4cwt.

327. *Mr. Wilson.*] When we formed the deputation to the Premier about the bonus, and he asked you whether, in your opinion, the grading should not go on at the port of shipment, you said no?—I did not state that positively. I could not then see any special advantage. Since then I have thought it out, and seen the practical assistance it would be to know the quality of the bales. It is a most important thing that the grading should be done; so much so, that the association would do it themselves if the Government would not. I think that, after considering the matter.

328. *The Chairman.*] If in opening the bale it should be found of unequal quality, would it be a proper system that the whole bale should be classed as the worst, or should it be drafted by the Inspector?—I think so. I should make a special charge, and if the miller wished the bale graded and selected he should pay for it. There is an additional cost in taking out the hanks, and the miller would have to pay for that.

329. That would be a matter of cost between the grower and grader?—Yes.

330. Do you consider that the Inspector should have his own staff for baling and selecting, independent of the Harbour Board staff?—I think it might be left either way. It might be done as in the Customhouse, having a special man to look after that particular work. I think there should be two departments with special officers—one, the Inspector, who should charge 6d. per bale for inspection; and the other 2s. for repacking and dumping, which are two different things altogether. Repacking and dumping might be done almost by anybody—by the Harbour Board, or by a private company.

331. *Major Steward.*] The bales should be made a uniform size of 5cwt. instead of 2cwt., not exceeding so much?—Yes, I think so. The Harbour Board charge for anything more than 4½cwt.

332. *The Chairman.*] As a practical shipper of flax, do you not think it possible that the inspection department might be so arranged that the officials could assist one another?—Yes.

333. Such a system would be possible, but it is a question of detail to be hereafter arranged?—Yes; another advantage to the colony in having the flax graded, we should be able to sell here without any reclamations. During the last flax excitement, when the flax arrived in London it was sometimes not received as of the reputed quality in which it left New Zealand. They rejected it as