

not quite up to the mark. I think if you drew at random samples from the average number of bales, you could get a fair estimate of what they should be classed.

722. It would warrant the Government in putting on the brand—first, second, third, or fourth, as the case might be?—Yes.

723. *Major Steward.*] Is it the duty of the Harbour Board staff to interfere in a matter of that sort? Would it not be necessary, if this special labour was going to be placed upon them, that they should make some further charge, or as an alternative, that the Inspector should have two or three men at his beck and call. Do you think, under the circumstances, that the inspection could be carried out simply by the Inspector, without any provision for labour?—What I now recommend would be suitable to our own port.

724. Yes?—If any members of the Committee would step down to the wharf they would see that the Harbour Board have provided a shed, the upper floor of which has been set apart entirely for the purpose of examining flax. The Harbour Board's charge for opening and allowing inspection and rebaling at present is 2s. per bale, and I think all shippers will agree that is a moderate and reasonable charge.

725. *The Chairman.*] Does that include dumping?—They re-dump it.

726. That includes dumping?—Yes. I mean that they make it exactly as it was before they opened it.

727. *Major Steward.*] It would be inspected and rebaled before the dumping process in any case?—Yes. So far, the Harbour Board have made no charge for giving assistance in pulling out the individual hanks, and I think that system might go on.

728. So far as this port is concerned, where there are facilities?—There is every facility here for the purpose.

729. But where there are no facilities there would be labour provided for the rebaling, if necessary?—I do not think a staff would be necessary. I think where the bales are opened, the present charge should be in addition to what we have named as the inspection charge. Some of the Boards might put it cheaper; but 2s. seems not an unreasonable rate, because you get the whole laid down on a floor, and you can examine every hank.

730. That would mean a general charge of 6d. for each inspection?—You would not open every bale. On the average it might be 7d. per bale.

731. *The Chairman.*] You think the Harbour Board charges reasonable on the whole?—Yes, for that work, because they have had to provide special accommodation for the purpose, and special presses, and they give the labour. I dare say it pays them very well, but it has given a deal of trouble.

732. *Mr. Walker.*] Are you aware of any fibre or similar product which is subject to an inspection of the kind that is now proposed, in other parts of the world?—I believe manila is. They have a grade they start from, and it is then worked upon percentage off. You sell manila at 5 per cent. off, or 7 per cent. off.

733. *Major Steward.*] Off a given standard?—Yes.

734. *Mr. Walker.*] Who fixes those grades, do you know?—I am not certain if it is a Government matter. But I understand it is a very rare thing to find the quality turn out different from the guarantee.

735. *The Chairman.*] You do not know anything about sisal in the same way?—No; but I have a sample which was sent to me, and I will send it up to the Committee, of New Zealand phormium grown in St. Michael's, prepared there, and sent to London for sale. I do not know what machine they can be using, or whether the dressing is done by chemicals. The Committee will be able to form an opinion on that: it is of a beautiful colour and nice-looking flax, and it was sold at £3 per ton above the highest price going for New Zealand at the time. It was not a large shipment, only about forty or fifty bales, and was the first that had gone.

736. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] As far as you know, our flax is used for no other purpose than for rope and binder twine?—Not to my knowledge. I do not think it could be while the present process of manufacture obtains, because, as I have said before, it injures the whole fibre. But this phormium is capable of being subdivided into most minute threads, and if we could get some means of dressing it, I do not know that it is not possible for it to be used for other purposes.

737. From your experience is it suitable for canvas?—I cannot say it is, in its present state.

738. *The Chairman.*] Who is the expert you have had examining your flax?—I chiefly examined our own myself, because it was a matter requiring great care.

739. Then, as an expert I would ask you, is that a good sample before you?—Yes, a very nice sample; it is very clean, but it has not got the bright colour one would like to see. It looks almost as if it had been chemically prepared, it is so white. There is more of a golden hue about the ordinary prepared flax.

740. *Mr. Walker.*] That would be called pale?—Well it is of a palish hue, but this is well cleaned at the ends. Is it cleaned by machinery?

*The Chairman:* By Chinnery's machine, at Christchurch.

Captain EDWIN BABOT, examined.

741. *The Chairman.*] You are Marine Superintendent for the Shaw, Savill and Albion Company?—Yes.

742. We want information from you as to the general state of the fibre as received from the mills for shipment?—Well, it has been improved very much of late.

743. It has been improved of late; but some time ago the shipments were very inferior?—Yes.

744. Have you found that there was much moisture in the samples as sent down from the mills?—Occasionally we have had a few bales.