

I do not think it is a freight; I call it a tax. The tariff charged for the carriage of frozen meat in New Zealand, as compared with that of other colonies, is a disgrace to New Zealand when you consider the volume of trade.

129. Has there been any concession in carrying frozen meat as compared with the rates charged when the trade was first instituted?—There has been one concession, as far as Islington is concerned, and that amounts to 1s. a ton.

130. Otherwise, notwithstanding the large growth of the trade, the sheep-breeder gets no benefit?—He gets no benefit.

131. In the event of a reasonable concession being made in the freight, who would get the benefit of it?—The sheep-farmer would at once.

132. Have you any complaint you wish to make with regard to the administration of the railways, so far as the handling of your products are concerned, or is there any improvement you can suggest in connection with the working of the trade in frozen meat only?—Before you leave the matter of railway freight I would like to say that I think tallow is treated even worse than frozen meat. Fairfield is fifty-five miles from Lyttelton—I am referring to our second works at Ashburton—and the railage on tallow is £1 4s. 10d. a ton. Now, you know that tallow is packed in 7 cwt. casks, and goes in the ordinary trucks. It pays the same rate as for butter in 10 cwt. lots, and you see at once that the quantity is infinitely greater, while cost of handling must be less. Tallow goes in the ordinary trucks, whereas for butter insulated trucks have to be provided; and butter, as you know, is three times the value of tallow.

133. You mean that the railage on half a ton of butter is the same—what is the exact tariff?—Tallow and butter are carried at the same price so long as the butter is carried in half-tons. The railage is £1 4s. 10d. a ton for tallow, but we are not allowed to send a truck out of a siding with less than a ton and a half of anything in it. We never send tallow in less than full trucks. Another thing I might mention is in connection with sheep-trucks used for conveying stock to the works, which frequently are in a most disgraceful condition; and, of course, in busy seasons we cannot get our stuff into the works because there are no trucks to send it by.

134. *Mr. Field.*] Have you anything to say with regard to steamer freights: are they excessive?—No. I think they are now very reasonable.

135. We have had it in evidence here that sheep for butchering purposes have gone from the North to Christchurch, and been sold there at half as much again as was offered for them here—that is to say, the meat companies here have offered 10s. for sheep that have been sold at Addington for 14s. or 15s.?—That would be quite probable.

136. Can you give any reason why it should be so?—Frequently in Canterbury lately they have been very short of butchers' meat, the prices ruling for frozen meat being such that all the good stuff is frozen and exported; and it is a very expensive thing for the local butchers to compete with the exporters buying that class of sheep. Therefore, if they can get North Island sheep for so much less than they can buy Canterbury sheep, they would naturally buy the North Island sheep.

137. It has been stated that the butchers in Christchurch charge more for their meat than the butchers in Wellington do?—I believe they do, but I do not know what the prices are in Wellington.

138. We admit here that for freezing purposes the Canterbury sheep are of more value than North Island sheep, but can you from your experience give us the difference in value?—I could not. As I have told the Committee, my company does not buy, and I do not follow the prices of sheep as others do.

139. You buy no sheep at all?—No.

140. Do you think the Government could assist the trade in any way at the other end?—I do not think so.

141. We had a witness here the other day who gave evidence to the effect that he was dissatisfied with things in the Old Country. He said he was in favour of combination, but did not see how it could be brought about. Do you not think that the Government could possibly be of some assistance and might aid in the scheme of concentration, distribution, and sale to the consumer at Home?—I do not think the Government could.

142. Do you think there is any remedy which lies in the hands of farmers or the meat-dealers themselves?—I think the evils complained of are more imaginary than real.

143. You think things are fairly satisfactory at Home?—Yes. Take Canterbury—and I think the same thing applies here. There are many people who have local buyers here buying on the spot, and they are selling under contract to London salesmen.

144. We have heard that dealers at Home make large fortunes in one season out of New Zealand lamb?—I have not heard of them.

145. You have not heard of any large sums of money being made out of New Zealand lamb?—No.

146. *The Chairman.*] Have you any other statement you would like to make which could be added to your evidence?—I was going to say that, with regard to the trade in Canterbury, as far as I know, the farmers are quite satisfied with the way in which the business is being carried on. They have always two or three auctions for the disposal of their stock—that is, they can either sell them on their legs at the farm, or send them to the nearest market, and there is no place in Canterbury that is fifty miles from a market; and then they have the option of sending their stock to the factory and selling it at per pound on the factory certificates. They also have the further option of taking it to the London market if they wish, and to whatever consignee they like. Our freezing-works are equal to all requirements, and the farmers, as a class, are very satisfied with the business.

147. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*] You spoke of men selling their sheep at the factory at per pound?—Yes.