

34. Do the rates of freight fluctuate very much?—No. For many years there has been an understanding that the winter rates shall be lower than the summer rates, so as to induce the farmers to turn over winter sheep; but the rates of freight, I think, have not been changed for a couple of years or more. The rates are fairly low as compared with Australia, but the Australian rates fluctuate more. Sometimes they pay more, and sometimes less, than we do. We are protected by agreements with the shipping companies, and we get our uniform steamer rate through the "push" of the season, when rates are sometimes higher in Australia.

35. Is it not the case that at certain seasons you have a great amount of difficulty in putting through the stock the farmers want to get rid of?—The freezing appliances have hardly been equal to the demand of farmers during the past two or three years in this Island. I think it is quite possible that if the freezing companies had been able to take the meat as fast as the farmers and dealers wanted them, the ships could not have taken it.

36. Do you know if there have been many complaints from farmers that they have been positively unable to get rid of their stock?—During the last two years, if you take February, we have been somewhere about fifty or sixty thousand sheep behind in our work.

37. And through your buyers declining to take stock the sheep have deteriorated in price and quality?—I do not know that they have deteriorated in price, but they might deteriorate in quality. If you could have freezing facilities and ships enough at the time the farmers want you to take their stock away, you would almost inevitably have a slump in the English market.

38. Do you think it would lead to an improvement if there were cool-stores at the port of departure of sufficient capacity to enable you to regulate the supply from month to month?—I think there are enough cool-stores if you take all the works in New Zealand, and with the extensions now going on.

39. Are you, then, in a position to arrange satisfactorily with the shipowners, so that vessels will have prompt despatch and will know exactly what cargo they are going to receive? Do they know exactly what they are going to get?—They know now that they are not going to get anything to put in their boats for some time; and there are two boats—the "Ionic" and another one—now lying in the harbour here waiting for cargo. They will be anchored in the harbour for the next two months, because they know they will not get anything to carry away.

40. Do you not think that could be avoided if the supply could be properly regulated?—I do not think so. I do not think the people here or at Home want it regulated to that extent. People will have the stuff when they want it if they can afford to pay for it. If the farmer and dealer are satisfied to have it taken away, away it goes. If you were a large grower or dealer in fruit you would not necessarily refuse to sell to people in the summer because you thought your fruit might bring a better price in winter if you were satisfied to sell at the price offered in summer. The thing would be governed by the ordinary law of demand, and that is the case with the meat. The thing would be equalised if there could be a large quantity of winter-fattened meat turned out.

41. I think you said that New Zealand frozen lamb in the English market is preferred to Home-grown?—I think many people prefer it.

42. Does it fetch the same price?—I think so, in the higher class of shops. Butchers' prices are like doctors' charges—they charge according to the position of the people who buy.

43. *Sir W. R. Russell.* I do not know whether you have considered the subject of focussing the places of departure of steamers, so as to prevent vessels going round New Zealand for small parcels?—Yes; but the steamers are so large that it would be difficult to load them up at one port. I am frequently asked if, instead of putting forty thousand sheep into two steamers—that is, twenty thousand into one and twenty thousand into another—we would put the forty thousand into one steamer; and I say No, because the people we sell it to do not want it all to arrive in the docks at one time. They want it distributed. The ships are so large in proportion to the quantity of meat they carry that unless they pick it up from different ports it is difficult to get them filled. No doubt it adds to the expense to go round to the small ports.

44. Then you think that storage in the various ports of New Zealand for small consignments is inevitable?—I think you might extend the ports to an extent that would be inadvisable. The ships go to quite enough places to pick up meat as it is, but I do not see how these very large boats can avoid going to three or four ports at times.

45. Can you give me any idea as to the difference in cost if the mutton came down, say, from Wanganui by truck, or was taken on board by tender?—I think it would cost 7d. or 8d. a carcass more to carry it by train. You would save lighterage, which is 4d., and the cost of carriage by rail, I think, is a little over 1s., so that it would be more than 7d. or 8d. a carcass.

46. Is the freight Home the same from Wanganui as it is from Wellington?—Yes; all freights are the same.

47. You think it would be impossible to get a combination amongst the steamship-owners to save the waste of time which takes place through the steamers having to go round the coast?—I think so. The managers say, "If we do not go to Wanganui others will." If works were established at the mouth of the Patea River, for instance, I think they would go there for the meat.

48. Has this peregrination of New Zealand by the steamers had anything to do with the rate of freight from New Zealand?—I think it has. Supposing the steamers could load in Wellington or Lyttelton—at either of these two ports, or both of them—I think it would go without saying that they could carry the meat for less money.

49. Do you think they could arrange with one vessel to load up, say, in Wanganui, another in Wellington, and another in Lyttelton during the summer months to prevent that?—No; because the quantity carried by each steamer is too large. There are only three companies—the Gear Company, the Meat Export Company, and Longburn—that load in Wellington. They would say, "We do not want to ship forty thousand carcasses at one time; we want to divide it into four or five lots."