

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

INVERCARGILL, 27TH MARCH, 1909.

WALTER HORACE BRENT sworn and examined. (No. 1.)

Witness : I am not prepared to make a statement, but I am in a position to answer questions. I have only just returned from the north. I could make a statement on Monday morning next.

Hon. the Chairman : Is it the wish of the Commission that we excuse Mr. Brent for the present ?—Agreed to.

EDWARD COOPER LEARY sworn and examined. (No. 2.)

Witness : I am secretary of the association of a few sawmillers, but it is not a registered association. We call it the Otago and Southland Sawmillers' Association.

Hon. the Chairman : We require you to make a statement, and questions will be asked you later.

Mr. Leary : As far as practical sawmilling goes, I can say nothing. I can only tell you about the association. It was formed about July, 1907.

1. *Hon. the Chairman* : How many members were there at that time ?—There were eighteen.

2. Will you kindly give their names ?—I think it is confidential.

3. It depends upon what the Commission may consider confidential, and I do not think it is breaking any confidence to know the names of the men in the association ?—I have no authority from them to give the names, and it might be considered by them as confidential. I have been out of town, and have had no meeting of the association. I have no authority to give this information, but I have not been told not to give it.

4. We will waive that in the meantime ?—If called on I may be able to give it later. I may state that they represent about twenty-one mills, and there were seventy-three mills altogether. They represent about twenty-one or twenty-two out of the seventy-three—about one-third. I think there are seventy-three in the Southland District altogether, but I think that includes Catlin's River as well.

5. *Mr. Field* : There are not seventy-three in Southland ?—No, I do not think so. The exact information could be got for the Commission without any difficulty. I am not speaking from any list I have had, but merely from memory and from conversations I have had.

6. *Hon. the Chairman* : Are you prepared to answer any questions with regard to the workings of this association ?—Yes, I think so.

7. What were the special features for which it was formed—that is, when they formed the association there were some rules and regulations laid down with regard to the disposal of timber and many other things ?—Yes, in the notification I got from your secretary last night I was asked to produce the memorandum. There is not a great deal in it, and it is in the same position, because I do not think I should be justified in producing it without the authority of my association unless it was given in committee.

8. I do not want to commit you to anything that would be injurious to your association in any way. We want to get all information possible, and you will be prepared to give it later, I suppose ?—Yes, with the authority of the association I am quite prepared to give it.

9. We have power to call for it, but we do not want that ?—I am pretty sure the association will agree to it. Of course, I can give it now in committee.

Mr. Barber : We must not allow this to be established as a precedent, because, if we do, it will hamper us throughout the Dominion. Those who constitute the association are well known in the district, and their names should be made public. If we agree to what is suggested, every other association will claim a similar privilege. Of course, I am aware there may be confidential matters which we should regard as confidential. The position of the association is well known, just as there is in Wellington an association, and there is nothing confidential about it.

Mr. Mander : The secretary has come here before he is quite ready. The association is not refusing to give any information we require, but the secretary has not got the authority to do so. We do not want to get the secretary into any difficulty. We had better let it stand over until he gets the authority.

Mr. Brent : I give him my authority. I will take the responsibility on behalf of the association on my shoulders.

Mr. Leary : In that case I will read the memorandum of association.

Memorandum of Association, Otago and Southland Sawmillers and Timber Merchants.

"It is hereby agreed that the undersigned are associated for the purpose of generally promoting and fostering their mutual interests, and to establish and maintain a uniform price for timber, and for the purpose of giving and receiving information which may tend to the general benefit.

"The business of the association shall be conducted by a secretary, who shall keep minutes of all meetings and carry out instructions as may be given by the association in general meeting. The secretary shall have power to investigate any alleged breaches of the rules, and shall report the result of his investigations to a general meeting.

"The minutes of the association as passed from time to time by general meetings shall be binding on all members.