

232. *Mr. Morris.*] I want your opinion as a sawmiller whether you consider it in the interests of this Dominion that cheap foreign timber should be allowed to flood the market?—Looking no further than my personal interests as a sawmiller—not looking at it in a general and comprehensive way—I can only say that I should like decidedly to increase the duty. I am quite sure that the West Coast is suffering from the Oregon.

233. You must bear in mind the great amount of capital involved in the industry, and also recognise the large source of employment resulting from it?—I do, indeed. You have my sympathy in that matter.

234. Generally as to the question of area allowed to sawmillers, I should like to have your opinion?—Eight hundred acres is allowed here in one lot, but I think they are increasing it to 1,200 acres. I think there are new regulations about to be issued allowing a sawmiller to take up an area in proportion to his horse-power. I have not seen the regulations, but I understand they are about to be issued.

235. I take it that you recognise that if we had more liberal conditions in regard to the area of bush timber in some cases it would enable a man to produce cheaper goods?—Yes, undoubtedly I do. That would lessen the cost of the timber to the consumer.

236. There are only some twenty-three mills here in what you call the nominal association?—Yes.

237. I presume that the forty-seven mills outside that association practically control the price?—Of course they determine the price.

238. Seeing that, they are in a big majority?—They are.

239. Then, the association cannot be accused of increasing the price to the public?—Oh, no! How can they? We try to get the highest price we can, and but for the forty-seven outside mills I have no doubt we should get a better price. That is just our trouble at this moment.

240. Do you export much timber from here?—No—if you mean, export out of the colony.

241. I think your policy for years back has been to conserve your timber?—Myself, personally?

242. Yes?—No, not at all. I should be glad to cut my timber in six months and get out of it. It would be the greatest mistake to spend my life here.

243. You have got a number of mills in which you are interested, and I presume you are able to keep them working at a small margin of profit owing to the fact that you are a merchant?—Yes.

244. Otherwise they would be closed up?—Most certainly one would be, or we should reduce the output immediately.

245. *Mr. Barber.*] You stated that the Southland mills were supplying cheaper than any other mills in the colony?—I think so.

246. And yet you are milling under very great disadvantages—you have very inferior bush in the first place, and yet you are able to supply timber cheaper than those who have fair bush to mill in. Can you explain the reason of that?—No. I dare say some of the other mills in the North Island are further away from the railway, or they may have some other disadvantages. I think it is the competition down here, for one thing.

247. With regard to the association, you said there were twenty-three mills in the association, but there are a larger number outside?—Yes.

248. And you said just now that the price of timber was controlled by the non-associated millers. Well, in your opinion, if a legally formed association were established in the district, with penalties for breaches of the rules and no one outside the association, would that be, in your opinion, a reason for keeping the price of timber up?—I think they could keep it up that way; but I do not say it would be a good reason.

249. If they had not the conditions which you have here it would increase the price of timber?—I think so.

250. As to the quantity of milling-timber available in this district, you said you were sure that milling would go on in this district for over thirty years?—I think so.

251. The Crown Lands Department in their report stated that the milling-timber on Crown lands, State forests, and forest reserves in the Southland District only amounted to 102,000 acres?—Yes.

252. So that if you divide that by 800, and the life of a mill in one of these areas is only six years, and if these reports are correct, the life of the bush in this district cannot last more than six years, and the whole timber area will disappear. That is in the report of 1906-7. In a later report it is said with regard to Southland that as there is not a very large supply of standing timber remaining in the district it is probable that the sawmill trade will gradually decrease, and at a not very distant date, judging from the present output, will cease to be an important factor in the industries of the province. Had you read that?—No, I had not.

253. You said that as a sawmiller you thought it was not a good thing that this Dominion should be swamped by cheap foreign timber?—Speaking as a sawmiller.

254. Now, do you consider that ordinary building sawn timber, undressed, sold at 17s. 6d. is a cheap foreign timber?—No, I certainly do not.

255. You think that a very fair price to pay for building-timber?—I think it is a very big price.

256. You said you did not think that it was fair that this colony should be swamped with cheap foreign timber?—Only as a sawmiller.

257. Now you say as a sawmiller that you do not think timber sold at 17s. 6d. is a cheap timber?—You did not mention Oregon.

258. The man who wants to build a house has to pay 17s. 6d. for this foreign timber, which is called cheap timber, and some millers are afraid it will come into competition with our home product?—If they get 17s. 6d. for it, I do not think they need be frightened.

259. *Hon. the Chairman.*] But is any one getting that for it?—We in New Zealand use it for the factory or for very long lengths.

260. But are you getting 17s. 6d. for it?—Yes.