

58. *Mr. Morris.*] I have got an extract from the *Gazette*: the rate is 4s. 7d.?—Then, you have to take the reduction off that. You will find another slip in the same *Gazette*.

59. I suppose this was also made in the interest of the West Coast?—Oh, yes! we have an interest in the West Coast. I do not think it has very much to complain of.

60. *Mr. Barber.*] Do you think the timber traffic in this district is likely to last very long?—Well, I do not know. Seaward Bush is getting cut out, and they have to go further back. There is a large quantity back of Orepuki and on the other side of the Waiau, but how long it will last I do not know. We have maintained an average of 28,000,000 ft. these last three years—that is, roughly, four or five millions less than some years ago.

61. Would it be a serious thing for the railway traffic if the timber traffic were to cease?—Oh, I do not know; most of the land is good. It is different to the West Coast, because you can make some use of it when the timber is gone.

62. Do you think 75 per cent. of the land would be useful without the timber?—Oh, yes! The land beyond Orepuki is beautiful.

63. Tell me the freight on imported timber from the Bluff to Invercargill?—1s. 11d.

64. Do you know what the wharfage is?—I think 1s. per thousand feet, but I am not quite sure about the wharfage.

65. The wharfage is only 1d. per hundred feet—that is, 4s. of a tax on imported timber to compete with the timber of this district?—Yes, putting it that way.

66. *Mr. Ell.*] When you say "rate and a half" what do you mean?—Rate and a half on whatever the initial rate is.

67. You are not taking into consideration the distance to be allowed for?—Rate and a half on the initial timber rate.

68. I suppose you cannot give us information with regard to the kind of timber used for sleepers?—I could not give you information about that.

69. The Engineer would be able to give that?—Yes.

70. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] Have you noticed any increase in the haulage since the reduction of the rates?—No, not yet. These reduced rates came into operation in January, and things were pretty slack down here at that time, and have not improved very much yet. Going back to February, the number of feet forwarded was 2,263,500, and for the previous January 1,337,850. We have not had time yet to see the effect.

71. How many branch lines have you got in this district?—Nine.

72. How long have they been laid down?—Some of them long before I was here: I could not give you the dates offhand. The line to Riverton was laid down about twenty-five years ago.

73. *Mr. Mander.*] Considering the fact that only 252,000 ft. of timber has been exported from this district during the last year, do you see any urgent necessity for an export duty on timber?—The export of timber is confined chiefly to birch and white-pine. About one-third of it has gone to Melbourne. It does not concern us very much. It is used in the furniture business.

74. You consider there is no urgent necessity for an export duty on timber?—I do not think so.

75. *Hon. the Chairman.*] With regard to the export of timber for furniture, do you think there is any falling-off in the export of that?—No, it is growing.

76. Are you aware that a duty was put on lately in Australia?—No. In 1907 we exported 446,000 ft., and last year it went up to 756,000 ft. The bulk of that has been used for furniture, and it is chiefly birch and white-pine.

77. *Mr. Hanan.*] Are you aware that at one time here the merchants put on wagons for the purpose of carting their stuff to the Bluff in opposition to the railway?—I am not aware of that.

E. H. WILMOT, Commissioner of Crown Lands, sworn and examined. (No. 11.)

*Hon. the Chairman:* We want you to tell us specially, as far as you know, respecting the quantity of land as leased for sawmilling, the average quantity of timber on these leases, and the quantity of timber and timber land held by the Crown unleased, with the distance from rails, together with other and general information of that class?

*Witness:* I am not in a position to supply that information just for the moment, but I will go and get the papers.

*Hon. the Chairman:* Very well, we will take your evidence later.

JAMES LEGGAT sworn and examined. (No. 12.)

*Hon. the Chairman.*] We want you to tell us specially, as far as you know, respecting the timber industry?—I am not quite sure what the Chairman would like.

*Hon. the Chairman:* The Commission would like to know with regard to the prices and cost to the miller.

2. *Mr. Hanan.*] How many years have you been engaged in the trade?—As a sawmiller only two years, but I have been connected with the business for about forty years. I have taken out four or five months of last year before the end of the year, and I find that, so far as wages go, they run about 4s. 10d. per hundred feet for wages alone, and that covers all wages only. I expect that my cost per hundred feet would be a little higher than some millers, who have perhaps better and more easily worked bush. With the conditions such as were given here the other day, and with which I agree, it makes the cost just over 8s. per hundred feet, including everything—interest, rates and taxes, royalty, and upkeep of machinery, and so on. Our selling-price is 9s.

3. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you tell the Commission that you have a profit?—If we sold our timber for less than that we should have to close up. On some timber we get more, and on some less. I sold some six weeks ago for—.