

55. And that was one of the largest forests in New Zealand?—Yes.
56. And it is now practically cut out?—Yes.
57. As to firewood slabs, what is the price charged at the mills?—You get about 3s. a load.
58. Has there been any reduction in that class of timber for firewood during the last few years?—I could not say. At McCallum's it was 3s. a load then.
59. That is twenty-five years ago?—Yes.
60. Do you know if it has substantially gone up in price?—No, I do not think it has.
61. *Mr. Jennings.*] Do you pay men by a day-wage or take contracts?—By day-wages.
62. *Mr. Field.*] In estimating the cost of production, do you provide for interest on capital or interest on bank accommodation when you say the cost was 8s.?—I want to explain this to you. I could not undertake to produce a list such as I saw here—I do not think any one could do so. The only way is to take the profit at the end of the year, and the difference between your wages and the profits must be accounted for in interest and expenses—you cannot apportion everything.
63. Still, if you spent £3,000 on the mill, you must get back at least 5 per cent. on that?—Yes, apart from depreciation and everything else.
64. In addition to that. Interest on capital is not your profit. Anybody can get interest on capital without exerting himself at all?—Yes.
65. Must you not get something besides that to pay you for all the risks you run?—We should get it.
66. We have had it in evidence that it is a fair thing to ask 2s. or 3s. over the cost of production to pay for the risks that are run—would that be too much?—No, I do not think so. In my own case I have had to do with less. The length of my mill is about two years and a half altogether from the beginning to the end, and when you shift your mill of course you take what you can get, and if there is a market you may sell your plant for half its cost, but there are always hundreds of pounds' worth of tramways which are not worth one penny to you.
67. One witness stated that in a four-roomed cottage the difference in the price of timber had gone up in the last twenty years from £50 to £60: he said it used to be £40 a room and now it was £100 a room. Is that a fair estimate of the increased cost of the timber?—It is not my experience at all.
68. We had it, I think, in evidence yesterday that some years ago a man could buy timber from the miller, including cartage for six miles, at 2s. 2d.—would that be a fair thing?—I should like to know what that includes.
69. We also had it in evidence that twenty years ago rough timber could be purchased here at 3s. 9d. and 4s.: were you cognisant of that state of things at that time?—I think it is a mistake.
70. We had it from Mr. Massey that at this particular time half the millers in the district went bankrupt on account of the low prices of the timber?—Quite a number did.
71. Is it true to say that men were making large sums of money out of sawmilling at that time—at 4s. 6d. a hundred?—They simply could not do it.
72. What proportion of the millers have made a big thing out of it—say, several thousands of pounds out of it?—I do not know the whole business very well. I should say, from my knowledge of the district, that not more than two have made a good thing out of sawmilling, and these men have done it because they have had every advantage; they have had bush of the best quality, and flat country, and everything in their favour. Now you get a sawmilling area with miles of tramway and hilly country. Not long ago I went up some hilly country behind six horses, and it took the six horses all their time to haul two empty trollies up. You have also bridges to construct, and all that has to be considered as against working in flat country.
73. Do you find the combination, as it is called, has been a benevolent combination or hurtful? Has it had the effect of putting up the prices unreasonably on the consumer?—No, it has not.
74. And it was not formed for that purpose?—One reason was to get prices. At that time prices were such that the millers had either to get a better price or close up. The prices were such that they could not live.
75. What are you getting at the present time per hundred feet in excess of the cost of production?—Somewhere about 1s. to 1s. 3d.
76. And how much has the timber increased during the last eight years?—Eight years ago it was selling at 8s. 6d. in Invercargill, and it is now selling at 10s. 6d., less 5 per cent.
77. And I suppose the increased cost differs in different places?—Yes, there are no two saw-mills run at the same cost.
78. And is it fair to say the increased cost in some cases is less than 2s.? We had it in evidence in one case that it was 1s. 6d.—I mean the increased price in eight years?—That is really less than 2s.—it is 2s. less than 5 per cent. It costs them 10s. now, and eight years ago it cost 8s. 6d.
79. Have the builders got anything to complain of in regard to the sawmills not filling the orders with promptitude?—I suppose once in a while it may happen that a sawmiller is a bit busy and has orders coming for 12,000 ft., and he cannot expect to supply that next day. If a man comes in and leaves an order, and we find it is a job which must be done in a certain time and the timber has to be supplied early, we do the best we can. I think a man could be supplied with the timber for a big job in ten days.
80. Has the increase in the price of timber had the effect of restricting building operations in Invercargill?—I do not think so. If a man was going to build and it was going to cost £15 or £20 more I do not think it would stop him.
81. We had it from Mr. Bain yesterday that sawmillers were in the habit of piling up stacks of timber and letting it rot rather than sell to the builders at a certain price. Do you know of any timber that is rotting in that way?—I suppose we have been foolish often, but not so foolish as that. Of course, once in a while you have bigish stacks in a yard, and sometimes you find the bottom pieces have gone rotten.