

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 1910.

JAMES GLENNY WILSON examined. (No. 1.)

Witness: I am here in rather a dual capacity I happen to be Chairman of the Manawatu County Council, and am the representative of that body on the Foxton Harbour Board. I have not got time to traverse the report which the Department has put in, as I wish to catch the Main Trunk express, but it could be, I think, very successfully combated in every instance. Mr Newman or Mr Hennessy can do that. I should like to go on to paragraph No. 8 in the petition, which relates to Messrs. Levin and Co. and McMurray and Co.'s wharf Patea, Wanganui, and Waitara were in exactly the same position as we were, but these particular wharves were handed over to the local bodies. You, Mr Chairman, in Wanganui have no rate on your land, and you have a large endowment. The wharf, I believe, was handed over to the Harbour Board, yet there is no necessity for dual control, as objected to by the Department, because the Railway Department take over all the wharf dues and pay a certain proportion to the Board. When anything is done by way of repair it is carried out by the Department, and the cost deducted from the revenue due to the Board. In Patea they have a very satisfactory harbour, as far as local traffic is concerned, and they are not accused of interfering with Railway revenue. It is somewhat similar to our harbour in that it has a bluff on the south side of the entrance. If we could only control our river, and keep it against the bluff on the south, we should have a good bar, but unfortunately the river has a tendency to run north instead of running out straight, and we cannot control it. The entrance therefore very frequently shifts—which is a very important point—and if we had money we could erect a training-wall which would obviate that. Patea is in a very satisfactory position as far as finance is concerned. The Government collect the wharf dues, and hand over the balance to the Harbour Board, and it is on that revenue that the Board is able to borrow the money to complete its works. At Waitara it is the same. Mr Hennessy will speak on this, as he has gone very fully into it. To come back to the cases of Levin and Co. and McMurray, we do not dispute that the legal position taken up by the Railway Department is correct, but we do think that they have treated us harshly and very unfairly in taking all the wharfages from Levin and Co. and McMurray and Co. The Railway Wharf was built by the public, but in the case of Levin and Co. and McMurray and Co., they built their own wharf and their own store. The Railway Department paid nothing towards it, and it cannot be argued that because public money was spent the revenue should belong to the Railway Department. In this case we think all the wharfages ought to go to us, inasmuch as we provide the means by which the steamers get there, and the Railway Department does nothing towards it. The Department, according to their report just read, spent £1,000 in dredging, and got back £723 in cash for gravel from the local authorities, as well as being able to use a great deal of the spoil for their own benefit and to gravel the yard, which otherwise would cost 6s. per yard. Then we think we have a right because we think the foreshore on which is the actual wharf is all our ground. The foreshore between high- and low-water mark is vested in the Board, and we think that as the wharf extends over that we ought to have the right to the wharfages. The Committee will see that it is absolutely impossible, with a revenue of £600 per annum, to improve the river. It brings down an enormous quantity of silt, and is constantly changing its bed, and steamers are interrupted in their traffic. We have not even sufficient money to buy a steam-launch, and have to hire one at considerable expense to make soundings. There is another point I wish to make clear, and as a resident of the district for many years and Chairman of the Manawatu County Council, I wish to state that we have no intention of competing with the railway. We do not suppose that even under the best conditions we could do that. All we can do is to provide the means to carry the heavier class of goods. The coal traffic should naturally come that way, because coal comes from the West Coast, and it would be very expensive to take it on to the wharf in Wellington and transfer it on to the railway. It naturally would come to Foxton, and the transhipment would take place there. Heavy goods, such as wire, iron, roofing-iron, and cement, come into Foxton. The railway charge on these is heavy, and much of it comes through the Foxton Harbour, and goes up the line by train. Sugar is another item which is a heavy class of goods, also nails, &c., and any other heavy class of goods, which can be much more cheaply carried by sea, and the local traffic of wool, flax, &c. But we never anticipated for a moment that we could do more than provide access to the Port of Wellington through Foxton, and never contemplated taking away any appreciable traffic from the railway. I was astonished when the Minister made a speech recently in the House indicating that that was our intention, as none of us connected with the tramway or the harbour had ever anticipated competing against the railway. In fact, it seems to me that both local authorities have been of very great benefit to the railway. On the point that the income derived from the wharf is railway revenue, as stated in the departmental report, that, of course, is special pleading on the part of the Department. It is held all the world over that the wharf revenues should go to improve the access to a harbour. Any person can see that the wharf is for the benefit of the steamers and railway together. If you cannot get steamers to the wharf, the railway would suffer, and if the steamers cannot get up the river the wharf would be no good. It is well known that the wharfages always go towards harbour-improvement. The Railway Department has got this wharf into its own hands, and it will take a good deal to make the Department give it up, but we appeal to the Committee to see that the Harbour Board has a reasonable portion of the wharfages to spend on the harbour, to enable us to benefit the river and the port, and keep them in fair order.