

have gone up simply owing to the fact that these workers, both line and seine fishermen, have awakened to the fact that by combination they can control the market and raise the price. From their point of view they are quite right. They limit the amount each day, and when they catch too many one day they hold it back and send it up next day. Both the line and the seine fishermen have got a union, and when the price goes below what they consider a fair return to them they knock off for a day or two, and the price goes up again. This, of course, was a difficult season for ascertaining whether the price of fish was due to natural or unnatural causes. To give an instance: Five years ago kingfish for about three months averaged 9s. a dozen; this year they have not been down to 1s. each seven days in the whole year, and probably for the plentiful three months the average price was 18s. a dozen. That was not due to the fishermen, but was owing to the scarcity of the fish.

2. Do you object to there being an understanding between these fishermen?—Certainly not. From their point of view they are doing quite right. The market is free so far as I am concerned. We buy the fish under hammer from two auctioneers.

3. If fish sells at a prohibitive price what do you do?—We pass the price on to the public. They take fine care they keep the price so low that the public will buy. It was said by Keenan that when the public come in to buy the hawkers run the price up. That is absurd. I have never seen it done on the fish-market. If fish are plentiful the dealers take what they want and leave the remainder. Sometimes instead of the public buying dearer than the dealers they get it cheaper. Fish are put up in pairs, and we would be foolish to run up the price because some one wants a particular fish or pair of fish. One reason for limiting the supply by the boats was that when fish had been flush the surplus had been frozen and kept in the freezer until there was a scarcity and then brought out and sold. They are taken by boardinghouses, hotels, and the railway dining-car. That keeps down the price of fresh fish at those particular times. When they cannot get fish to freeze it naturally makes the price to the fisherman better.

4. *Mr. Macdonald.*] As it works out it has a tendency to keep the price uniform?—It has a tendency that way. I would also like to say a word about rabbits. Those who deal in fish also deal in rabbits. It was said by a witness that we bought the rabbits at Lawrence for 5d. a pair, and he had to pay 10d. for them in Dunedin. The retail price in Dunedin is 9d. Probably during the winter skins are worth 5d. a pair, but we cannot get our rabbits at 5d. a pair. We buy from the men near the line, and further back the exporters take up the land in blocks, put on trappers, and take the whole output. We have been offering 7d. a pair on the railway, and could not get them. When the railage is taken into account, all the hawker gets is the skin; and he has to prepare them.

JOHN BUCHAN, Fish-curer, examined on oath. (No. 35.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—Fish-curer. I have sold fish wholesale and retail about as long as any one in Dunedin. I think I am the oldest fish-dealer in the market to-day. When fish are very plentiful we buy more than we require, and cure the surplus. If I send a case of fish of 33 lb. to half a hundredweight I am charged 1s. 10d. up to 2s. on the railway, and if I send 9d. worth of fish the carriage is 6d. People outside Dunedin cannot get cheap fish.

2. How do you send 9d. worth of fish by rail?—Through the parcel office. I have often sent cases of fish from here to Christchurch, and the price is excessive.

3. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] What is the price?—I cannot remember. The railage between Dunedin and Owaka is 1s. 10d. and 1s. 9d. a case of 30 lb. to 50 lb. If the price was cheaper it would encourage more to be sent.

4. What price per pound would you charge for that fish?—I am referring to the fish of which we have more than sufficient for the local supply.

5. How much do you charge for that fish?—Not more than 2d. a pound.

6. What sort of fish is it?—Ling and barracouta. Those are the only fish you can cure, and I am speaking of cured fish.

7. Do you confine yourself to curing fish?—Not always.

8. Could you give the price of fresh groper?—I could not; it varies every day. The point I want to make is that the railway charge on fish is excessive. Farmers should not get the cheap freights all their own way. Fruit is carried for 1s. a case from Central Otago, and we are charged 3s. for the same weight of fish to the same place.

CHRISTCHURCH.

MONDAY, 10TH JUNE, 1912.

WILLIAM HENRY BOWATER, of the firm of Bowater and Bryan, Sawmillers and Timber-merchants, examined on oath. (No. 36.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are in the timber business?—Yes.

2. Have you been in it some time?—Yes, twenty-four years.

3. To what district does your experience relate?—To the West Coast district.

4. Could you make a statement to the Commission about the position of business on the West Coast in regard to the transactions you have had in the timber trade?—In what way, Mr. Chairman?

5. Well, we would like to know pretty nearly the extent of the business of timber trading in Westland. You could give us some idea of the trade, whether of export or local consumption, during ten years—say ten years ago as compared with the present time: could you do that?—I could do it roughly from memory. I have no records here.