

139. In Waitara I think you handed over the wharf to the local body because you had been interfering with their streets in some way?—Yes; the railway-station was put into the middle of the main street, practically closing it. It was adjacent to the river. The wharf would have been of very little use to us. There was considerable local objection, and the Government, when representations were made by the local authorities in regard to the railway-station, agreed that if the Harbour Board was prepared to construct a new wharf and sheds with additional track below the Railway Wharf they could have the Railway Wharf on that condition. The Harbour Board accepted the offer and put up a wharf lower down.

140. But in Waitara is there not an appreciable quantity of goods sea-borne which passes over the railway?—No, there was not at that time: there was practically nothing.

141. The bulk of the trade at Waitara is frozen meat, I suppose?—Yes, it is now, but it is a new industry: there was no meat traffic in those days.

142. Did that pass over the Government wharf at all, or how was it taken?—Not at that time. There were no meat-works there, and no business of any extent. The total business at the time was £132 a year, and the expenditure on working the wharf £123 per annum.

143. At Port Chalmers the Railway Department owns a wharf?—Yes, we have a wharf there.

144. How do you operate that?—We work the traffic straight from the ship's slings into our trucks; we do all the tallying at ship's side, and send the bulk of the goods up to Dunedin, where they are discharged into the goods-sheds. It is the only deep-water wharf there, and it was provided for the specific purpose of inducing large ships—boats like the "Ionic"—to come to Port Chalmers and use the railway instead of lying out in the stream and lightering, and then taking goods up to Dunedin by water route. For years there was keen competition for overseas traffic between lighters on the bay and the railway from Port Chalmers to Dunedin.

145. It was necessary that you should have a wharf at Port Chalmers?—Yes. If we had not provided a wharf suitable for deep-water steamers the boats would simply enter the port, lie in the stream, tranship some of the goods into lighters for Dunedin, and then go on themselves to Dunedin wharves. Some of the ocean boats, of course, do go direct to Dunedin now.

146. We have heard a good deal from some of the witnesses in regard to the question of coal, although no owner of coal-ships has been called as a witness. It is a fact, is it not, that your importations of coal into Foxton are considerably less than they used to be?—Oh, yes.

147. First of all, has the reduction in your importations of coal into Foxton anything to do with the state of the river or bar?—No, nothing whatever.

148. When was it that your importations of coal into Foxton began to be reduced?—On the 31st March, 1909, they were falling off.

149. At that time had the Government acquired and commenced to operate the Manawatu Railway?—Yes. We took the Manawatu Railway over in December, 1908.

150. At that time had the Main Trunk line been opened?—Yes, it was just opened.

151. Now, first of all, did the acquisition of the Manawatu line and the running of the Main Trunk line of trains affect the question of importations of coal into Foxton?—Undoubtedly.

152. Will you explain to the Commission the factors which operated in the direction of reducing the coal-importations into Foxton?—Prior to 1908, if the Railway Department required to send coal from Wellington to its depots at Palmerston North, Woodville, and beyond, it had either to pay the Manawatu Railway Company tariff rates for carriage over the Manawatu line, or to haul the coal over the Rimutaka line and round by Woodville. Therefore, so far as the Department was concerned the Port of Foxton was a convenient point at which connection could be made with the Government railway, and for that reason, and as small boats were then available and much easier to get than they are now, the Government railways used Foxton to a considerable extent to supply coal to the Palmerston North, Taihape, and Woodville depots.

153. And I suppose you used to get some coal in through Wanganui also?—We did not rely wholly on Foxton. As soon as the Manawatu Railway was acquired the Department made a practice of getting large shipments of coal. All the Department's coal coming into Wellington is obtained in large shipments, and Wellington is now the most convenient place from which to distribute and replenish the coal stocks at various depots—Palmerston North, Paekakariki, Woodville, Taihape, Ohakune, and sometimes as far north as Taumarunui.

154. Do you therefore make use of coal as back loading?—As far as we can. A large number of loaded trucks gravitate down to Wellington from the Main Trunk districts and Napier district, and in addition a considerable number come from Wanganui district. Those wagons have to be hauled back either empty or loaded, and it is a convenient and good arrangement for us to load them from Wellington with coal instead of hauling empty to Palmerston and diverting a number to Foxton to load coal—dead haulage is saved.

155. What about Wanganui: do you still get coal into Wanganui?—Yes, from time to time, as we require it. Then, there is another objection, so far as we are concerned, in respect to getting coal at Foxton. All our coal is screened coal: that is what we contract for. Whenever we get a shipment of coal at Foxton it is necessary to send the Locomotive Foreman from Palmerston North—to take him away from his ordinary business and send him down to Foxton to inspect the coal. If he were not there when the ship arrived, and before it commenced to put out the coal, there would be a difficulty in regard to inspection, because the coal would not always be up to our standard. By getting the coal at Wellington we have two men right on the spot, who can go down to the ship without any inconvenience, and without leaving their headquarters, and inspect the coal as it is put out. The same thing applies at Wanganui and at New Plymouth.

156. Can you tell the Commission what coal is mostly used in the North Island for the railways?—A very large proportion of it is Newcastle—the larger proportion.