

For the purposes of this report there is no need to distinguish between licit and illicit trade, and some reliable estimate can be made of the total volume—a volume that would be largely increased if there were proper control and development.

There is some import of raw skins from Australia and Tasmania. There is also a re-export of raw skins to America, more going now to America than formerly went to Britain. Numbers of skins are made up in New Zealand and placed on the local market. The manager of an important Dunedin firm, from whom I have received most valuable information, states the value of his manufactured skins for last year at £2,415. It has to be borne in mind that this is the value of the local trade only, to one only of the Dunedin firms. Export figures are running up so rapidly that one year's figures are not reliable as a guide to what may be expected in the next year, but since the beginning of December this firm has filled an American order for 2,000 "best Tasmanian greys" at 14s. f.o.b., and it has prepared a further consignment for sale in America of 1,820 skins. For this consignment they have already been offered 16s. f.o.b. in Dunedin, but, not being satisfied with this offer, prefer to place the skins on the open market in America. As there are other firms operating in Dunedin, and as there is a market for skins—smaller, indeed—in Christchurch, it is safe to assume that trade with America alone has already a volume of not less than £10,000, and it is almost certainly much greater.

Of actual transactions in opossum-skins other than those referred to may be mentioned the Crown lands sale of last season's skins from Kapiti—about 2,000 skins at an average of 10s.—and a sale on behalf of the Summit Road Scenic Board of Canterbury of 145 skins at an average of 10s. The price quoted in these two cases is the price given by the local dealer—the price that a trapper might expect.

With regard to imports and exports, no definite information can be got from the Customs returns, seeing that there is no special heading for opossum-skins.

As the New Zealand skins are better all round than the Australian skins, owing in part probably to our colder climate, the whole of the re-export trade might be replaced by genuine export trade in New Zealand, and the local market could also be supplied.

Taking local and American trade it seems to me perfectly safe to assume that the present volume of trade is certainly not less than £15,000 a year. Mr. R. S. Black informs me that £50,000 would be a low estimate. That the demand for export is unlimited is evident from the following figures:—

Messrs. Funsten Bros., St. Louis, U.S.A., submitted at the last fall sale, September, 1919, 171 lots of opossum-skins, comprising 158,996 skins. The average upset price was 2.22 dollars. That the average price was kept down by the presence of many poor skins is evident from the following quotations from the list, quotations that I have made to include the best and the lowest skins and to show the range:—

Lot.	Price.	Number of Skins.	Quality.
	\$		
2684	1.75	1,080	I, pt. II—medium and small.
2685	2.43	424	II—extra large and large.
2690	3.90	500	I—extra large, black.
2691	5.05	748	Fine blue.
2698	3.20	1,000	I—small blue.
2766	0.63	764	III and IV.
2778	0.20	1,581	III, pt. IV—medium and small.
2780	0.18	2,588	IV, pt. V.

I have taken these figures from Messrs. Funsten Bros.' catalogue, kindly lent me by Mr. Stewart, of Messrs. J. K. Mooney and Co., Dunedin. I understand from Mr. Stewart that there are at least two other large firms doing business on a similar scale in St. Louis alone, and that Chicago has a large fur-market.

NOTE.—Since the report was written there has appeared in the daily papers of the 3rd April the following cablegram:—

"Australian and N.Z. Cable Association, Montreal, March 27.—Nearly five million dollars' worth of furs were sold at auction. A feature of Saturday's session was the sale of 236,000 dollars' worth of Australian opossum."

Also, in the *New Zealand Times* of the 4th April appeared an extract from the *Sydney Sun*: "An enormous trade in fur skins is being built up in New South Wales. . . . The following figures show the weight and value of fur skins exported through Sydney port for the six months ended 20th January: Fox, 244,909 lb., £182,047; kangaroo, 785,218 lb., £201,743; opossum, 684,470 lb., £851,025; wallaby, 191,459 lb., £75,541; wombat, 401,483 lb., £133,220; other fur skins, 4,923 lb., £1,012."

XI. OPEN SEASON; LICENSED TRAPPING; REGISTERED DEALING.

I strongly recommend that an open season be declared during which opossums may be lawfully taken, and that for the present the open season be the months of May, June, and July, as in Tasmania. Most of the practical men in New Zealand are in favour of these months, but there is some difference of opinion. I will make later suggestions for determining the date in New Zealand on actual observation of opossums taken for that purpose. An open season should only be declared in any district on the advice of the acclimatization society's rangers, or of Rangers appointed by the Crown, or by some local body charged with this duty.

The advantages of an open season may in general terms be stated thus:—

A considerable amount of trade that is at present carried on illegally would be much more under control, and would be capable of indefinite extension.

A licensed trapper, no longer a poacher, would be able in an open market to get the full first-purchase value of skins. At present in an underground trade he cannot always make the best terms with the buyer.