

the other day that his Company intended ordering large steamers for the Westport coal trade as soon as they knew that the harbor was to be improved.

*Mr. Dickson.*

21st June, 1882.

THURSDAY, 22ND JUNE, 1882. (Mr. MUNRO in the Chair.)

Mr. A. J. BURNS, examined.

*Mr. Burns.*

22nd June, 1882.

234. *The Chairman.*] You are one of the Directors of the Westport Colliery Company?—I am.

235. The object of this Committee is to ascertain what action should be taken in order to improve the Westport Bar, and increase the facilities for shipping goods from the Westport Harbour. It has been proposed that the coal companies interested should guarantee a certain rate of interest on an expenditure of, say, £150,000. Would you inform the Committee as to the nature of the guarantee your Company would be prepared to give?—The two Companies would be prepared to give a guarantee that they would put out 300,000 tons of coal per annum.

236. And the royalty on that at 6d per ton would be between £7,000 and £8,000?—Yes; it would be a substantial guarantee. We could guarantee to put out that quantity provided that vessels of 16 or 16½ feet draught could go in and out on all tides.

237. What additional works would you propose to carry out if the Government agreed to spend the money necessary to deepen the bar?—We would be prepared to construct works which would enable us to put out 500,000 tons of coal per annum.

238. You have resided in Westport for some time?—Yes.

239. What is your opinion about the bar?—When I lived there I was General Manager of the Company as well as a Director, and it was part of my duty to report to my fellow directors respecting these matters. On one occasion I requested the Harbourmaster to take me out with him on the bar, and we went out at dead low water. I took with me some rough boring apparatus for the purpose of ascertaining what the bottom consisted of. I drove an iron rod about 8 feet into the bottom. The first 18 inches consisted of hard pure sand, and then the rod went down for a couple of feet without much difficulty. I then drove to the bottom very easily. I then came to the conclusion that the bar could be deepened by several feet. I came to the conclusion also that the bar was simply a sand-bar. There is occasionally a small deposit of gravel on one side of the channel—I think it is the east side—but that is purely on the surface, and evidently has been left there by floods.

240. *Mr. Fish.*] How would you propose to remove that crust?—By harrowing it, as was done in the inner bar of Otago Harbour. I am confident that an improvement could be made in the harbour by harrowing. It is a well-known fact that when a vessel happens to ground on the bar she manages to make a bed for herself. I am of opinion that the bar could be easily removed.

241. *The Chairman.*] Are the present facilities for shipping satisfactory to the Company?—No; they are not sufficient. The upper wharf would have to be extended, and additions made to the staith accommodation. Eventually, as the trade increased, hydraulic cranes would better suit the requirements of the trade than the present system of shipment, but additions to the present staiths would give increased facilities at small cost.

242. *Mr. Levestam.*] As far as your Company is concerned, would it be willing to undertake the work for an abatement of the royalty?—No; I think not, because our articles of association would not allow us to do so. The harbour would require to become our own property for a term. I am convinced that it would be better for the Government and the Companies if the former found the money and did the work.

243. How many men are employed by your Company now?—About 120 at the mine, and about 70 on board the steamers.

244. How many more would be required to put out the large quantity of coal you have mentioned?—About 1,000. This would represent a population of about 4,000.

245. *Mr. Fish.*] What amount of revenue would go to the railway if you were putting out 500,000 tons of coal per annum?—The Railway Department at present get 2s. 6d. per ton. I will add that there is no business man who cannot see that if this trade is opened up it will be a paying thing for the country.

246. *Mr. Macandrew.*] It has been stated in evidence that your Company would have sent away 100 tons of coal per day more than they have done if the railway had been able to carry it?—Yes; that is the fact. We could have done that if the Railway Department had furnished us with the rolling-stock.

247. And the consequence is that the Railway Department has lost £12 10s. per day, while your Company has lost the profit you would have got on 100 tons of coal per day?—Yes; but the present Minister of Public Works has now promised that we shall have plenty of rolling-stock.

248. Would your Company be prepared to work the railway, paying a rental equivalent to the interest on the money which the Government had already expended at Westport, and subject to such restrictions as to the rates of fares to be charged as the Government may stipulate?—We would. The line should be handed over to us in good condition, and we would return it in the same good order and condition.

249. You said your articles of association would preclude you from undertaking the harbour works yourselves?—Yes; unless you can give us possession of the harbour.

250. Suppose there were any difficulty in the way of the Government expending money on the work, do you think that your Company, in conjunction with the Koranui Company, would be prepared to spend their own money on condition that the railway charges were reduced or modified?—I know we would be prepared to advance money on debentures issued by the Government. Before finally answering that question, however, I should like to consult my brother directors. We have always been exceedingly willing to meet the Government fairly, but I think it would be better for all concerned if Government would construct the works. I would say, too, that we see a market for 500,000 tons per annum if we could get the coal away from Westport.

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