

276. If the Crown and Native Lands Rating Act is repealed you lose that amount of revenue?—I am afraid so.

277. Assuming that your contention is correct, that the Board has power to levy a rate of 2d. in the town and 1d. in the country, do you think the district would be able to bear such a strain as that upon it?—I think they would feel it hard to pay.

278. Do you think it would be detrimental to the progress of the district?—I do not think it would be wise to strike a rate of 1d. and 2d.

*Mr. Ross* : I find, Mr. Chairman, that by section 216 of the Harbours Act the Harbour Board has power to “fix and authorise the levying of Harbourmasters’ fees and port charges, not exceeding the rates specified in the Fifth Schedule to this Act; to regulate the use of wharves or docks,” and so on. So that I do not think there is any limit to the wharfage.

279. *The Chairman.*] With regard to these petitions, will you kindly look at the signatures and tell the Committee what you think as to the *bona fides*—whether they are ratepayers or not, as far as you know?—Well, none of the Natives are ratepayers.

280. Your answer will be this: Any Native names which appear on these petitions are not ratepayers?—Yes.

281. *Mr. Allen.*] You have received revenue, have you not, from Native lands?—Yes; from Government. The Natives are not on my rate-roll, I may say, and the money we have received on account of Native and Crown lands forms part of the £5,000 yearly received in rates.

282. *The Chairman.*] Touching these Sinking Fund Commissioners, under what authority did you appoint them?—Under the Harbours Act of 1878.

283. Are any of the Commissioners members of the Board?—None. There are two Commissioners, the manager of the Union Bank and a Mr. Bennett.

284. Has any of the money been lent to members of the Board?—They were not members of the Board when the money was lent. There are two gentlemen now on the Board to whom money has been lent.

285. *Mr. Allen.*] When were the valuations which you have given of the securities made?—At the time the money was lent. They were made by local valuers.

286. When was the bulk of the money lent?—Last year.

287. I suppose the valuations have all been made within the last two or three years?—All since 1886. I should like to make one statement with regard to these sinking-fund investments, and that is, that the Sinking Fund Commissioners employed a solicitor, and also a valuer to report upon the securities before the money was lent.

288. *The Chairman.*] The Committee, I suppose, has a right to assume, from the fact that you have levied what I believe to be the maximum rate of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. and 1d., that you are compelled to do so in order to meet current expenses?—Yes.

289. You could not have done without it?—Certainly not.

290. The demands you have upon you compel you to raise the maximum rate of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. and 1d., assuming my contention is right?—Yes.

291. *Mr. Ross.*] Can goods be landed at any other part of the harbour than at the jetty?—No; unless inside the river.

Witness handed in balance-sheet of the Board for year ending the 31st December, 1887; copy of the Board’s by-laws; and the telegram received from the Collector of Customs.

Mr. WILLIAM SIEVWRIGHT further examined.

292. *Mr. Graham.*] With reference to how this deficiency is to be made up if the works were carried out to the extent proposed, what increase in the revenue would there be? Mr. Bourke has told us the amount would be made up by an increase in the port dues and wharfages—that these could be increased to make up this amount, and there would still be a saving as far as the goods are concerned?—I said yesterday, although I had no figures by me, that I had no doubt the revenue could be obtained. If we spend £40,000, we have a sum of £2,000 to raise. By expending £40,000 we will enable shippers to save a lighterage of 5s. per ton at least; and if the merchants can be saved that lighterage it would be perfectly just to say to them, “If you want this additional accommodation you must pay a higher wharfage.” Half the sum they are paying now would give us over £2,000 a year. From the telegram which we got yesterday from the Collector of Customs at Gisborne, I find, to my surprise, that the lighterage actually came to £4,000 in 1887. If we obtain half of that in the shape of wharfage-dues, we should have quite as much as, and more than, we would require, in addition to any other sources of revenue.

293. In addition to that 20,000 tons there must be other items of wharfage?—There will be stock, which is not included in that at all, and I do not think wool is included.

294. Is it not likely, if these works were carried out to the extent proposed, a very large trade in stock would result?—It is certain that the stock is there in any quantity, and it only wants an outlet to take it away. If we had facilities in the way of shipping, I have no doubt the stock would be sent away.

295. It would only be reasonable, then, to expect a very considerable increase in that direction?—Once facilities were given, the steamers would be bound to come, and the trade would necessarily create an increased carriage. Hence I think it is possible some kind of steamers, well adapted to carrying stock, would probably take the place of some of those that come just now, or in addition to them.

296. *Mr. Ross.*] It appears the rate you are levying is really a harbour-improvement rate under the name of a wharfage-rate?—I do not think that is the meaning of “the harbour-improvement rate.” I take it that “the harbour-improvement rate” means that when you require a special work to be done you pledge a special rate for the purpose.

297. What was contemplated by a wharfage-rate was simply a charge for the use of the wharf?—It is difficult to draw the line between one rate and the other.