

27. *Hon. Sir J. Hall.*]—Have you had any applications addressed to you on the subject of charges for freight?—Yes. Mr. Hobbs, of Auckland, who was a member of the House, very frequently spoke to us about reducing the rate of charges, and giving facilities for the return of empties; and it resulted in bringing the charge down to one and a half grain rates and reducing the charge on empties.

28. Does that apply all over the colony?—Yes.

29. Have you had any applications from the Canterbury fruit-growers?—No, none whatever.

30. *The Chairman.*] Does that provision in respect of fruit apply to imported fruit as well as native fruit?—No; the imported fruit is charged differently.

31. We will now take the question of coal?—The coal rates have been reduced recently, both bituminous coal and brown coal. For bituminous coal the charge was reduced 2d. a ton some few months ago.

32. For what distance?—For eight miles and all above that. The distance from Brunner to Greymouth is eight miles. The former charge was 2s. a ton, it is now brought down to 1s. 10d. At Westport the distance of coal-haulage is twelve miles and the rate was brought down from 2s. 3d. to 2s. 1d. per ton. The charge on the brown coal was brought down considerably. For instance, from the Kaitangata Mine the reduction was 6d. a ton on the fifty miles from Stirling to Dunedin, and from Huntly to Auckland, the distance being 65 miles, the reduction was 8d. a ton. Compared with the charges in New South Wales, which is a coal-producing colony, the charges on our bituminous coal may be from 4d. to 6d. a ton greater than in New South Wales; but comparing the long haulage here with the long haulage in New South Wales the rates are nearly the same. There is this to be taken into account: In New South Wales they produce about two and a half million tons of coal and mineral per annum, and the railways haul that quantity, while in New Zealand we haul about eight hundred and seventy thousand tons. The rate for haulage of coal in South Australia is considerably higher than what it is in New Zealand. The same remark applies to Queensland, in part, and also to Victoria, if I recollect aright.

33. With regard to the charges in New South Wales the Committee have been supplied by a person interested with the following list of charges there:—

RAILAGE OF COAL ON NEW SOUTH WALES RAILWAYS.

Miles.	Where Truck provided by Railway.	Where Truck provided by Owner.
7 1s. 6d. per ton 10d. per ton.
12 1s. 6d. per ton 1s. 1d. per ton.
20 2s. 1d. per ton 1s. 5d. per ton.
28 2s. 9d. per ton 1s. 9d. per ton.

Witness.] That is nearly correct.

34. *The Chairman.*] That scarcely tallies with what you say?—I think it does. This list of New South Wales rates shows that for a distance of seven miles 1s. 6d. per ton is charged where the trucks are supplied. For eight miles distance we supply trucks and 1s. 10d. is charged. The difference between seven miles and eight miles haulage is very little indeed. The principal thing is the expense of the terminus; the cranes and the wharves, and all arrangements for unloading the coal. Our charge includes every one of these things, at Greymouth for instance.

35. The minimum charge is for twelve miles?—In the matter of haulage a mile or two more or less is of very little consequence

36. You say that the charge for eight miles is 2s. 1d.?—No; the charge for twelve miles is 2s. 1d.; that is, 7d. more than this list. This list is quite correct, I believe. I wish to point out the difference in quantity that is handled in the two places. The coal in New South Wales is nearly all handled at one port, so that there is a great advantage in that. We handle our coal at a great variety of places.

37. Are the freight charges upon coal in New South Wales the profit of the Railway Department; do they set it aside for any local purposes?—Not that I am aware of; I should think not.

38. What is done in New Zealand in that respect?—At Greymouth and Westport the railway and the port are deemed to be special trusts, and the amounts are kept separately. At the end of each year the profits and the results of the working of the port go to the Harbour Board.

39. The profits of the railway are set aside by Act?—That is so.

40. For the purpose of providing funds for harbour works?—Yes.

41. *Mr. Duncan.*] Has there been any complaint at Kaitangata and Shag Point with regard to the excess of charges?—No; on the contrary, at Kaitangata, which is the largest coal-mine in the south, they said that the reduction which we made of 6d. a ton would have a very beneficial effect upon their business in the way of increasing it; that they would be able to send the coal further along the railway-line.

42. *The Chairman.*] What is the difference, generally speaking, between the charges for conveying brown coal and bituminous coal; the charge is very much in favour of brown coal, is it not?—No, it is not. It is difficult to compare the two for this reason: that the bituminous coal is carried a very short distance, in no case more than eight or twelve miles altogether, whereas the brown coal is carried a long distance. The Auckland Province is supplied from Huntly, which is sixty-five miles away. Dunedin is mostly supplied from Kaitangata, which is over fifty miles away.

43. *Mr. Duncan.*] What would be the charge from Kaitangata to Oamaru?—It would be about 9s. a ton; distance 128 miles on the main line.

44. *The Chairman.*] Have you any differential charge as between the New Zealand product and the imported product?—Yes; imported coal is charged higher than our bituminous coal and still higher than brown coal. For instance, for a fifty-mile distance Newcastle coal would be charged 9s. 10d. per ton, Westport or Greymouth 7s. 8d., and Kaitangata or Huntly coal 5s. 5d.

45. Is there any Newcastle coal carried by the railway to the interior of the country?—There may be a few thousand tons, but it is not all of much importance,