

182. Do these companies charge what they consider their own price? Is there any contract?—No, absolutely none. I think the Meat-export Company have a fixed rate. At any rate, I am sure they would not be hard in any way upon small butchers, because, as far as I can make out, they have always done whatever they could to help the small butcher along.

183. How is the price regulated—according to the price of stock in the market, or what?—Yes, according to the price of stock in the market.

184. The prices vary?—Yes, prices vary at certain times of the year. The Home market affects the local market. The papers publish every week the average prices for bullocks and sheep at the principal saleyards in the colony.

185. Have you any power as to regulating the price, or must you accept the prices charged by the companies?—We have to accept the prices charged by the companies.

186. You have no power to alter it?—No.

187. With regard to the quality, what quality of meat do you get?—At the present time we are receiving the first quality. They are not killing much for export at present.

188. But when they are exporting?—When they are exporting we undoubtedly get the rougher carcasses among the second-class mutton if we buy any. Not in any case unfit for use. They may be slightly bruised, or too fat or too lean for export, and so on.

189. Do I understand that in such a case you must take what you can get?—Yes; if we wish to try to do better we have the other wholesale butchers to deal with, or can buy alive if we like to do so.

190. And that may be second class?—Not necessarily.

191. They will sell it to you as first class?—Yes, of course, if it is first class; the price is more for wethers than it is for ewes.

192. Then the class of meat you get from the companies will depend upon the price paid to them?—Yes.

193. Do you buy first class always, or do you buy second class?—At the present time wethers are 3½d. and ewes 3¼d. I buy as many ewes as possible.

194. With regard to beef, what is the price of first-class and second-class beef?—I think ox-beef is 19s. and heifer-beef is 17s. per 100 lb.

195. *Mr. Bollard.*] You are in favour of public abattoirs?—No.

196. You think it would be better for the butchers to buy from the meat companies?—I do.

197. Do you not think that would minimise competition?—No; I think the abattoirs would create more competition. The small butchers would then have to go and buy in competition with the large companies' buyers, who have an unlimited amount of money to offer for stock.

198. You think that butchers should buy from the meat companies, and you admit that public abattoirs would increase competition?—Yes.

199. Well, now, are you not completely in the hands of the meat companies as to the price paid?—No; I do not think we could do as well for ourselves if we were buying on the hoof.

200. Is it desirable from a farmer's point of view that the companies only should purchase their stock?—I think the farmers are very well satisfied at the present time with the price they are getting for their stock.

201. But you admit as a matter of fact that public abattoirs would cause more competition?—They would in such places as Johnsonville, but not up the country where the companies' buyers are. They are able to give a farmer an advance of £500 on a mob of cattle probably not fit to lift for a few months. They can secure them by this means, and pay the balance when they lift them.

202. Do you think you will get the advantage of that by buying from the companies?—Yes.

203. You admit that competition increases the price in ordinary trade?—Yes, but it will increase the price to such an extent that the larger butchers will be able to outclass the smaller butchers altogether. Suppose a small man starts in business here. He can get a side of beef at a time and two or three sheep. If he had to go up country to buy that, and to drive it and to kill it himself, the expense would take all the profit away.

204. Then, you believe in encouraging monopoly?—I believe in leaving well alone. The small butchers here are very well satisfied.

205. *Hon. Mr. Duncan.*] You mentioned that you pay 3½d. for wethers and 3¼d. for ewes. Is that a continual price, or is it just from time to time?—That is the price which was fixed about three weeks ago.

206. Present quotations?—Yes.

207. And you said you could do better by dealing with the companies than you would if there were public abattoirs?—Yes; that is if it is necessary for me to buy my stock and kill it at the abattoirs.

208. But is it absolutely necessary that you should?—Yes. It is not always advantageous to deal with small wholesale men who would be using abattoirs if erected.

209. Yet you say it is an advantage now?—We can get better meat and more extra stuff from the companies than is possible with the small wholesale people.

210. You mentioned tongues?—I have taken as many as fifty at a time.

211. Do you do that many times?—Oh, no.

212. The companies killing for export have far more tongues than they want?—Yes, that is so.

213. Suppose there was no public abattoirs, and not likely to be any public abattoirs, the companies could charge you just what they wished. You would have to pay whatever they asked you?—For beef?

214. For all meat?—Yes, certainly.

215. You could either take it or leave it?—Yes.