

36. The ports of Ruawai and Raupo are practically closed to you in winter?—Yes.
37. Is any chaff exported from your district?—A considerable amount.
38. What is the quantity of wool and flax shipped?—A considerable quantity of flax used to be carted to Mitaitai, but there is none now, because of the want of a market. An average of about seventy bales of wool is sent through from each of the four ports.
39. Have you any acquaintance with the other districts to the north of your settlement?—Not a great deal. I have been to Whangarei occasionally. I have not been south for some considerable time.
40. Given railway facilities of transit, is your district as capable of producing the ordinary forms of produce as other districts in New Zealand?—Quite capable.
41. The land and climate are quite suitable?—Yes.
42. Although the products are low, the only reason for that is the want of communication?—Yes.
43. Do you require manure in your district any more than any other district does?—No. I have a brother in the Waikato who uses far more manure than I do to the acre—usually double.
44. Is it not a fact that your district is a rich district?—Yes.
45. The Rehia district is a large butter-producing district?—Yes.
46. *Mr. Steadman.*] Which way does butter go out after being manufactured?—By the river to Helensville, and thence to Auckland.
47. Have you ever considered the loss the middleman has in buying at your sales when there is a falling market?—Yes; but we will take the risk of that.
48. How do cattle get drowned in transit?—The water comes into the punt, and the cattle get down, and cannot get up again.
49. Who bears those losses?—The shipper; not always the middleman, as many of the owners ship their own cattle.
50. Are you not accepting the burdens of the middleman if you ship direct to Auckland?—Yes; but at the same time our stock gets through within a day. We practically know the price we are going to get before we send them away. It is a rare occurrence for stock to be killed on the railway.
51. Do you sell cattle by weight or per head?—Per head.
52. *Mr. Becroft.*] What are the freights on manure to the Wairoa?—They average about £1 10s. a ton. I get only a little myself.
53. Would not the passenger traffic go by the railway also?—Yes.
54. Is it not a fact that £6 or £10 per acre has been given for a good while for land at Raupo and Ruawai?—Yes. For one place a man refused £14 an acre.
55. *The Chairman.*] This stock that is bought in your district by cattle-dealers: where does it ultimately find its destination?—At Auckland.
56. Is it sold in the open market or to private dealers?—Both.
57. You say that when the railway is through you will be able to put stock on the railway direct for Auckland market yourselves?—Yes, if we choose to do so.
58. Could you find a market for fat stock?—I am speaking practically of fat stock. We send some stores also.
59. Will it be necessary, after you have the railway, for you to sell first to cattle-dealers, or can you get a direct market with the Auckland freezing-works or the Auckland yards?—We can do so if we choose. We could send fat lambs, or any stock, direct, and it would pay, but at present it does not pay for the ordinary settler to send small lines.

EDWIN HARDING examined. (No. 25.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Where do you reside?—At Dargaville. I am a farmer, and have resided here for sixteen years.

2. Perhaps you would like to make a statement to the Commission about this matter?—During my residence here it has been part of my business to travel about the district in connection with the purchase of stock, and over a large area of country north of Otamatea. As a member of the Hobson County Council, I have also had to travel the whole district, to ascertain the best method of developing its resources. By this means I have acquired an intimate knowledge of the whole country from coast to coast, and from Otamatea northwards to the neighbourhood of Hokianga. I have observed that it is a feature of this peninsula that on both coasts there is a very large proportion of poor land. When I first came here the bulk of the interior was covered with forest, largely unexplored. My observations have led me to conclude that there is in the heart of the peninsula, between Otamatea and Hokianga, a solid block of over 1,000,000 acres of fertile country. Taking the points at McCarroll's Gap and Kaikohe, and presuming that the railway will draw traffic from ten miles on either side, you will have a parallelogram containing, roughly, 800,000 acres. I think my knowledge of the country is sufficiently thorough to enable me to say that there are not 20,000 acres of poor land inside that area. The western route, as suggested, would traverse this area from end to end, and the whole of the country is good grazing-land. When developed a large portion of it is suitable for agriculture, dairying, and fruit-growing. It is also to be noted that this block of country is remote from any water carriage, and can only be developed by railway. As to the eastern or western (of the Tangihuas) route, I wish to speak simply from personal observation. The surveys show that the western route is about one mile and a half shorter—that the conviction of well-informed persons is that the western route can be materially shortened at several points. I consider that the configuration of the country, taking it as a whole, lends itself more to better construction and working on