

48. The Government have the Auckland trains going over the line, and that affects you—is that what you mean?—Yes.

49. *Mr. Myers.*] You have goods-trains from Wellington to Palmerston every day, do you not?—I do not know. I know of a mixed train, but I do not know of goods-trains. I do not think so.

50. Will you forward to the Commission a schedule giving year by year since 1908 the aggregate tonnage of goods that you have received through Foxton and direct by rail from Wellington respectively?—I do not know whether I could do it just now. It may not possibly convey anything to you. If our business was actually of the same turnover every year then it may convey something to you.

51. *Mr. Weston.*] The district is growing every day, I suppose?—Yes.

52. And business has grown particularly during the last ten years?—Yes.

53. And I suppose traffic both on the railway and through the port has naturally increased?—Yes.

ERNEST HUGH CRABB sworn and examined. (No. 14.)

1. *Mr. Weston.*] You are a coal and general merchant carrying on business in Palmerston?—Yes.

2. And you were formerly a member of the Borough Council?—Yes; I am senior Councillor at the present time. I have been a Councillor for the past three years.

3. You are speaking on behalf of the coal-merchants in Palmerston?—Yes.

4. And this statement [produced] has been compiled by you?—Yes. [Statement put in—Exhibit N.]

5. *The Chairman.*] Where do you get your coal from?—From the west coast of the South Island.

6. Is the Waikato coal being introduced here?—Yes, but I am not taking that into account at all. I am just dealing with the sea-borne coal.

7. I suppose you do not get any coal from Newcastle?—Yes, large quantities, partly from Wanganui and partly from Wellington.

8. Does the Wellington coal come by steamer or by rail?—It comes from Newcastle direct to Wellington and then by rail.

9. *Mr. Weston.*] In this statement you have put in you estimate the amount of coal imported into New Zealand other than Waikato coal for Palmerston at 22,000 tons altogether?—Yes.

10. Has the amount of coal imported through Foxton fallen off?—Most decidedly.

11. Why?—Because the harbour is so bad that you cannot depend upon it. The men will not go near the port as long as they can get any other work to do. I have a sheaf of letters from the Blackball Company, which I represent, in regard to the matter during the last six months.

12. The shipowners will not send their boats there?—No.

13. In the old days did you import much coal through Foxton?—Yes; the first year I took over the agency I used to get a steamer on every tide, but lately it has become more difficult.

14. In 1911–12 your company had the railway contract for delivery of 5,000 tons of coal at Foxton?—Yes.

15. Were you able to deliver that?—No, not a large portion of it. We could not get sufficient steamers to take it.

16. With regard to the West Coast Trading Company, this is a statement you desire to make with regard to the position of the coal-wharf erected there and how it came to be erected?—Yes. [Statement produced and put in—Exhibit O.]

17. In that case, although you erected the wharf yourselves, you are paying rent and also paying wharfage in addition?—We had to pay rent to the Government for the land on which it was built. We had to pay for constructing the siding, which they used more than we did, and to pay a rent of £26 per annum, and when the Harbour Board insisted on collecting wharfage they made us pay wharfage as well.

18. *The Chairman.*] The wharfage was for the use of your own wharf?—Yes. The Minister of Railways said to me that the Harbour Board was right in collecting the wharfage, because the wharf was on Harbour Board foreshore and bed of the river.

19. *Mr. Weston.*] That was the late Mr. Millar?—Yes. I had several interviews with him in regard to the matter.

20. A large quantity of coal is used here by the borough for the gasworks?—Yes, 8,000 tons.

21. The greater portion of that is Newcastle?—No; 6,000 native coal and 2,000 Newcastle.

22. And you think you could make a saving if you brought native coal direct into the Foxton Port?—If we could get a regular service of boats similar to that at Wanganui we would save 2s. a ton on present prices.

23. That is the class of boat that goes up to the city wharf?—Yes.

24. *Mr. Myers.*] So far as the importation of coal is concerned into Palmerston, you blame your trouble on the condition of things at Foxton: is that so?—Of course, we cannot get coal through Foxton, and we have to get it through other ports.

25. Have you been able to get all the coal you require from the West Coast?—Yes.

26. Has not your company had difficulty in fulfilling its orders?—It has never kept me short a day. I have always been able to get the coal I require.

27. Are you manager here for the company or in business on your own account?—I am in business on my own account, and agent for the West Coast for Blackball Coal Company.

28. Do you purchase from them or do they consign to you?—I purchase from them.

29. I suppose it would be no use their sending coal to you unless they sent you the whole cargo?—That is so.