

66. I do not see why you want to go on cutting it all straight away— but cut it as required?— Yes, but it is not the usual custom. It means that if they cut one stack one day and had to leave the rest the chaffcutter would be on the road half the time.

67. Unless the farmer had a chaffcutter of his own?—I think he would be sorry if he did.

68. If a farmer in the lower Rangitikei got his land at, say, 30 per cent. less than the land at Marton he could afford to sell his chaff as the man at Marton?—Yes, on that basis; but if you required every farmer to own his own chaffcutter he would have to get a machine costing £500.

69. But he need not do that: he may have a chaffcutter coming to his place to-day, to A's the next day, then to B's, and then to C's, and so on?—It is not the custom: usually the whole lot is cut straight out.

70. *Mr. Skerrett.*] We are talking of a business proposition, and I presume the work of a district is founded upon the most cheap and most practical way of conducting the business?— Yes, that is so.

71. It is the practice of the district for farmers to hire or employ chaffcutters for the purpose of cutting from the stack?—Yes.

72. Would it be a practical business proposition to cut one-third or one-half on one day and the balance on subsequent days?—No, it would not be practicable to break into one stack in that way.

73. *The Chairman.*] Do you mean to say that the growers of oaten chaff must cut the whole of their chaff at once and not hold it for a rise in price?—It is the practice of the district.

74. I ask you, as a practical farmer, would a farmer, being a wise man, and perhaps seeing a rise probable in oaten chaff, sell the whole of his oaten chaff straight away when the price was £3 per ton instead of holding some to get the higher price?—It would probably pay him to sell the whole stack even if there was a rise later, on account of vermin. I have seen a stack riddled in a year by vermin.

75. I am not taking twelve months: you said a farmer should sell right off?—Well, they have done it for twelve years and they find it practical business and payable. If you once lose the call with the chaffcutter you may lose your chance of cutting. The farmer in this district is driven into other channels with his produce, which is less profitable for the railway.

76. *Mr. Skerrett.*] At any rate, I understand that you as a practical man say that the conditions of the district are such that it is necessary for the average farmer to cut his chaff with the travelling chaffcutter once and for all?—Not altogether. For instance, we will take a man with a parcel of 300 tons, he may possibly make three cuts; but a man with, say, 150 tons would cut it outright when he could get the chaffcutter during the dry season, irrespective of a possible rise later.

77. In order to get that chaff to the market from Sandon, say, to Greatford, according to your experience it would cost how much per ton for carting it?—I think, 15s. per ton.

78. Will you tell me what mileage by rail it would be carried for the same cost according to the Government tariff?—Approximately 240 miles.

79. So that it costs to cart chaff eight miles what it would cost to carry it by rail 240 miles?— Yes, with a through freight. That is not including the war charge of 10 per cent.

80. I think the result of your evidence is that it would be impossible even with a five-horse team to make more than one trip per day between Sandon and Greatford?—Yes, carting chaff.

81. *The Chairman.*] It is taken in a wagon?—Yes, a five-horse wagon, or four horses in some instances.

82. You say you would have to load up and load back the same day?—No, there would be no loading back.

83. But if there is a load back?—They could do that.

84. That would be £3 15s. Could not they take a load of coal back—you are importing coal from Greatford?—They find they have to get the coal before the chaff is cut. They may have to go for coal when they have no chaff to cut. The coal must be on hand to run the chaffcutter.

85. But you need coal for other purposes?—Yes, ordinary purposes.

86. Are there no coal-merchants in Bull's or Sandon?—No, practically not. They get the coal through Foxton by steamer.

87. If you managed your business properly you ought to be able to get a return freight from Greatford. You are assuming that the wagon goes up full and comes back empty?—Yes.

88. Is that good management? That would never do. If the railways were run in that manner—that they took up a load and brought nothing back—they would have to charge more than 15s. per ton?—If they had a coal-merchant at Sandon possibly it could be arranged.

89. Is not that a question of co-operation? Why should not the farmers have a co-operative store and arrange that so that they should not have a wagon go up full and come back empty? You do not call that good business?—No, it is not good business, but when we get the through access we can show how it can be done. The eight miles would be prohibitive for coal.

90. I am assuming it costs 15s. a ton to take goods from Sandon to Greatford. If you had a return freight what would happen?—Taking coal freights?

91. You could take coal or any other merchandise. You ought to arrange your business so that you do not waste your eight miles for nothing?—

92. *Mr. Skerrett.*] You are not in the Sandon district, you are in the Marton district?—Yes.

93. And I understand you are dealing with the existing conditions of that district?—Yes.

94. Such a change as His Honour suggests would require a very extensive organization possessing extensive capital?—Yes, and that organization does not exist to-day.

95. And that organization would exist to make money?—Yes.

96. Do you think it would pay such an organization to cart an equivalent quantity of coal into the district as the quantity of produce sent out?—No.

97. Or even fencing-posts or firewood?—No.