

766. You prepared a statement: you might tell the Commission what it is first?—These are applications made by persons who wish to take up land on the West Coast and on to Nelson. The company shows in its application-book, which has been carefully posted up, 1,067 applications.

767. What area?—109,000 odd acres.

768. So that the average application would be about 109 acres each?—They vary. The largest area applied for was 5,000 acres; the next highest is 957 acres. The average would be something over 100 acres.

769. That is from 1887 up to when?—Till 1895—the time of the seizure.

770. *Mr. Bell.*] Why, then, did not the company grant these applications? Why did not they select the land and give these people the land they wanted?—I could not make a positive statement with regard to that, but I know these applications were forwarded to the Government from time to time under clause 33.

771. Do you know what happened to the applications in the hands of the Government?—No, beyond that very few of these applications have been granted.

772. Do you know whether the applicants desired to proceed with their applications?—Some have referred to the question since then, but we have had to assure them from time to time that we have done our best, and we could go no further: we were very anxious to get settlement.

773. How many mills do you say there are working now?—I think there are twenty-four or twenty-five in the whole district.

774. How long have they been working?—Some of the smaller mills were in existence when the company started—cutting for local purposes, but not for export: there was no export whatever.

775. The others have been for export?—Yes.

776. How many do you anticipate will be added to that twenty-four or twenty-five?—It is difficult to be definite, but there seems to be a great inclination now for outside millers to come here and erect new mills. There are two persons now on their way from Dunedin who intend to erect mills. A third mill is now being erected at Inchbonnie; and lately the Receiver has disposed of a large block of timbered land, and I understand from the purchasers that they are endeavouring to make arrangements for mills to be erected on their property.

777. That would make four more?—Possibly six more.

778. You say that the present output is about 15,000,000 ft. from the port of Greymouth?—14,900,000 ft.

779. Do you know what the increased export was last year?—I have not the figures with me, but each year it has increased from 1,000,000 ft. to 2,000,000 ft.

780. For how many years?—Since 1895.

781. And do you not think it has got ahead of the demand yet?—Certainly not. There are two mills actually owned by Christchurch timber merchants, and Mr. Brownlee, of Havelock, has a half share in a third mill. Christchurch merchants state that they will have to increase their output considerably; in fact, one of them was wishing to place an order of some 1,500,000 ft. a little while ago, in addition to the output of his own mill.

782. Then, the demand is still in excess of the supply?—Yes, and greatly increasing.

783. In your opinion the effect of the increase of the mills will not be to reduce the price?—No, I think not; I think the tendency is to increase.

784. Will not the effect be to close some of the small mills?—The small mills are cutting principally for local purposes.

785. And the larger mills for export?—Yes.

786. And you anticipate a continuance of this growth at the rate of 2,000,000 ft. per annum?—Yes, at the very least.

787. For how many years?—There seems to be such a general demand in all the large centres that it would go on for a great number of years.

788. Increasing at the rate of 2,000,000 ft. per annum, at least; that is a large quantity?—I think it is not a great quantity. It is one shipload. There are vessels now carrying that quantity from Puget Sound to Port Pirie.

789. But not from the Port of Greymouth?—No, but there is no reason why it should not go from here in smaller vessels. I was in Port Pirie some time ago, and there was a vessel arrived there with 2,000,000 ft. of Oregon pine for the use of the mines. The heart of our red-pine is 30 per cent. stronger than the Oregon timber, and it is very important you should have the strongest timber in mines where the lateral strain is very great. I took some samples of our timber to Broken Hill, and the managers of the mines thought very highly of it, and if that could be placed at Port Pirie at something like 10s. or 10s. 6d. per hundred it would sell well.

790. Is that possible, seeing that Greymouth is a bar harbour?—Quite possible.

791. You are giving us the best of your judgment and opinion, but have you any data upon which you found your opinion that the 2,000,000 ft. increase will go on?—It has been proved so far; it is an absolute fact that it is increasing.

792. You say that has been the result since the year 1895?—Yes.

793. The export trade commenced then, and has gradually expanded?—Yes.

794. Have you any data upon which you found your opinion that the expansion will proceed at the same rate?—I think so. There are so many industries now increasing in importance. In manufacturing different products now they require immense quantities of timber—for instance, for boxes and packing-cases these large meat-vendors use an enormous quantity of timber; and for many other purposes. There has only been a limited demand up to lately for white-pine. White-pine being a tasteless wood is now used generally for butter-boxes, and large orders are now being executed in different parts of New Zealand for it; and I think the class of white-pine here is superior to a great deal of the white-pine that is now going from the Auckland District, and from the Thames.