

to export without duty. In one of the resolutions you advise that the Government should not place any export duty on the sawn or dressed timber, but I do not quite understand from the resolution what sizes that will exempt. In the case of orders being received for 12 by 6, or 12 by 9, or 12 by 12, to be cut up into planks for butter-boxes, what do you suggest should be charged?

*Mr. Goldie* : We do not suggest any charge, sir.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : What size would you go to for exemption?

*Mr. Jagger* : We do not charge any duty on anything passing through a mill.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : Supposing they get you to square a log 3 ft. square with the saw?

*Mr. Jagger* : It is subject to the duty.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : That is covered by the first resolution ; but there is nothing in any of these resolutions that defines how you are going to stop the export of fitches of timber that will be used up for butter-boxes, and we get no advantage at all. I do not see that the sawmiller gets any advantage whatever under those conditions.

*Mr. Goldie* : The American timber is in small logs. Hence you can get broader fitches than they get, our trees being larger. To make it a minimum size, we should simply kill the market. The broader we get the fitches, the better for ourselves.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : There has been an expression of opinion from some of the sawmillers as to what should be the minimum or the maximum size that would be allowed to go away sawn. It does not seem to me that the export would be stopped by putting a big log through the mill, taking only the slabs off and then letting all the fitches go away. You might as well let the whole log go.

*Mr. Goldie* : You have to sell the impediment with it.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : There seems to be very little difference between that and the log that was sawn.

*Mr. White* : In the event of getting an order to cut fitches, I maintain that there is considerably more work to the New-Zealander if he has to cut fitches than if he is cutting the log up into ordinary sizes. If I got an order requiring me to cut 1,000 ft. of fitches I would have to cut up 5,000 ft. of logs to do it. Would you put an export duty on that? All the millers I have met have come to the conclusion that if an export duty were put on to the fitch it would simply mean throwing something like a thousand men out of employment.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : Do you not think the tendency of that resolution would be to make the importers from the "other side" take all fitches or anything but round and square logs? Do you think the export duty you propose will deter them from doing that?

*The Chairman* : That is the opinion of the Conference, sir.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : Very well. I understand the resolutions, Mr. Chairman, and it will be for the Conference to decide whether the suggestions I have thrown out will have your further attention—with regard to the conservation of the timber and naming any parts of the colony that you know of suitable for this purpose. I think the representative sawmillers here should know pretty well where every 100 acres of bush were in New Zealand, and might from that local knowledge give good advice to the Government as to whether the day had arrived when reserves should be made, or, if a reserve is not made, the timber should not be dealt with in opening-out for new sawmillers—i.e., it should not be cut for some little time. Do you think it desirous to do this? I also notice that all the Chambers of Commerce have met and expressed an opinion, and it struck me that you—meeting here at long intervals—might express an opinion as to whether you agree with the views expressed in other places for or against the Government amending the present tariff as a way of meeting the present difficulty, or whether we should continue on the same lines as at present. At any rate, I know the Government will be well pleased to receive any resolutions that have been passed by the Conference here to-day, and give them careful consideration.

*Mr. Price* : For Mr. Mills's information I might state that some three years ago I was through the North Island Railway route from Hunterville through to the Wanganui River, and I think on that journey I must have passed through at least one hundred miles of solid timber, and out of that hundred miles I came across three settlements. The first I did not take so much notice of—from Pipiriki—but the second one was in the midst of the timber, and how the people lived there goodness only knows. I should think a boar could hardly live there, and there is a settlement still further on which is in a much worse position. I said at the time I should think the Government are mad to settle people up here to starve. I reckon I do know something about timber and settlement. I have been in it since I was a boy, and to send people into the midst of forest like that for settlement seemed to me to be a ridiculous thing. Those are the bushes, in my opinion, that should be conserved—and right through that settlement. I am quite satisfied that there is enough to pay for all money spent in putting the railways there.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : I sent in the Federation Commission's report, but I do not suppose the Conference has had time to go through it.

*The Chairman* : No, we have had no time to go through it, sir.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : In 1899 the timber exported to New South Wales reached a value of £92,511; to Victoria, £73,523; to Queensland, £6,059; to South Australia, £4,203; to Tasmania, £708; or a total value of £177,004. I mention this to the Conference to give them an idea of what our timber export to Australia has been, as shown by the Customs returns.

*Mr. Waddell* : Could you tell us the value of the timber imported from Australia? I think it is a matter we should consider in making negotiations for having their timber in free and getting our timber into Australia free.

*Hon. Mr. Mills* : The importation of timber from New South Wales in 1899 represented the sum of £33,930; from Victoria it was nothing; from South Australia it was nothing; from Tasmania it was £9,071; from Western Australia the return is not available, but the amount was small. Those are the only figures that we have been able to collate with regard to what