

I did not think there was any prospect of him getting value; and I was quite right, because they got more for their stock than I could give them. Whether the companies operate at these sales I am not in a position to say; but I do not think it can be said that the companies are in favour, as a rule, of having stock-sales. I think they are distinctly against them. It is quite true that at Johnsonville the Meat-export Company buy very largely. I remember that once I was talking to Mr. Sladden, and expressed my gratification that he had supported us; but his reply was, "I do not think we are entitled to any thanks at all. We do not do it for friendship's sake. We do it from a business point of view. If we did not attend the sales the butchers would get this stuff thrown on them." That is the reason they buy there; but it is an absurd market considering the size of Wellington. They go there simply to regulate the price of stock, and rightly too, because it would not be wise not to do so. But their attendance at that market is not sufficient, to my mind, to indicate their desire or wish to see fat-stock sales, although I think if these were established they would tend to economize their expenses, and also tend to lessen the number of their buyers; and if they were properly established in regular centres, so that a regular stream of sheep was coming down to the works, it would materially increase their business indeed. However, that is their business, not mine. I certainly think this: that a company working for owners only would be eminently desirable. I do not say for one moment that the Meat-export Company, which has done the great bulk of the freezing on behalf of the owners and c.i.f. men, has not done its best to assist them and to treat them with the greatest possible fairness; in fact, I am satisfied they have done so. I myself, for instance, as a c.i.f. buyer, do not think it is desirable that my buyer should go into competition with the company's buyer. But the company's buyer is in close connection with—perhaps he is related to—the company's overseer, and my sheep have to be passed by the company's overseer. The company's manager attends to all these things, but cannot know everything, and has to take the report of his overseers. He cannot inspect the whole of the works. I do not think it is desirable that these sheep should have to undergo inspection at the hands of men who are very keen about the competition which I, for instance, bring to bear on them. I get hold of a lot of sheep, and the owners of these sheep in the past have been in the habit of dealing with the company. The company's buyer resents that. The company's manager is absent, and there is a good deal of feeling brought into the matter. I think it would be better, therefore, if there was another company established to freeze on owners' account only, and for that very reason. My experience last year of freezing through the Meat-export Company was very unsatisfactory. I have had plenty of explanation as to that, and I made no charge against them. I made no charge against them, but my rejects were 10 per cent. I bought from one man who has two farms some three thousand sheep, and there was a block, and owing to the block only half of the sheep went down, but when I got the reject report it was 10 per cent. I interviewed Mr. Sladden about it, and expressed my discontent, when he assured me he would look into the matter. He also assured me that it was not so large a proportion of rejects. However, next week the following lot went down, and the proportion of rejects was a little over 2 per cent. I still did not lose my faith in the company. In consequence of the block last year we were all put about a good deal. The company had undertaken to freeze five thousand a month for me, and I did not force or press them to do so. I suffered a considerable loss then to give them no more inconvenience than I could help, because I thought they were doing their best, and I went so far as to keep four thousand sheep, which I had to graze on the root at a very considerable loss on account of the paddocking. I sent another two or three thousand to Picton rather than compel the company to take them, and I did that at a loss of 3s. 6d. a head extra. Later on one of my buyers came to me and very straightforwardly informed me that he had a very good offer from the Meat-export Company to go on with them as a buyer. Well, freezing matters had not been very satisfactory, and I did not feel very happy about it; but I said, "All right; perhaps you had better go to them." I gave him a letter to the manager, and that was quite satisfactory. I still did not think the company was not prepared to do what was right to me; but when the other day another of my buyers—I may say that we have been acting for the Meat-export Company's buyers in the Pahiatua district alone, and this man had been acting for us to buy for the company—when this man came and gave me six weeks' notice after fifteen years' service, and informed me that he had taken the position of buyer in the very district we were operating in, and where he had, as you may say, the whole of our goodwill at his fingers' ends, then I began to look back, and I feel more than satisfied that the company do not like c.i.f. buyers, and if they could go so far as to induce my buyers who had been freezing with them to leave me without saying a word to me in any shape or form, I am quite satisfied they do not care about it, and will not encourage it. Again, I think where the North Island people suffer is in the prices offered for the by-products. The fat in Christchurch was selling at slightly over 3d. per pound. I am not prepared to say it is not of rather better quality than the North Island fat. It is not so coarse, perhaps. But I do not think the companies lay themselves out here to get the best price. I understand that this year they are offering to give the same prices as they do in Christchurch for fat. I was informed of that by Mr. Foster, one of the directors of the Meat-export Company, so that it rather looks as if they admitted that they did not lay themselves out in the past to obtain the best prices. They do not get such good prices for skins as they do in the South, although there again the finer wool comes in, and skins are worth more money. But they have not the same market for skins, and my c.i.f. man—a man for whom I have been operating—informs me that he can do better with his skins than the southern fellmongers.

150. *Mr. Buddo.*] You stated that on a previous occasion yourself and others tried to establish a fat-stock market on the West Coast, and that it was a failure?—Yes.

151. More or less caused by the unwillingness of the freezing companies to send their buyers there?—Partially caused by that. I do not say that it would have been a success in any case.