

will be sold on its quality. I have a letter here from a big firm in Australia who thoroughly understand our system, and they buy on points—eighty points, which is only in the “good fair” grade. They have taken so much of one and so much of another, but the average must be eighty points, and when this system becomes general I think all our difficulty will cease.

31. We have had it on evidence from several millers that because of this wide range between “fair” and “good fair” they do not attempt to get up to, say, anything near seventy points—they keep down near sixty or sixty-four?—That is correct.

32. That is, they would lead us to believe that the grading led to rather an inferior article?—That is so—it will be done until the points are settled. If a man cannot reach that fairly easily by working with a little extra push—if he cannot reach the higher grade he will dwindle down and may become careless.

33. The Department proposes to reconstruct this scale of points?—Yes.

34. Can you give us what you propose?—My recommendation is that the grades be reconstructed to between eight points—anything below sixty-seven will be “common.”

35. *The Chairman.*] That is a reduction of seven on the present regulations?—That is so—sixty-seven to seventy-four, “fair”; others are seventy-five to eighty-two, “good fair”; eighty-three to ninety, “fine”; over ninety, “superior.” That is as near as I can remember it.

36. I have no doubt from the evidence we have that the scale will be very much better than the present one in existence. Is it a fact that at the present time most flax receives that grade, from sixty to seventy-four points—that most of the flax exported is of that quality?—The usual contract is “good fair”—seventy-five to eighty-four points.

37. Is the bulk of the flax we export classified as that?—It is contracted at that, and if a man does not reach that, that is where the £2 10s. per ton difference comes in. The difference in value at most is 10s.—as between seventy-three (“fair”) and seventy-five (“good fair”).

38. What is the next grade of flax?—“Common.”

39. Below sixty?—Yes, below sixty.

40. To what?—To anything below that—anything below fifty is usually condemned.

41. What kind is it you want to prohibit the export of—below sixty?—Below fifty.

42. You would call that what?—“Rejected.”

43. You have quite made up your mind that it would be better for the trade to prohibit the export of what you call “rejected”?—I am quite convinced of it.

44. Because we had it on evidence that certain lots of flax that were classed as “rejected” and came below fifty points were exported now and sold in Australia at £17 a ton, and the price they could have got in the local market was £9. If the millers were prevented from sending this out of the colony it would result in a considerable monetary loss to them?—If you prohibit the exportation of it you will find very little of it produced. Every man is subjected to loss as an ordinary farmer if his crops get swept off by a flood: he gets no compensation for that.

45. Do you think it would injure the New Zealand flax trade if this “rejected” quality had a proper trade-mark? It would be bought at its proper quality, and it would be known by the buyers in other countries that this was an inferior quality, and it would be bought as such?—It is not the manufacturer you have to consider, it is the poor unfortunate user of the stuff, who at first trial finds it results in disaster, and he says, “This is New Zealand fibre: I want no more.”

46. Then we come to this: that if this stuff is manufactured into rope in the colony, would you prohibit the export of that rope—the manufactured article?—Having it manufactured in this colony?

47. Yes?—I would have them prohibited from manufacturing it into rope or twine—it has no right to go into either—nothing below fifty points. There is nothing any good, to my mind, below seventy for those purposes.

48. We had it from one or two that it was because of the circumstances under which they worked that this “rejected” stuff was turned out. For instance, I remember one man saying that he was largely supplied by Maoris. Maoris supplied him with green flax from some swamp, or this green flax had laid in a wet place, and was, of course, awfully discoloured by the time it got to the miller, and that it was this very inferior stuff that was made. What would you do in that case—it is not because of the carelessness of the miller in that case?—So long as you allow that stuff to be exported the miller will buy—competition is so keen—he will say, “It is poor muck; we shall get something for it.” But if you prohibit that he will say to the Maoris, “Stop cutting,” and they will have the flax-cutters stopped.

49. Unless you are very careful, you are likely to injure the man in his work and in his mill, for, if I remember aright, one man said, “If I refused this quality that was sent in to me through it lying in the water, the Maoris would not send me any, and I am entirely dependent on the Maoris for the supply of green flax,” and he would have to shut up his mill—you see no difficulty there?—Of course, it is a big question; but I have seen the greedy customers in different parts of the colony, rather than let anybody else come in, get a quarter of an acre stacked up with what was at one time green leaf. They have worked for a week and they did not handle a quarter of it, and the result was that the balance was withered and sweated, and no man could make a good job of it, and rather than let his poor neighbour come in and give a reasonable price, he buys the lot to keep him out. It is a case of the survival of the fittest.

50. I suppose you would not for a moment suggest that the Government should prevent the exports of “locks” or inferior wool?—No, all “locks” are alike.

51. No, dirty locks are alike?—All sheep have the same process of making locks—it does not matter whether from New Zealand or anywhere else.

52. Comparison between wool and flax, to my mind, is a good one. They are both of them natural products. We have all kinds of wool, from “fine,” and we export everything down to “dirty locks,” and we have flax of different grades. It seems to me that we want to be very careful before we prohibit the export of even inferior quality if there is a better price in any other country. You do not see any difficulty?—No.