

bottom of the truck. No careful man would load into that, but do you think it would be possible?—I never knew that to be the case. I never thought they were tight enough to contain water.

289. The construction of the flap doors would be sufficient for that?—I should think so.

290. And the floors of the trucks are all flush—they have no battens on them?—No, all flat.

291. It was mentioned also that the proportion of dirty wool and skins had been greater this year than in previous years—locks and pieces. Can you tell us how we could have that verified?—No, I could not tell you.

292. Where could we get that information?—From the consignees of the wool here, I should think. In my time most of the wool in that condition had to be reconditioned here by instructions from the wool-grower generally.

293. Well, the inference is that this year, owing to the good prices, growers and owners have preferred to send their locks and pieces away in the grease to losing the time that is taken up in scouring?—Of course, that might be so.

294. From your experience of the conduct of the wool-growing business, would you imagine that owners would pretty well adhere to very old methods of dealing with their quality?—Well, you would think so; but I have heard that, this season in particular, buyers have been here purchasing wool from the sheep's back, and taking the responsibility of carting and shipping. Whether that is so or not I do not know.

295. In which case you would think that the interests of the buyers would be to ship it in the condition in which he purchased it?—Yes, that is the inference I draw from that.

296. *Captain Blackburne.*] Do you know anything about the slight fire on the "Indraghiri"?—Yes; I was not present when the fire occurred, but it was kept open for my examination when she came back here.

297. Do you know how the fire was supposed to have originated?—Yes; I formed my opinion that a match or candle had been left at the foot of the ladder down in No. 2 lower hold, and they were cooling down at the time. They came down and left a light or a match there, and then came up and put on the insulated hatches and started to cool down. There was nothing in the hold.

298. In regard to the charcoal for insulation?—It did not originate in the charcoal.

299. *Mr. Foster.*] Do you recollect the case mentioned by Captain Evans this morning in reference to rabbit-skins which were found to be heated in Wellington?—I think that was the case I referred to.

WELLINGTON, FRIDAY, AUGUST 17TH, 1906.

The Commission sat in the Upper Court, Magistrate's Courthouse, Wellington, at 10.30 a.m.

THOMAS FORBES MOFFATT sworn and examined. (No. 15.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are master of the "Mamari," are you not, Captain Moffatt?—I am.

2. You have had considerable experience of the carrying of wool, flax, and tow from New Zealand and elsewhere?—Yes.

3. The purpose of the Commission you know. Our object in calling you is to learn from your experience and observation what we can as to the probable cause of the fires which have occurred on the wool-ships?—Well, I have been carrying wool for thirty years. I saw one case, particularly, of spontaneous combustion in a bale of wool. In a good many cases we have had wool very hot, and on opening the bales the wool has been so hot that you could not bear your hand on it. On every one of these occasions I think it was very wet. I am speaking now of a very long time ago, when they used to bring the wool down to Otago in bullock-wagons, and be six weeks on the way. Very often, owing to fording the rivers, the lower bales would become saturated with water. No doubt the drivers would not like to arrive with the wool showing wet, and in many cases they would camp outside for a few days and allow the bales to dry on the outside. We should then know nothing about their being wet until they were dumped, when the water would be pressed out of them. At that time we dumped the wool when it came down. In several cases where we opened the bales they were exceedingly hot inside. That was specially the case with wool—locks and pieces, greasy wool—but the locks and pieces especially were mixed up with a good deal of dirt and vegetable matter, and on one occasion one bale did actually take fire. We opened the bale, and it was smouldering in the centre. That was at Port Chalmers, and at the time I was in a sailing-ship. In those days we dumped the wool on board ship; that was about 1870 or 1871.

4. *Mr. Foster.*] You mentioned that the wool was smouldering in the centre. Are we to understand that there was actual fire present, or only dense steam and heat?—Actual fire and red ashes were present.

5. Red hot—in fact you could actually light a match from it?—Yes. That is the only case of actual burning out of the many cases of heat which I have seen. I think perhaps I had better tell you what I saw in the case of the "Gothic" fire, because that puts it beyond all question or doubt as to the possibility of a bale of wool taking fire. I was at Home when the "Gothic" arrived. As you know, I took up her running and took her place coming out this time. Have you had any history of her case at all?

6. *The Chairman.*] No. We should be glad to have it?—Well, the first fire occurred in one of the holds, and when it was first discovered, they got the wool up and threw it overboard.

7. Was it in a state of ignition?—Actually ignited. That was dumped overboard, and they thought the trouble was overcome; but the next day they discovered another fire in another hold. That was the hold which burst into flame eventually, and they had to sink the ship to get it out. Not only that, but in the same hold, or an adjoining hold, there were bales of wool burning in two different places in the hold.