

REPORT on ANNUAL MEETING with
BRITISH RAILWAYS' BOARD in the
STATION HOTEL, PERTH at 11.15 a.m.
on TUESDAY, 3rd AUGUST, 1971.

PRESENT: B.R. Messrs. Coward (Freight Manager Scotland); R. Johnston (Sales Officer - General Traffics); J. Boyle (Claims Prevention Officer); Henderson (for Area Manager, Perth), and Dick (for Area Manager, Montrose);

N.F.U. Messrs. Galloway, Miller & Macfarlane;

S.P.T.E. Messrs. Fulton, Fordyce, Gray and Hunter.

Mr. Coward was in the Chair.

INTRODUCTION. The Chairman welcomed the representatives of N.F.U. and S.P.T.E.

1970/71 SEASON. Mr. Coward stated that during the season 1970/71 57% of seed traffic from Scotland to England and Wales had gone by rail. This was an improvement as compared with previous years and was encouraging. The ware figures for 1970/71 were 80,000 tons as compared with 58,000 the previous year. This reduction was attributable to the considerable reduction as compared with the previous year of ware potatoes leaving Scotland for England and Wales. The average van load for 1970/71 season in respect of seed potato traffic was over 10 tons.

CLOSURE OF STATIONS. Mr. Coward explained that the economics of keeping stations open was constantly under review. He was happy, however, to report that there were no proposals for the closure of seed potato loading stations in Scotland in the foreseeable future provided the present level of loadings was maintained. This meant that the Perth/Forfar line should remain open throughout the foreseeable future. In reply to Mr. Galloway the British Railways' representatives agreed that the service offered by Freightliners Ltd. did not appear to be of much value for seed potato traffic.

AVAILABILITY OF VANS. Mr. Coward stated that there had been no problems regarding the availability of vans during the 1970 /71 loading season. It was agreed that the situation had been made easier because of the open weather conditions which permitted a more even rate of despatch of seed potatoes from Scotland. Mr. Coward added that although the British Railways' waggon fleet was gradually being reduced he was satisfied that/

that there would be sufficient vans to enable them to meet normal demand for seed potatoes. To ensure that the maximum number of vans were available it was necessary to obtain the full co-operation of the Trade by their ordering vans as much in advance as possible and by their limiting their demands to their actual requirements. Mr. Fulton undertook to send out a circular to the members of the S.P.T.A. urging them to give British Railways Board maximum co-operation in this matter. Mr. Coward stated that British Railways were experimenting with new type vans and although they may not be ideally suited for seed potato traffic they would have the effect of making more of the conventional construction of van available for use for seed potato traffic. He stated that the prototype vans being experimented with cost approximately £5,000 each.

RATE LEVELS. Mr. Coward referred to the Schedule of Rates recently issued by British Railways for potato traffic. He mentioned that the increases had been kept to a minimum. Mr. Fulton pointed out to the British Railways' representatives that the new rates had been agreed at a meeting between British Railways and the N.A.S.P.M. in London on 8th June whereas the new rates had been announced to the Trade in Scotland on July. Apart from the delay in intimating the new rates to the members of the Trade in Scotland he considered that it was only proper that the Scottish Trade should be represented at the London Meeting. The British Railways agreed that this was a reasonable request and suggested that S.P.T.A. should take this matter up with the N.A.S.P.M. It was also agreed that S.P.T.A. should write to Mr. Johnston regarding this matter.

EMBARGO DATES. Mr. Boyle stated that an embargo on acceptance of seed potatoes will be imposed from 17th to 24th December, 1971 (inclusive) and from 30th December, 1971 to 3rd January, 1972 (inclusive). He added that when the destination is in the Southern or Western Regions the ban will operate on and from 14th December, 1971. Mr. Boyle added, further however that as a result of approaches received by him/

him in 1970/71 it was likely that British Railways would again agree on request to allow potatoes to be despatched during the embargo periods at "owners risk for frost damage". Mr. Boyle also stated that the arrangements for Special Protection over the worst winter period would be introduced on 15th November, 1971 and would continue until 18th March, 1972.

PROSPECTS FOR 1971/72 SEASON. Mr. Fulton indicated that British Railways could expect that the tonnage of seed potatoes despatched from Scotland to England and Wales during the forthcoming season would be similar or perhaps fractionally higher than the tonnages despatched during the 1970/71 season. The British Railways' representatives were advised that it was impossible to make any estimate of the quantity of ware potatoes to be despatched as this depended upon many factors at present unknown. The meeting were also unable to give British Railways much information with regard to the quantity of seed potatoes likely to be exported from Scotland during the forthcoming season. Mr. Galloway suggested that British Railways should approach Central Farmers or West Cumberland Farmers in the hope that they may be able to give some estimate of the tonnages likely to be exported.

CLAIMS. Mr. Boyle stated that during the 1970/71 loading season there were no claims in respect of frost damage. It was agreed that this was not altogether surprising in view of the lack of frost which was experienced. Mr. Boyle added that claims in respect of pilferage and chaffing disclosed an 80% reduction. Reference was made to the tests carried out in 1970/71 season by the Department of Agriculture with new standards of hessian, paper and polypropylene. British Railways stated that they did not know the result of these tests but understood that further tests were to be carried out by the Department during the forthcoming season. Mr. Boyle stated that once the Department's tests had been completed British Railways would then wish to carry out their own tests to decide if they would be prepared to accept traffic in the new standard of containers. Until British Railways' tests had been completed they would not be willing to accept traffic in the/

the new containers at Board's risk other than on an experimental basis. In the event of seed potatoes having to be despatched in polypropolene because of a shortage of hessian resulting from the East Pakistan crisis the British Railways' representatives indicated that they would only accept the consignments at "owners risk" until such time as they had had the opportunity of assessing the suitability of polypropolene containers. Mr. Galloway suggested that rather than papering vans British Railways should provide each van with permanent insulation which could be placed in position when the van was transporting potatoes. British Railways indicated that this was not a practicable suggestion from the point of view of increased expense and also likely theft of the insulating materials.

MANPOWER. British Railways stated that it was their intention for the forthcoming season to continue the practice of taking on casual labour to assist with the loading of seed potatoes at certain stations during the peak loading periods. In reply to Mr. Gray the British Railways' representatives indicated that consideration had been given to the possibility of providing elevators at loading stations to assist with loading but this had not proved feasible.

A vote of thanks to the Chairman terminated the meeting.