

1876.
NEW ZEALAND.

RABBIT NUISANCE COMMITTEE,

(REPORT OF THE).

Brought up on 29th August, and ordered to be printed.

ORDERS OF REFERENCE.

Extracts from the Journals of the House of Representatives.

THURSDAY, THE 20TH DAY OF JULY, 1876.

Ordered, That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the Rabbit Nuisance, with power to call for persons and papers, to take evidence and report. Such Committee to consist of Mr. Andrew, Mr. Bunny, Mr. Wason, Mr. Seymour, and the Mover; three to form a quorum, and report to be brought up within one month.—(*Mr. Hodgkinson.*)

WEDNESDAY, THE 26TH DAY OF JULY, 1876.

Ordered, That the names of Mr. W. Wood and Mr. Manders be added to the Select Committee on the Rabbit Nuisance.—(*Mr. Hodgkinson.*)

Ordered, That the name of Mr. Larnach be added to the Committee for inquiry into the Rabbit Nuisance.—(*Mr. Hodgkinson.*)

Ordered, That the petitions of Pastoral tenants of the Crown and freeholders of Southland, Farmers and residents of Southland, and Settlers in the Waianiwha District, Southland, be referred to the Select Committee on the Rabbit Nuisance.—(*Mr. Kelly.*)

FRIDAY, THE 28TH DAY OF JULY, 1876.

Ordered, That the statement by the Southland Pastoral Association, relative to the rabbit nuisance, laid upon the table this day, be referred to the Rabbit Nuisance Committee.—(*Hon. Major Atkinson.*)

TUESDAY, THE 8TH DAY OF AUGUST, 1876.

Ordered, That the petition of Owners and occupiers of land at Matura be referred to the Rabbit Nuisance Committee.—(*Mr. Kelly.*)

FRIDAY, THE 11TH DAY OF AUGUST, 1876.

Ordered, That the petition of Residents of Winton and Forest Hill District be referred to the Select Committee on the Rabbit Nuisance.—(*Mr. T. Kelly.*)

THURSDAY, THE 17TH DAY OF AUGUST, 1876.

Ordered, That the petition of Owners and occupiers of land in the Electoral District of Matura be referred to the Committee appointed to consider the rabbit nuisance.—(*Mr. W. Wood.*)

REPORT.

THE Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Rabbit Nuisance have the honor to report, that they have carefully studied the reports of inquiries into the subject in the Australian colonies, in New Zealand, and elsewhere. They have also examined a sufficient number of witnesses to confirm beyond doubt the facts of the case.

The mischief already done is most serious, is increasing, and, unless some effectual remedy be adopted, is likely to increase.

The Committee recommend that a Bill should be introduced into the Legislature, without delay, to establish an inexpensive machinery, by which the owners or occupiers of land may be compelled to keep in check the increase of rabbits on their holdings.

The Committee are of opinion that such a Bill might be extended so as to include pigs and probably other noxious animals.

They further think that a grant of money for the purpose of introducing weasels, as a natural check, into the country, would (if the object were attained) be of very great service.

The Committee call the attention of the House especially to the evidence of Captain Walker, Conservator of the State Forests, showing that forest-planting by the Government will be useless expense if rabbits are allowed to multiply uncontrolled in the neighbourhood of plantations.

Tuesday, 29th August, 1876.

SAMUEL HODGKINSON,
Chairman.

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS.

MONDAY, 31ST JULY, 1876.

The Committee met pursuant to notice at 11 o'clock a.m.

PRESENT :

Mr. Andrew,
Mr. Bunny,
Mr. Hodgkinson,

Mr. Larnach,
Mr. Manders,
Mr. Wason.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr. Bunny, That Mr. Hodgkinson do take the chair.
Orders of reference read.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr. Andrew, seconded by Mr. Larnach, That William Beetham, Esq., of Brancepeth, and G. Beetham, Esq., of The Camp, Featherston, be requested to attend and give evidence before the Committee at the next sitting.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr. Andrew, seconded by Mr. Larnach, That application be made for the Legislative Council to give permission that the Hon. Sir J. L. C. Richardson, the Hon. Dr. Menzies, the Hon. Captain Fraser, the Hon. Mr. Waterhouse, the Hon. Mr. Nurse, and the Hon. Mr. Robinson, have leave to attend to give evidence.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr. Larnach, seconded by Mr. Andrew, That the Chairman at once communicates with the Secretary of the Pastoral Association of Southland, and any other persons interested, that the Committee feel they have sufficient evidence for their purpose at hand, and that they do not feel justified in putting the country to any expense; but at the same time they would be glad to receive evidence from any quarter, it being understood that witnesses come at their own expense.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr. Larnach, seconded by Mr. Andrew, that the draft Bill on the Rabbit Nuisance, and all letters connected with same, be printed for distribution amongst the Committee.

Resolved, That the Committee be adjourned until 12 o'clock to-morrow.

TUESDAY, 1ST AUGUST, 1876.

The Committee met pursuant to notice at 12 o'clock.

PRESENT :

Mr. Andrew,
Mr. Hodgkinson,

Mr. Seymour,
Mr. Wason.

The minutes of previous meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Andrew gave notice that Mr. William Beetham and Mr. George Beetham, in accordance with summonses, were duly in attendance.

Mr. W. Beetham's evidence first, and Mr. G. Beetham's evidence next, were taken down in due order by the reporter in attendance.

Resolved, on the motion of the Chairman, That the meeting be adjourned until Wednesday, the 2nd August, 1876, at 11 o'clock a.m.

WEDNESDAY, 2ND AUGUST, 1876.

The Committee met pursuant to notice at 11 o'clock a.m.

PRESENT :

Mr. Hodgkinson,
Mr. Larnach,
Mr. Manders,

Mr. Seymour,
Mr. Wason.

The minutes of previous meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. William Smith, of the Kaikoura, attended and gave evidence, which was taken down by the reporter.

The Chairman read extract from petition from the settlers of the Waianiwha District. The report from the Southland Pastoral Association was read. The Committee then adjourned.

FRIDAY, 4TH AUGUST, 1876.

The Committee met pursuant to notice at 1.15 p.m.

PRESENT :

Mr. Andrew, Mr. Hodgkinson,		Mr. W. Wood.
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The minutes of previous meeting were read and confirmed. The Committee then adjourned until Tuesday, 8th August, at 11 a.m.

TUESDAY, 8th AUGUST, 1876.

The Committee met pursuant to notice at 11 o'clock a.m.

PRESENT :

Mr. Andrew, Mr. Bunny,		Mr. Hodgkinson, Mr. Wason.
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The minutes of previous meeting were read and confirmed. The Hon. Sir J. L. C. Richardson's evidence was taken down by reporter in attendance. *Resolved*, That the Committee be adjourned until 11 o'clock a.m. to-morrow.

WEDNESDAY, 9TH AUGUST 1876.

The Committee met pursuant to notice at 11 o'clock, a.m.

PRESENT :

Mr. Andrew, Mr. Hodgkinson, Mr. Larnach,		Mr. Manders, Mr. Seymour, Mr. Wason.
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The minutes of previous meeting were read and confirmed.

Order of reference read of 8th August, and petition from Owners and occupiers of land in the Mataura District handed in.

The evidence of the following gentlemen was taken down by reporter in attendance:—The Hon. Captain Fraser, the Hon. Mr. Waterhouse, and the Hon. Mr. Robinson.

The Committee then adjourned.

THURSDAY, 24TH AUGUST, 1876.

The Committee met pursuant to notice at 11 o'clock.

PRESENT :

Mr. Andrew, Mr. Hodgkinson,		Mr. Manders, Mr. Seymour,
		Mr. W. Wood.

The minutes of previous meeting were read and confirmed.

Resolved, That the meeting be adjourned until 12.15.

Order of reference of 11th August read, and petition from Residents in the Winton and Forest Hill District handed in.

Mr. Cuthbert Cowan, runholder from Southland, attended to give evidence, which was duly taken down by reporter in attendance.

Letter from Arthur Gerrard, farmer, Limehills, read by Chairman and handed in.

Mr. W. Wood moved that the following resolution—viz., "*Resolved*, on the motion of Mr. Larnach, seconded by Mr. Andrew, That the Chairman at once communicate with the Secretary of the Pastoral Association of Southland, and any other persons interested, that the Committee feel they have sufficient evidence for their purpose at hand, and that they do not feel justified in putting the country to any expense; but at the same time they would be glad to receive evidence from any quarter, it being understood that witnesses come at their own expense"—passed by Committee on 31st July, 1876, be rescinded forthwith, in order to enable the mover to move that evidence be sent for from amongst those who have signed the petitions against legislation on the rabbit nuisance.

And the question being put, the Committee divided, and the names were taken down as follows:—

<i>Ayes.</i> Mr. W. Wood.		<i>Noes.</i> Mr. Andrew, Mr. Hodgkinson, Mr. Manders.
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The motion was therefore negatived.

Mr. George M. Bell, runholder from Southland, attended to give evidence, which was duly taken down by reporter in attendance.

Resolved, That the Committee be adjourned until to-morrow at 11 a.m.

FRIDAY, 25TH AUGUST, 1876.

The Committee met pursuant to notice at 11 o'clock a.m.

PRESENT :

Mr. Andrew,
Mr. Hodgkinson,

Mr. Manders,
Mr. Seymour.

The minutes of previous meeting were read and confirmed.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr. Andrew, That Mr. Seymour and the mover communicate with the Government, the Hon. Dr. Menzies, or other member of the Upper House, respecting the introduction into the Legislative Council of a Bill for the abatement of the Rabbit Nuisance.

Resolved, That the Committee be adjourned until Monday at 10 a.m.

MONDAY, 28TH AUGUST, 1876.

The Committee met pursuant to notice at 10 o'clock a.m.

PRESENT :

Mr. Andrew,
Mr. Hodgkinson,

Mr. Seymour.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

Captain Campbell Walker, Conservator of State Forests, attended and gave evidence, which was duly taken down by reporter in attendance.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr. Andrew, That the following report be adopted and brought up to the House to-morrow :—

The Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Rabbit Nuisance have the honor to report that they have carefully studied the reports of inquiries into the subject in the Australian colonies, in New Zealand, and elsewhere. They have also examined a sufficient number of witnesses to confirm beyond doubt the facts of the case.

The mischief already done is most serious, is increasing, and, unless some effectual remedy be adopted, is likely to increase.

The Committee recommend that a Bill should be introduced into the Legislature, without delay, to establish an inexpensive machinery, by which the owners or occupiers of land may be compelled to keep in check the increase of rabbits on their holdings.

The Committee are of opinion that such a Bill might be extended so as to include pigs and probably other noxious animals.

They further think that a grant of money for the purpose of introducing weasels, as a natural check, into the country, would (if the object were attained) be of very great service.

The Committee call the attention of the House especially to the evidence of Captain Walker, Conservator of the State Forests, showing that forest-planting by the Government will be useless expense if rabbits are allowed to multiply uncontrolled in the neighbourhood of plantations.

The Committee then adjourned.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

TUESDAY, 1ST AUGUST, 1876.

Mr. WILLIAM BEETHAM being in attendance, was examined as follows:—

1. *Mr. Andrew.*] You have been a settler for some years in New Zealand?—Yes.
2. How many years?—About twenty years.
3. You are tolerably well acquainted with the District of the Wairarapa?—Yes.
4. When you first knew that district were there any rabbits on it?—There were a few when I first went up there.
5. What sort of rabbits?—The ordinary domesticated fancy lop-eared rabbit. I think there were a few of those at Manaia.
6. Did these increase to a detrimental extent?—No.
7. Have rabbits increased to a detrimental extent during the past few years. I am speaking of the Wairarapa District?—Yes, within the past four or five years they have very greatly increased till they have now become a pest and a nuisance, and occasion a serious loss by destroying feed on the runs.
8. *The Chairman.*] I presume the rabbits you are now speaking of are a different variety to the domesticated animals of which you spoke a minute ago?—Yes.
9. *Mr. Andrew.*] By whom were these rabbits introduced?—By a Mr. Carter.
10. These are the grey rabbits?—Yes.

11. Are there any silver grey rabbits in the district?—I have not seen any.
12. Could you mention some of the parts of the Wairarapa where these rabbits have become such a nuisance?—There is Taratahi and some of the places above Masterton. They have here increased in very large numbers, but they are on the increase, more or less, throughout the whole of the district from Palliser Bay to twenty miles north of Masterton.
13. Are there any on the Brancepeth estate?—Within the last six months they have made their presence felt there.
14. In your opinion would the increase of these rabbits have a depreciatory effect upon the value of property in this district?—I believe the increase, if it continues at the same rate as it has done during the past year or two, will have a very detrimental effect upon the district.
15. *The Chairman.*] Is the district made up of farms and runs?—Yes; principally the latter. The country is principally pastoral and laid down in English grasses.
16. *Mr. Seymour.*] What is the character of the country generally?—Hilly.
17. And the soil?—A rich marl.
18. *Mr. Andrew.*] And you say the rabbits have spread so widely, and so largely increased in numbers that the question of their continued increase is becoming serious?—Yes; they have spread greatly, especially in the Te Purupuru. On Mr. Buchanan's run they have been exceedingly destructive, so much so that he has been obliged to employ men to kill them.
19. *Mr. Wason.*] Of your own knowledge have the rabbits done serious injury?—They have not done us any injury yet.
20. But they have done Mr. Buchanan injury?—Yes; decidedly. It costs him, I should think, £150 to £200 a year.
21. Has he been obliged to decrease his stock?—I think not. This run, I may say, is not fully stocked.
22. Has any settler in the Wairarapa been obliged to decrease his stock owing to the rabbits?—I have heard people of the Taratahi say that they were unable to keep the number of sheep that they had done before.
23. *Mr. Andrew.*] Small farmers? The Taratahi District is settled by small farmers, is it not?—Yes.
24. And small farmers have complained that the carrying capacity of their farms or runs has been diminished owing to the rabbit nuisance?—Yes.
25. *Mr. Wason.*] How many rabbits would a man, an ordinary good shot, kill in a day?—I could scarcely answer that. I have heard of boys going out with guns and dogs and killing a hundred in a day.
26. *Mr. Seymour.*] The soil is favourable to the rabbits burrowing, is it not?—Yes; in some parts. The soil varies very much. There are some sandy blocks where they can burrow, but most of the burrows I have seen have been mere breeding burrows.
27. *Mr. Wason.*] Can you suggest any method of exterminating rabbits?—I think it would be impossible to exterminate them; it would be as difficult as attempting to exterminate rats.
28. Are you aware what will be the consequence if some steps are not taken to exterminate them?—I am aware that the consequence will be a very serious deterioration in the value of property, and there would be a very great annual cost to landholders to keep them down.
29. They have increased very rapidly during the last few months?—Very rapidly indeed.
30. *Mr. Seymour.*] Do you know of anything to lead you to suppose that the rabbits would not exist in such large numbers if unable to burrow?—I think they would not, although I may say this, that they do exist in large numbers where they are able to get into logs and ferns.
31. The reason they have not done much damage in the Wairarapa as yet is that the land is mostly taken up in runs?—Yes.
32. There is no extent of grain crops in the district?—No.
33. Still they have decreased the carrying capacity of some of the runs?—Yes; certainly they have.
34. What remedy can you suggest?—I can only suggest the use of ferrets and dogs. Weasels might be introduced, and I think there should be greater facilities given for the residents in these districts getting powder. On some stations the cost of powder forms a heavy tax.

Mr. GEORGE BEETHAM being in attendance, was examined as follows:—

35. *Mr. Andrew.*] You live in the same district as your brother?—Yes.
36. And I suppose you can corroborate all that he has said?—Yes, entirely. I have heard that the rabbit pest has interfered a good deal with the farmers of the Taratahi. Their gardens have been sadly plundered, and they inform me that it has become impossible to raise cabbages.
37. The small farmers of the Taratahi are not at all well supplied with butchers' meat, are they?—No, they are not.
38. Yet, notwithstanding their efforts to get rabbits for food, they have not been able to keep the rabbits down?—Certainly not.
39. *Mr. Wason.*] Do you think the people have any adequate idea of the ruin likely to come upon them if the pest be not subdued?—I think they are just now becoming alive to it. It is dawning upon them, and an agitation is arising on the subject.
40. Can you suggest any means for alleviating the pest or checking its growth?—It is a very awkward subject to legislate upon. I think that any action which might be taken should be through the Pastoral associations. If the Government subsidized these associations to a certain extent it would perhaps lead to some united action.
41. The Government assisted to check the cattle plague; and this is worse than the cattle plague; therefore you think the Government should assist in the matter?—Yes.
42. *The Chairman.*] Is the district a freehold or leasehold district?—Most of the land is freehold.

43. *Mr. Andrew.*] There are a great number of holdings under 100 acres?—Yes, about the townships.

44. And there are a good many runs varying from 300 to 1,000 acres in area?—Yes; such runs as Manaia and Carter's. It is the larger runs in which the rabbit difficulty will occur principally.

45. The danger is greater on large runs than on the smaller runs?—Much greater.

46. You can only suggest the increase of the power of the Pastoral associations?—Yes; as I said before, it is a very awkward subject to legislate upon. I recollect the thistle nuisance which, in some degree, was similar to this. The Provincial Council undertook to legislate upon the subject, but I do not think much good was done.

47. Are there any Highway Boards in the district?—There are three large highway districts in the Wairarapa, each of which has its Board.

48. Do you not think that they might deal with the question, collecting special rates for the purpose of eradicating the pest?—I think very probably they will do so. At any rate I should hope to see the County Councils take the matter up.

49. I presume the small farmers at the Taratahi can keep the rabbits down on their properties?—They have not done so hitherto, as they do not seem to have seen the necessity for doing so. I think they will, however, keep the nuisance down in future.

50. Does anybody else besides Mr. Buchanan keep men to destroy the rabbits?—I believe Mr. Waterhouse does.

51. I suppose you will have to keep men if you find the rabbits increasing?—Yes; we are keeping one hand now as a precaution, and it may become necessary to keep more than one on presently.

52. Then do you not think it would be desirable that there should be legislation so as to render it compulsory upon people to keep their runs clean?—I think such a law would be a dead letter.

53. Would it not be very hard if such a law did not exist. Suppose, for instance, that a number of runholders spent a good deal of money in clearing their runs, but some man holding three or four acres in the midst of them declined to take any steps whatever to clear his run, would not the work of the other runholders be useless?—Yes, it would.

54. *Mr. Andrew.*] There is, as a matter of fact, a large block of Native land, some 200,000 acres in extent, between Mr. Waterhouse's run and yours, is there not?—Yes.

55. *The Chairman.*] Are there many rabbits in that block?—Yes; they are breeding very rapidly on that run.

56. *Mr. Andrew.*] There is also one block between the Taueru and the Ruamahunga Rivers?—Yes.

57. *The Chairman.*] There are some large holdings in this part of the district?—Yes; all the properties in the East Coast District are large, and it is on the East Coast that the rabbits have principally increased.

58. *Mr. Andrew.*] Were the rabbits, when first found two or three years' ago, confined to one locality by the Ruamahunga River, and since then have they crossed the river, and are now breeding in all the districts?—Yes; during the last five or six years they have increased in all directions.

WEDNESDAY, 2ND AUGUST, 1876.

Mr. WILLIAM SMITH, of Kaikoura, being in attendance, was examined as follows:—

59. *The Chairman.*] Where do you live, Mr. Smith?—Kaikoura, in the Marlborough province.

60. Have you lived there long?—Ten or twelve years.

61. In the same particular place?—Yes.

62. How long is it since the rabbits appeared in the locality? Six years?—Longer than that, but they have not become a nuisance until lately. I should suppose it is fourteen years since they were first turned out in the province.

63. What is the variety of the rabbits in this district?—The silver grey. I believe they are called Lord Galvin's breed, but they are a French kind, and better known as the silver grey.

64. Were they numerous when you first went to the district?—No, they were not.

65. How long is it since they began to become a nuisance?—Some six or seven years since they first became troublesome.

66. Have they increased much during the last year or two?—I do not think they have increased much of late in our neighbourhood, though they have spread further over the district, because the skins being more or less valuable, many people have been engaged in killing the rabbits for the sale of the skins in the winter season, and the runholders all the year round, to abate the nuisance. In this way the nuisance has been partially kept down.

67. What is the value of the skins?—The market is not at all steady. At first very good prices were obtained, but the value seems to be less now. I may say that some time ago I employed a man to kill rabbits in a paddock of 1,500 acres, and took the skins from him at 4d. each, or 4s. a dozen. I also found him in ammunition.

68. *Mr. Seymour.*] Did you give him his food?—No.

69. And the skins are worth 4d. each?—That was the value of skins taken in the winter months, but the skins taken in the summer months were not so valuable owing to there being a difference in the quality of the fur. You would now get about 3½d. for the winter skins. There has been a reduction in price, for which I can only account by the circumstance that the supply is coming up to the demand.

70. *The Chairman.*] Is the country freehold or leasehold—that is, is it a farming country or pastoral?—Both; there are some large properties and a good few farms.

71. What is the nature of the country? Easy for the rabbits to burrow in?—Yes, the principal

portion is. There are a good many acres of silt and sand, and in this kind of country burrowing is easy. There are other parts, where the soil is clayey, where they burrow, but not so easily.

72. They live chiefly in sandy places?—Yes, as a rule they do. It is in such places that they find their stronghold.

73. *Mr. Seymour.*] Can you tell us roughly how many men there are in the district engaged in the destruction of rabbits?—I cannot speak for this season. Last year I know that there were sixteen men employed on the Swyncombe estate, which belongs to Mr. King. There were a number of men killing on their own account, for the skins. I think there were seven or eight on the flat alone. Then Mr. Buller and Captain Keene employed men; so did others, whom I cannot at the moment name. I have one man.

74. What is the size of the Swyncombe run?—I believe it is about 15,000 or 20,000 acres.

75. Do you remember how many skins have been exported?—No; I should think that the export of last year was large—about 120,000 skins, or more than that. The purchases on the Swyncombe station amounted to about 80,000 skins; then there were a large number taken in other places in the province. I really could not even approximate the number exported.

76. Would not the number you represent be small as compared to the number that are killed in various ways?—Yes; I think it would be small.

77. Is it not a fact that cats and hawks are encouraged?—Yes; I have just thought of one circumstance which I ought to mention: the rabbits were first introduced in the Swyncombe estate.

78. *The Chairman.*] Are you of opinion that rabbits could be kept down on farms and small holdings?—Yes.

79. Farms, say, from one hundred acres to one thousand acres in extent?—Yes; on farms that are cleared, or are in a state of cultivation; but it would be scarcely possible to keep them down on land covered with scrub.

80. The difficulty would be great, you think, on freehold properties or runs?—I think so—on unsold land, absentees' land, and so forth.

81. What is your opinion as to having a provision in any Rabbit Act which might be passed for giving Road Boards powers to enter upon lands and destroy rabbits, in case the owners or occupiers did not kill off the rabbits?—Do you mean in the case of unenclosed lands or otherwise?

82. Both?—I think it would be very desirable, because there might be some persons apathetic in reference to the extirpation or destruction of rabbits; but it would be a question whether people would like such a law. It might be that some persons would keep the rabbits on their properties for the sake of their skins.

83. *Mr. Seymour.*] Is it not a fact that at first the skins were much more valuable than they are now?—Yes; and I account for it by the skins becoming more plentiful.

84. In the young rabbits, is not black plentifully mixed with the grey fur?—Yes; but they become grey as they grow older.

85. Then, do you not think that the cause in the fall of price of the skins is that the skins of the young rabbits killed lately are inferior to those of the rabbits killed earlier?—No; I should scarcely think so, inasmuch as it seems to me that the skins of the full-grown rabbits now are as good as those taken previously.

86. Have you shipped many skins home yourself?—About 5,000, for which I have not yet received account sales.

87. The trapping of rabbits is done principally upon the flats?—Yes; in sandy neighbourhoods.

88. Is it a fact that by trapping rabbits upon the sandy flats, you drive them to the hills?—Yes; rabbits when hunted in one locality move off to another.

89. Do they return again in time?—Yes.

90. Have you been led to suppose, from your observation, that the rabbits accommodate themselves to circumstances, and can live out on the surface of the ground and without burrowing?—Yes.

91. I have heard that rabbits have destroyed the young kowhai trees?—They do destroy a good many, and after the trees have fallen eat the bark from the limbs.

92. The kowhai tree is a valuable timber, is it not?—Yes; and is not very plentiful.

93. *The Chairman.*] Do the rabbits do injury to the large trees in the forests?—No.

94. What do you consider the best means of destroying the rabbits?—In some localities they trap them easily; but in others this mode of destruction cannot be followed. In our province the ferrets have been resorted to, and there must be a great many in the district.

95. Do you think they do good?—Yes, I think so. There has been a great deal of speculation with a view of ascertaining what is the best means of extirpating the rabbits, and, among other remedies, weasels have been suggested. From my own knowledge of weasels and stoats, I believe they would merely go into the bush after the small birds and leave the rabbits alone. I think the ferret would be the best animal of the kind; and, on the whole, I think they are doing good service at present. They are now in the district in large quantities; in fact, I have heard of sixteen ferrets having been caught in the traps in one night—that is, the traps set for the rabbits.

96. *Mr. Wason.*] Do you not think a method of extirpating rabbits altogether could be devised?—Not altogether. I think the nuisance might be kept under, but not wholly done away with.

97. Not on large sheep stations I presume you mean?—Yes; I think in the open stations—that is, in the cleared stations a good deal might be done to thin the rabbits by the use of the gun. Of course it would be different on those which are wooded; on those it might not be possible to do much with the gun.

98. Are the residents in your locality doing all that can be done to keep the rabbits under?—I am afraid all the farmers are not.

99. The runholders are?—Yes.

100. Do you suppose it is possible for the nuisance to be kept under while some persons stand out and will not assist?—I think it would be a grievous misfortune if some persons had power to resist the destruction of rabbits. People might use such a power, but I should hardly think they would.

101. Do you not think it would be proper to form local Rabbit Boards, and give them power to levy rates and keep men to enter upon lands to kill rabbits: thus the work of killing rabbits would be placed in the hands of the Boards. Would that not be a good plan?—Some years ago there was an attempt in our province to form Boards, and I have in my possession somewhere memoranda relating to it. A Committee was appointed, and a public meeting held; but the small farmers were very averse to the proposition. They seemed to think that the nuisance would only affect the large runholders, and that it would be unfair to tax small farm-holders for the benefit of the large holders.

102. Do you think the small farmers still hold the same views upon the matter?—I think so.

103. Were the small farmers then growing crops?—Yes; ordinary crops of wheat.

104. What sort of crops do they now grow?—In the locality of rough, uncleared land in which the rabbits now are in large numbers nothing much is grown.

105. Then they grow nothing?—Not very much.

106. *Mr. Seymour.*] Is it not a fact that many of these residents and small farmers look upon the destruction of rabbits upon the runs of their richer neighbours as a profitable source of work for them during the winter months?—Yes.

107. *Mr. Larnach.*] Are you aware whether or not it is calculated in Victoria that five rabbits consume as much grass as one sheep, or, in other words, that if a run is infested by 5,000 rabbits, it lessens the carrying power of the run by 1,000 sheep?—I am not aware what the calculation is in Victoria. I should think that is about the proportion in New Zealand.

108. *Mr. Manders.*] You stated just now that a Committee had been appointed and proposed certain remedies for the rabbit nuisance at Kaikoura. What were the nature of the propositions of the Committee?—That the Provincial Council should be asked to provide for a local tax being raised, and give a subsidy to a Board to be established for dealing with the matter. But as the public meeting did not seem to approve of the proposition, the matter was not carried out.

109. In your district, are the residents now desirous that power should be given to local Boards to deal with the nuisance in particular districts?—The feeling would not be generally in favour of it.

110. How many small farms have you in the district you speak of?—I could scarcely say.

111. Two hundred?—Not so many; not one hundred.

112. And it is from them you anticipate any opposition there might be to the establishment of Boards?—Yes.

113. *Mr. Wason.*] Do you think the opposition would arise?—I do not think they would concur with a measure of the kind you indicate.

114. What do you consider the best means of eradicating the pest? The formation of these Boards?—It would tend to keep the rabbits down, but I do not think they could be exterminated.

TUESDAY, 8TH AUGUST, 1876.

The Hon. Sir J. L. C. RICHARDSON being in attendance, was examined as follows:—

115. *The Chairman.*] We wish to know whether you can give us any information on this matter, Sir John?—I may say that I was one of the Commissioners whose report has been laid upon the table of each House, and which is marked H. 10, and dated 25th May, 1876.

116. Have you been all over the runs?—I cannot say that we have been over the majority.

117. You believe that the destruction of rabbits is absolutely necessary, or the pest will very seriously affect the carrying capacity of runs?—I am of opinion that all the statements in the report are substantially true.

118. Do you know anything as to which would be the best means of exterminating rabbits?—We stated what we heard upon the subject, as will be seen on the 9th page of the report. We made no specific recommendations on the matter beyond that the application of a remedy should be immediate, compulsory, and universal.

119. Do you not think that the value of the runs, the leases of which expire in about five years, will have been seriously diminished unless some steps are taken to clear them of rabbits?—Yes; that is stated in page 4 of the report. I confirm all that has been stated in the report on this point. I say this particularly, because we have been taken to task by some of the Southland people for having been "gulled" somewhat by the information which had been given to us. I can only say I have perfect faith in the reliability of the statements made by those with whom we communicated. In some instances accounts were shown us, and in other instances we had a convergence of testimony from different quarters showing that the statements made were correct.

120. You think it is quite impossible to keep the rabbits down unless united action be insured by compulsion if necessary?—Yes; similar to the Tasmanian practice, to which reference is made on page 6.

121. Several petitions have been sent up to the House in reference to the rabbit question, and some of the petitions are against any State aid to the suppression of the nuisance—that is to say, they ask that not one farthing may be granted to runholders from the public funds. The question arises whether it is good policy or not that the State should be called upon for assistance. What is your opinion?—I consider that as the State has a continuing interest in the property, and as the rabbit nuisance did not arise from any fault of the present occupants of runs, therefore justice demands that some aid should be given by the State. In what form the assistance should be given I am not in a position to state.

122. There is another question. There is a difference of opinion as to the best means to be taken for the eradication of the pest. The prevailing opinion in Southland seems to be that as soon as the leases of the runs have expired, the runs should be subdivided into smaller estates and let. It is observed that the parties taking the smaller parcels of land would be able to keep the rabbits down and ultimately clear the runs?—This is one of those problems upon which wise men would only give an opinion after it had

been experimented on. The peculiar character of the land taken up in Southland would make it very difficult to carry out such a scheme. Every man seems to have gone and bought land where he liked, and in some instances long strips of land commanding the uplands and extending for miles, and scarcely a mile in width, have been taken evidently with the intention of commanding other country. The difficulty of dealing with such high lands would be greater because of the rocky ground which occurs here and there. Then there might be indifferent crops, and there would be very considerable expenditure in fencing. Still the experiment might be worthy of a trial.

123. *Mr. Wason.*] The cutting of the land up into blocks of 4,000 or 5,000 acres?—Yes; it is worthy of a trial. I do not say I agree with the idea as regards Southland, but when farmers say, “We are prepared to tackle the work,” I think they should be allowed to try it.

124. Another question has been involved. It is said the Government should buy up all the land at a valuation to be fixed, cut it up, and sell it in smaller lots, so as to enable small farmers to get upon it. What is your opinion?—Do I understand that the Legislature is to make it compulsory on owners to render up their land?

125. Yes?—That I think would be subversive of every principle of political economy.

126. *Mr. Wason.*] If it were decided that the State should assist, what form should the assistance take?—That I have not sufficiently considered to justify me in supposing that any opinion I might give would be of much weight. The Government might assist by taking off the tax on dogs used for the purpose of rabbit killing, and on powder and shot, or there might be a slight reduction in the rental of the run.

127. *The Chairman.*] In the report, the Commission recommend that the natural enemies of the rabbits should be encouraged. Are ferrets meant?—I have heard that ferrets will not live and multiply. The climate seems too cold and too damp.

128. Do you think weasels should be introduced?—Yes; and I think people generally should be cautioned against the destruction of hawks, and against the use of poison.

129. In page 9 of the Southland Report, it is said, “That the application of a remedy is necessary, which should be immediate, compulsory, and universal.” What is meant by that?—That some legislation should take place rendering it compulsory that rabbits should be destroyed; the Act to be brought into force over all pastoral and agricultural country in which rabbits exist as a nuisance.

130. What is the remedy?—That I cannot say. There is a remedy pointed to on page 6, as adopted in Tasmania.

WEDNESDAY, 9TH AUGUST, 1876.

Hon. Captain FRASER, M.L.C., being in attendance, was examined as follows:—

131. *The Chairman.*] You will be kind enough to tell the Committee what you know of this matter?—The evidence I have to give will go to show the rapid increase and advance of the district with which I am best acquainted. I have got an interest in some runs in the Clyde District, near the Dunstan, and thirty months ago it would have been a good day's sport to shoot half a dozen rabbits.

132. Thirty months ago—that is, two and a half years?—Precisely. Latterly I sent a telegram to Mr. Strobe, of the firm of Strobe and Fraser, asking him to supply me with information on this subject, and this is the telegram which I received in reply:—“Damage by rabbits cannot yet be estimated. About 5,000 killed in three months. Cost of destruction 3d. each. The whole of duty on powder and shot be allowed, on a statutory declaration being made that the quantity has been used solely for rabbits.” This will show you, Mr. Chairman, how the rabbits are advancing and increasing.

133. This is by the Molyneux?—Yes, quite in the interior of the country; and it will show you how very much the rabbits have increased within a very short period, and how they are gradually spreading all over Otago. On the opposite side of the river, too, there is a run, belonging to Mr. Campbell, on which the rabbit nuisance is very much worse than in the case just mentioned. So you see they are advancing on both sides of the Molyneux; and if we are going to legislate with a view of endeavouring to arrest their progress, or suppress the nuisance altogether, the Act to be introduced would require to be something like the Scab Act, compulsory, and made to apply not only to those upon which were at present infested with rabbits, but to every station.

134. *Mr. Andrew.*] Then you recommend compulsory legislation for the destruction of these rabbits, and that the destruction be carried out from the funds of some general rate to be imposed upon run-holders?—Upon pastoral lands only, whether it is freehold or leasehold. I certainly would exempt all agricultural land, because I consider that agriculturists can protect themselves. In Scotland, where I have been recently, I know that the agriculturists could protect themselves from the rabbit nuisance if they were allowed to do so; but in no case are they allowed to do so. The landlords employ trappers, but tenants are not permitted to use powder and shot, for reasons which the Committee will, no doubt, understand.

135. *The Chairman.*] Can you suggest a plan for levying a rate, or empowering people to destroy these rabbits?—I think it would be safe and wise for the Government to act in the matter, as the leases of these lands are running out, and unless the progress of the nuisance be arrested the land will be worthless. At present a large revenue is being derived from these pastoral lands, and in the course of a few years that revenue would, no doubt, be largely increased; but unless something is done now to abate this nuisance the country will be useless. Therefore I think the Government are bound to subsidize the efforts which may be made by the tenants.

136. Do you think that squatters having only four or five years to run would be able to pay the rates and kill these rabbits?—I think, as I said before, that the Government should subsidize their efforts. As to the rate, it should not be confined to those who are making the effort just now. You will see by this telegram how very rapidly the rabbits are increasing and extending over the country.

137. You spoke about the Government making some compensation to landowners: in what way?

2—I. 5.

—They should certainly give powder and shot duty free, and then they should make some reduction in the rate of assessment during the present tenancy.

138. Supposing that were done, what evidence would the Government have that the rabbits were killed?—We could give them either their heads or their tails as evidence; besides, there would be a statutory declaration that so many were killed.

139. *Mr. Larnach.*] Would you advocate taking away the tax on dogs?—I do not think dogs would be found to answer. In my opinion cats are far more useful.

140. *The Chairman.*] But I find that cats will not increase?—Perhaps not in the country; but you can get them in the centres of population.

141. How long is it since the rabbits first appeared in your neighbourhood?—About two years and a half ago. As I have said before, six rabbits would be considered a good day's sport.

142. But had they been seen before then?—Oh, yes; they had been seen before then. I am under the impression that the rabbits we have now are tame rabbits, and they are not so dangerous as the wild rabbit, which increase more rapidly than the tame rabbit; and if the wild rabbit were to come up in our direction, our position would be much worse than it is now. There is, moreover, much more difficulty to destroy the wild rabbits, because they are smaller, and can live where it would be impossible for the tame rabbit to exist. Our country is of a hilly character, covered with large masses of stone, which afford protection to the rabbits, and dogs could not therefore follow them.

143. Have the sheep fallen off much in consequence of this nuisance?—There has not yet been time; but I have no doubt that in the coming spring we may feel the effect of it.

144. *Mr. Andrew.*] You have, or had at one time, I think, some interest in runs at the Hawea, Captain Fraser?—Yes.

145. Are there any rabbits there?—No; but there is nothing to prevent them coming up. They are advancing on both sides of the Molyneux, and they will reach the Hawea unless some steps are taken to arrest their progress.

146. What is the nature of the soil on the Dunstan where you are apprehensive of their doing harm now?—A light soil, and rocky.

147. Are there many Irishmen there?—Yes, a great number.

148. You have intense frosts there in the winter?—Yes, very hard frosts. It would be more difficult to get the rabbits out of the rocks then. Ferrets or stoats would be no use in our country; they would be lost.

149. How would weasels do?—They tell me you cannot bring them out here.

150. But supposing you could get them out, how then?—I have no doubt they would answer very well.

151. Do you know if any one has attempted to bring out weasels?—No. I do not know how I became possessed of the impression that they cannot be brought out. I think I have been told that they knock themselves to pieces about the sides of the cage.

152. *Mr. Larnach.*] You are not aware as to whether any have been brought out to Tasmania?—No.

153. Are you shooting down the hawks on your station?—No; but it is a singular thing that they have almost entirely disappeared, although at one time they were very numerous, as can now be seen by their old nests.

154. *The Chairman.*] Do you think their disappearance is due to the want of birds?—No; there is no want of birds; that is, there has been no decrease in the number of small larks; but I have examined their exuviae in many of the caves where they made their nests, and I think they must have lived very much upon rats, because I found in the exuviae the teeth of rats and the fur also. I cannot therefore understand why the hawks have decreased.

155. *Mr. Andrew.*] Are you acquainted with the Tasmanian legislation on this subject?—No, I am not. I believe that many hawks may have been destroyed in former years when poison was laid for wild dogs.

Hon. MR. ROBINSON, M.L.C., being in attendance, was examined as follows:—

156. *The Chairman.*] Do you live in a rabbit-infested district?—I do not, Sir.

157. Have you had any experience of the rabbit nuisance?—Not in this country.

158. In Tasmania or Victoria?—No; but I have been through country where there are quantities of rabbits in Victoria, in the Western District and in Colac. Rabbits, I think, would only thrive on certain soils. I do not think they would increase much on strong clay land.

159. But, so far as you know of the New Zealand country, do you think they are likely to increase much?—I know they have increased considerably in some portions of New Zealand—at the Kaikoura, for instance, they have completely taken possession of the country.

160. Do you think they are calculated to increase on all sheep runs?—Yes, I do; and the increase would greatly depend upon the run. For instance, I think rabbits would be much more likely to increase upon a run of 150,000 acres than upon one of 10,000 acres; the circumstances would not be as favourable to their increase on the small as on the larger area. On the small run there would be a larger population in proportion to area, and the rabbits would consequently be more interfered with.

161. Do you think it would be advisable for the abatement of this nuisance to sub-divide the runs in those parts of New Zealand where the leases are running out?—No doubt in the world. As an instance, I may mention a circumstance in the neighbourhood where I live. The pigs have been a great nuisance there, and the large landowners have gone to considerable expense to destroy them, as they have found to be a great nuisance. 80,000 to 100,000 acres of that country is thick with pigs. But they are no nuisance to the small farmers, but where there is wild country, of course they thrive and increase. I heard, while I was in the room just now, that you were talking about a rate; well, I may be permitted to say that I think the imposition of a rate would be a most iniquitous thing indeed to introduce for the destruction of these rabbits. It would be taxing the small farmers to protect the runs.

162. *The Chairman.*] It is a rate for the destruction of rabbits only where the destruction is necessary?—I understood that it was to apply to the whole colony. I think I heard mentioned also something about the introduction of ferrets. I think it has never been found that they interfere very much with the increase of rabbits, and I do not think you will ever get rid of the nuisance in that way. You will have to set men to work to dig them out, trap them, and destroy them. You might use long nets; I know that is the way they catch them on the warrens. They use these nets in the first instance, drive them in, and so collect them wholesale. When they get thinner you will have to dig them out and trap them; then, perhaps, when they become still thinner, it will be necessary to shoot them.

163. With regard to agricultural districts, do you think it is desirable to have compulsory legislation, so as to compel the farmers to kill the rabbits?—No; I think their own interests would dictate to them the best means of getting rid of them.

164. But in such a case, for instance, as where the owners of the land did not kill the rabbits, which therefore became a nuisance to the neighbours, what would you do then? I know there are such cases.—Then I should give the neighbours the privilege of going on the land and doing what they liked to destroy them. In the case of a piece of land lying idle, with no occupant, I certainly think the owners of neighbouring property should have the privilege of entering the land and destroying the rabbits.

165. *Mr. Andrew.*] Do you not think a provision enabling them to take action at law for damages would be sufficient remedy?—Yes; there is no doubt of that. The law steps between landlord and tenant at home.

166. *The Chairman.*] I think it is questionable which would waste the most—the lawyers or the rabbits.—That would be for the tenant's consideration, whether he should commence proceedings or not. There is no doubt in the world that if you have a large tract of country in the hands of one person, and if there are only two or three shepherds running over it, you will not be able to get rid of the nuisance unless by some such means as I have shown. I think probably if these holdings were reduced in size, there would be much greater probability of getting rid of the rabbits.

167. My experience has shown me that small farmers will not destroy the rabbits, but leave the work to their neighbours.—I rather think compulsory legislation on this point would be interfering with the liberty of the subject, as thus: A man might say, "I will have a rabbit warren on my land," and fence it in to keep others out. But if you had a law passed compelling all persons to kill rabbits, he could not keep his warren, and that would be interfering with the liberty of the subject.

168. Is it not the same in the case of the Scab Act?—No; I do not think that. As to the introduction of vermin to destroy the rabbits, I think there would be a very great objection to that; because they might increase to a very large extent, and destroy other sorts of game which it is desirable to preserve—quail and pheasants, for example.

169. Then you do not think it would be desirable to import weasels?—I think there would be great danger in doing so; and I feel sure they would not succeed in getting rid of the rabbits.

170. Do you know anything of the Tasmanian rabbit legislation?—No, I do not. There were no cases in Victoria where the rabbits were as numerous as they are ever likely to be here, and they were got rid of.

171. *Mr. Larnach.*] I think there are one or two cases where the rabbits have been got rid of?—But that is over a very large district.

172. It refers chiefly to the property of one individual?—I know it has been the custom to speak of Colac as Mr. Robertson's property; but the rabbits extend far beyond that.

173. *The Chairman.*] They are all through the Stoney Rises?—Yes; that is the district I refer to.

174. I may ask you again, are you in favour of compulsory legislation?—To this extent: that an Act might be passed, and then it should be left to the majority of the ratepayers of any district to bring it into operation. I have no doubt that those people suffering from this nuisance would be much more likely to determine something for the benefit of all parties than those who had not suffered from the nuisance at all, because they would necessarily turn their attention to the subject, and think it well out; and, as I have said before, I think the bringing into operation a compulsory Act should be left to the ratepayers of the district. If the majority of them will have it, then of course it may become law, and they would have to submit to it.

The Hon. G. M. WATERHOUSE, M.L.C., attended, and was examined as follows:—

175. *The Chairman.*] Do you live in a rabbit district?—Unfortunately I do. The rabbits have made their appearance on my land within the last five years, and now they are beginning to increase rapidly. I may state that the first rabbit I saw upon my property appeared in a paddock by the side of the River Ruamahunga, about five years ago, and I have reason to believe that it had been brought down in the stream on the occasion of a flood. In that part of my property there are numerous cats, which I think has prevented them increasing in number about the river bank, although the soil there is favourable to their increase. But in the back part of my property, on the hill tops and hard country, they have made their appearance in considerable numbers, and are increasing rapidly at the present time.

176. Is this a pastoral run or a freehold?—Freehold.

177. Is it a large property?—Yes, a large property. But the nuisance has only occurred at one end of it as yet. A day or two ago, however, I heard they were appearing on another part of the property where I scarcely expected to meet them. In the Wairarapa the rabbits are increasing very rapidly. I have heard of them being seen on the coast thirty miles from my property.

178. What is the name of your district?—The Wairarapa.

179. Are those wild or tame rabbits you speak of?—It is a tame rabbit, and appears to have been turned out by Mr. Carter a few years back. He denies the soft impeachment, but the people there maintain that he did turn them out. For the last four or five years the rabbits have increased with

great rapidity. Where they have increased most is in that part of the country where there are most small farmers.

180. Is the nature of the ground there more favourable?—Yes, inasmuch as there is a great deal of tea-tree and rubbish about it; and, in spite of a considerable population, they have increased until, as I heard latterly, a farmer has been compelled to abandon his farm in consequence of the nuisance. That part of the country, and indeed I may say the whole of the North Island, is favourable to rabbits. Originally it was covered with fern. That fern is in course of destruction; but the tea-tree is springing up with great rapidity almost everywhere, in the Hawke's Bay as well as the Wellington Province.

181. In place of the fern?—Yes; and wherever the tea-tree is, the rabbits will thrive independently of the character of the country. As I have stated, where the rabbits are worst on my property is where the soil is of a compact, hard description, but at the same time sheltered.

182. *Mr. Seymour.*] Do you find them use this shelter instead of burrowing?—They are beginning to burrow a little now.

183. Do you think they could exist without burrowing?—Decidedly.

184. *The Chairman.*] Do they make their nests above ground, or do they always burrow?—I should think the majority of them make their nests above the ground in the fern and in the rubbish. For the first two or three years we used to think they did not burrow, but we gradually found shallow burrows, and now we find deeper burrows, so that they are evidently acquiring the art of burrowing.

185. What means do you employ to keep the rabbits under?—I only commenced this year, and latterly I have generally had two men employed in that part of the property in which the rabbits are.

186. Do you suppose you will be able to exterminate the rabbits yourself unless a stringent law is passed compelling landowners to destroy them?—I do not believe in your legislation.

187. Yet you complain of the loss occasioned by the nuisance?—I complain very much in that way; but at the same time I realize that a hardship might be done by compelling persons to expend money. We are destroying that which affords a cover for the rabbits as fast as we can, but we have not always an opportunity of burning it.

188. You object then to any legislation upon the subject whatever?—I believe it would be useless. I differ entirely from Mr. Robinson in what I heard of that gentleman's evidence. We encourage the increase of wild cats, and our experience is that they destroy many rabbits; we likewise encourage hawks, which are found to be serviceable in the destruction of rabbits, and latterly we have turned out some ferrets.

189. Are you aware of the legislation of Tasmania on this subject?—I think the circumstances of the country very different to those of New Zealand. The districts were occupied chiefly by small farms, and there were consequently greater facilities for destroying the rabbits.

190. Do you think there is no similarity between the rabbit nuisance and the scab in sheep?—No. I think you may more easily disperse rabbits than eradicate that disease. I know two cases in the Wairarapa where persons have prided themselves upon getting rid of rabbits. They did so by turning out small dogs. I think the fact of the rabbits getting on to my property was entirely caused by a neighbour turning out small dogs to drive them away from his land.

191. *Mr. Larnach.*] Do not you think that if no measures are taken to prevent their increase they will overrun the country?—No, I do not. They are a very great nuisance; but I look to cats, ferrets, and occasionally the use of arms to keep them down. I do not know whether the Committee has any evidence with reference to ferrets before it.

192. *The Chairman.*] I was just going to ask you if you could supply us with information in that direction?—I have no personal evidence upon the subject, but it is one to which I have directed my attention for some time past; and I have often discussed the matter with Mr. Ingles, the recent member for the Kaikouras, and I told him of the efforts I had been making to introduce weasels. He then informed me that Mr. Buller, of that neighbourhood, had some time ago turned out ferrets on his property, and the soil had since been pretty free from rabbits. Still, in some of the gullies there were rabbits in sufficient quantities to be worth snaring. The trappers went into one of these gullies one day, and from that time in one month they got no less than forty-seven ferrets. They had no idea at that time that the ferrets had increased to such an extent. If so many were caught, no doubt there must have been a very considerable increase in the number of these ferrets, and they would do a good deal to keep down the rabbits. I believe when the country is thoroughly well open, we shall not be troubled with them much, unless in sandy soils. They will not go very far from the rubbish, and in this island especially there are no properties which have not vast quantities of rubbish affording shelter to these rabbits, and when they burn the fern and stuff, the shrieks of rabbits can be heard in all directions. The best way to get rid of the rabbits, to my mind, is to deprive them of shelter.

193. *Mr. Wason.*] In the South Island the circumstances of the country are considerably different from the North Island. In Canterbury and Otago the country is not divided as it is here into large freehold properties, but into freeholds and leaseholds interspersed with each other, and a large piece of freehold may adjoin a small piece of freehold, and so on. Thus, in the event of our establishing Rabbit Boards and levying a general rate, you will admit the injustice of imposing a like rate upon leasehold and freehold?—I do not think, in Canterbury, except on the river banks, that there is much danger to be apprehended from rabbits.

194. Take the case of Southland, where these leases will expire within the next four or five years, what means would you suggest of putting these leaseholders on an equal footing with the runholders. What do you consider they would be entitled to pay—half of the shilling in the pound or three-quarters?—I think the principle of the Road Board rates is a good one. They should only pay half the rates. That is the principle of the legislation in connection with roads. However, I do not think that there should be legislation. The great thing is to prevent its becoming an extensive nuisance, and I do not think any efforts to utterly destroy them would prove effectual. That is what Mr. Robinson, of Colac, told me. "We still have them," he said, "but we keep a couple of boys and a man at times, and drive them away by that means."

195. *Mr. Wason.*] But you are aware, I suppose, that Australia is a larger country than New

Zealand. We cannot drive the rabbits into the interior?—That part of Australia, you must remember, where the rabbits can prosper, is not so large. Western Victoria is not so large as New Zealand, and, moreover, we have facilities for the growth and spread of rubbish which do not exist in Victoria. We have, for instance, numerous streams in every part of the country.

196. *Mr. Larnach.*] You are aware that the rabbit does not require water, even in a climate so warm as that of Australia?—I am very much inclined to think that in the northern part of Australia no animals could live without water.

197. *Mr. Larnach.*] In Australia I have seen rabbits to the extent of 1,000 kept in hutches for over a year, and they never had water. They were generally fed on bread and thistles, and for a greater part of the year they had bran?—No animal can live entirely without moisture, either in the shape of food or water; and the rabbit is capable of getting at the roots of plants and extracting moisture from them.

198. Do you think the people in your district would object to rabbit districts being constituted, and rates levied for those districts? Would it meet with the approval of the people?—I do not think it would.

199. *The Chairman.*] Have you a Road Board in your district?—Yes.

200. Do you think there would be any objection to giving these Road Boards power to levy rates for the destruction of rabbits?—I do not think the Road Board would be the proper body to entrust with such a power. A Road Board is a body appointed for a special purpose, and the members are supposed to have a special knowledge of a particular subject. In dealing with rabbits, if there were to be any legislation whatever, it should be a special Board framed to meet the requirements of the districts.

201. *Mr. Wason.*] But you do not think even that would be satisfactory?—I do not think anything would come of it. I trust to the efforts of the people themselves, aided by wild cats and hawks.

202. *Mr. Larnach.*] Supposing you employed a man to kill rabbits on your property, and your neighbours did nothing, what would you do in such a case?—I know there is a deal of hardship in that matter, and I sometimes growl very much myself because my neighbours will do nothing in the way of destroying the rabbits; but I must do the best I can myself to get rid of them.

203. *Mr. Seymour.*] Have you tried wire netting to any extent?—No.

204. *Mr. Larnach.*] I understand that you regard this question from a local point of view?—Not entirely; because there is a great similarity in the country in different parts of New Zealand. Where there is hard soil and open country rabbits will never be a nuisance; but the hardness of the soil will not prevent them being a nuisance if there be much scrub or fern in the neighbourhood, as there is invariably in the Northern Island of New Zealand.

205. You know, I suppose, that rabbits will thrive in the snow?—Yes, rabbits will breed freely in the snow, under which they are kept warm; but here they get starved to death by the cold rain. I noticed that something was said about the desirability of offering facilities for more rapidly obtaining ammunition for shooting the rabbits. I think there is something in that. At the present time, owing to the special legislation regarding the sale of powder, there are difficulties in the way of obtaining sufficient quantities of ammunition; and I think it would be well if that law was relaxed.

206. *Mr. Seymour.*] In buying small quantities the license fees form a considerable proportion of the cost?—In buying a box of caps you have to pay one shilling for a license, and a considerable delay is experienced in obtaining it; and I think greater facilities should be given for sale of ammunition to persons well known. A register might be kept, for instance, of persons buying powder, of which a copy might periodically be forwarded to the authorities.

207. *Mr. Wason.*] And you think the powder dues should be reduced?—Yes; as well as the difficulties in the way of obtaining it.

208. Have you a dog tax in Wellington?—In Wellington, yes; but in the country it is not in force.

209. Would you suggest the withdrawal of the dog tax, in order to allow people to keep as many dogs as they should think proper?—I do not know that. Certain classes of dogs would not be much good for destroying rabbits. The trouble we have to contend with is a very serious one, and I do not see my way out of it.

210. But about the dog tax, I did not quite understand you. Are you favourable to the withdrawal of the tax?—I have said that there is practically no dog tax in the country, because it is not put in force there.

211. *Mr. Larnach.*] Down South there are places where it is found necessary to keep as many as 150 dogs to keep down the rabbit nuisance?—Well, where dogs are required for a purpose of that sort, a dog tax should not be in force.

212. *The Chairman.*] There is one question I should like your opinion upon. You know the circumstances of Southland, and that the leases there will expire in a few years. Now, do you consider it desirable that the Government, who anticipate a large revenue from these lands, by letting them again when the leases run out—do you think it desirable, I say, that the Government should go to some expense in keeping down these rabbits? Would it be good policy?—I think, undoubtedly, that if you form rabbit districts, the Government should contribute a certain amount.

213. Do you mean in the case of lands leased to squatters, or Government reserves?—In the case of land leased to a squatter. I think whatever exemption is made in favour of the squatter should be made up by the Government. If a squatter was charged, say, one-half the rabbit tax, in consideration of a lease which would shortly expire, then the Government should contribute the other half. I may state, however, that I have little hope in the result of legislation on this matter. I have no objection whatever to seeing legislation tried, but I very much question that it would be successful. I have recently met with three illustrations of the feats which the rabbit is capable of accomplishing. The island of Madeira, when first inhabited, had turned out upon it a pair of rabbits; and these rabbits so increased in numbers, that in a few years the entire population was driven from the island. It was subsequently re-occupied, and the rabbits got under; but the fact remains that the people were driven

away in the first instance in consequence of the utter impossibility of producing vegetables. In reading Carlyle's Life of Frederick the Great the other day, in a description of the first battle between the Russians and the Prussians, I was struck with the statement that the face of the country on which the battle was fought was so changed that it could not be recognized; and that had been brought about by rabbits. The country at that time was something of a heath or moor; the rabbits were introduced, and now there was nothing but moving sands, where at one time a considerable population had existed. In the *Times* the other day I was reading of the Island of Heligoland, which has a considerable population in proportion to its size, and the *Times* recommended that steps should be taken to exterminate the rabbits, because the island was sandy, and subject to strong winds, and it was feared, if the rabbits continued to spread as they had done, that the island would be unpeopled.

214. *Mr. Larnach.*] Would you suggest that, when these leases run out, the land should be re-let by the Government in smaller holdings, so that there would be greater opportunity of keeping down this pest?—I suppose the idea is that, where there are small holdings and consequently a larger population, more vigorous efforts would be made to keep down the rabbits; but, judging from my experience in the Wairarapa, such will not be the case. The only persons who take steps in the direction of destroying the rabbits are the large landed proprietors.

215. *The Chairman.*] Have you any opinion as to the policy of sub-divided runs?—I may state candidly in answer to that, I should be in favour of such a principle; but as regards keeping down the rabbit nuisance, I do not think it would be so great a success as some people imagine.

THURSDAY, 24TH AUGUST, 1876.

Mr. COWAN being in attendance, was examined as follows:—

216. *The Chairman.*] You are a runholder residing in Southland, Mr. Cowan?—In the Hokonui District.

217. How much land are you in occupation of?—About 20,000 acres of freehold and 9,000 acres of leasehold. I have been on the property for about eighteen years.

218. How long is it since the rabbits appeared on your land?—The first rabbit was seen on my property about 1871 or 1872; during the early part of 1872, I think.

219. About four years ago?—Yes.

220. Are they the English wild rabbits or mixed kinds?—The English wild rabbit, mixed with some of the silver grey.

221. Do you know from whence they came?—They came from two directions—the silver grey came from the east of the Hokonui range, and the English wild rabbit came up the river from the sand-hills between Invercargill and Riverton.

222. From the sand-hills? Yes; up the New River. The first rabbit heard of came up the river-bank past Winton.

223. Did they increase rapidly during the first year?—We did not take any particular notice of them at first. It is within the last eighteen months that the nuisance has assumed immense proportions, and that measures have been taken to suppress them.

224. Have they increased very rapidly during the past six months?—Well, since measures have been taken to suppress them, they have not increased so rapidly, and there is hope that, if these measures are continued, we may be able to keep them under. But I attach this condition, that the exertions to be made must not be confined to particular individuals; all people must act in the same direction. If my neighbours do not keep the rabbits down as well as myself, I could not keep the rabbits down; and I have no hope of the abatement of the nuisance unless united action be taken.

225. Have your neighbours tried to keep the rabbits down?—Some have and some have not.

226. Are these freeholders or leaseholders?—Both freeholders and leaseholders; and I may say that this mixed tenure complicates the question very much. In four months, on my 29,000 acres of land—that is, from March to July—I have myself killed 26,000 rabbits.

227. *Mr. W. Wood.*] As the evidence is to be taken down, we may as well be particular. You employed persons to do the work; you yourself did not kill these rabbits?—Yes; of course that is what I mean.

228. *The Chairman.*] In what manner were these rabbits killed?—Generally by men with spades, dogs, and one gun.

229. Not by traps nor by poison?—I tried traps, but found the system was not effectual; but poison I did not try.

230. Have you ever recovered any part of the cost by selling the skins?—A very small proportion. My experience of selling skins is that they do not return more than 1½d. per skin for winter skins. The cost of destroying the rabbits was 3d. per rabbit.

231. That included the total cost?—Yes; I contracted for the destruction of the rabbits at 3d. each.

232. Did you find powder and shot as well?—Yes; to one man only.

233. Do the rabbits destroy the pasture very much?—Yes; very seriously indeed.

234. Lessen the carrying capacity of the runs?—Yes; very materially.

235. Has it been necessary for you to reduce the number of your stock?—No; my greatest loss has been in the lambing. My lambs have decreased 20 per cent.

236. How many thousand ewes have you?—8,000.

237. And you attribute the loss of lambs to rabbits?—Yes.

238. Not the weather?—No.

239. *Mr. Andrew.*] There was nothing exceptional in the weather to account for the decrease?—No; the ewes were perfectly dry of milk, in consequence of the rabbits eating off the young grass as it came, and therefore could give no sustenance to the lambs.

240. Are they long-woolled sheep or merinoes?—Merinoes.

241. *The Chairman.*] Then you are not able to fatten wethers?—No; that period of fattening sheep on unimproved lands is quite past, solely in consequence of these rabbits. My run, I may add, is patched with a good deal of bush, and this makes it more difficult for me to deal with the question.

242. Do you mean scrub along the river banks?—No; bush on the hills.

243. *Mr. Andrew.*] What acreage is there of bush on your land?—2,500 acres perhaps.

244. On the run?—Yes; that is about the extent. I may explain that when rabbits are harassed on the open ground they take refuge in the bushes.

245. *The Chairman.*] Has your yield of wool decreased?—Yes; very materially.

246. What percentage have you lost in consequence of the rabbits?—I have not gone into the matter per pound.

247. *Mr. Andrew.*] Can you tell us the average decrease per fleece?—I have the papers at home by which I could pretty well estimate the decrease.

248. Do you shear in grease or washed?—Both.

249. Then it is more difficult to estimate?—Yes.

250. *The Chairman.*] You have not thought it necessary to decrease your stock?—That has been done by the destruction of lambs. I have in consequence of the loss at lambing time had to purchase to make up deficiencies.

251. Do you think your yield of wool has fallen 20 per cent.?—Yes, fully.

252. *Mr. W. Wood.*] To get at that, you must calculate upon a fixed number of sheep?—Yes.

253. In consequence of the rabbits, then, there has been a diminution upon the amount of wool obtained from a fixed number of sheep?—Yes; I estimate the fall at 20 per cent.

254. *The Chairman.*] What do you estimate the decrease to be in consequence of the lowering of the carrying capacity of the run?—That would be an increasing percentage; and if the nuisance be not abated, I am certain that the rabbits will drive sheep off the run altogether if some steps be not taken to keep them under. I say this from my own experience, and from what I have learned from other sources.

255. Do you think that, with the aid of legislation, freeholders and runholders outside the hundreds would be able to keep the rabbit nuisance down at their own instance?—I have no doubt it would be possible if the matter is made compulsory. I think, at the same time, it is perfectly clear that no one individual could possibly keep his run clear if his neighbours are allowed to keep a nursery for rabbits outside his boundary.

256. You think then that legislation is absolutely necessary?—Absolutely necessary.

257. And that if legislation were provided, then that pastoral tenants and freeholders would be able to keep rabbits down without outside assistance?—I think they could do it if there were compulsory legislation. It would be to their interest to do so, because if provision were made in the Bill that the land might be entered upon, and the work done by others at their expense, they would see that it would be much less costly to do it themselves. Besides, it is necessary for the interests of the country that something should be done.

258. For the preservation of the value of the Crown lands in the country?—Yes; the Government, no doubt, have a very large interest in this question—an immense interest. And I would point out that they have great responsibilities, because the freehold frontages to the rivers are the property of the Government, and upon these river frontages the rabbits breed in immense numbers; they are complete nurseries for them. If the rabbits, then, are allowed to breed here, the neighbouring runs will never be free from the pest. The same remark applies to many Government reserves in the centres of bushes, and lands of the Crown on the tops of hills.

259. Do you think that in any legislation provision should be made for levying rates and carrying out the compulsory clauses on Crown lands as well as on private lands?—Yes; absolutely essential.

260. If Crown land were excepted, it would form a harbour for the rabbits?—Yes.

261. You are well acquainted with the pastoral lands of Southland and the system of leasing. Are you of opinion that unless the rabbit nuisance is suppressed, the value of these lands when the leases fall in price, or six years hence, will be much deteriorated, and lower rents obtainable?—Yes; it is perfectly clear to me that unless steps be taken to eradicate the rabbits, and that speedily, the waste lands of the Crown in Southland will be of very little value at the expiration of the present leases. And I would say that it is not to be expected that the present holders will go to an enormous expense in the matter when they know that their term of occupancy will be up in a short time.

262. It has been suggested that the difficulty may be got rid of by subdividing the runs so as to let them in blocks of, say, 5,000 acres or less, by which means families or individuals who get these smaller blocks will, without difficulty, be able to clear them of rabbits and pay rent as well. What do you think of such a scheme?—Of course the success of such a plan resolves itself into a question of capital. If an individual takes up a small block infected with rabbits, has to clear it of rabbits, put up buildings and fences, buy stock, and pay rent, his success depends upon his capital. If he has not, I might say, considerable capital, he will not be able to get on.

263. Do you think that if this nuisance be not materially abated before the leases are out, the Government will be able to get tenants?—I think it will be very difficult indeed.

264. People will not be inclined to pay an increased rental?—Certainly not.

265. *Mr. Andrew.*] It would hardly pay to hold five hundred acres, would it?—No; people could not be expected to hold small lots of back country without a frontage.

266. *The Chairman.*] You have interested yourself in preparing a draft Bill for dealing with the rabbit nuisance?—Yes; it was drafted by Mr. Macdonald and myself.

267. The amount of rate is proposed to be limited to a farthing per acre on freehold land, and one-eighth of a penny upon leasehold. Do you think that is sufficient to be of practical use?—Perhaps it is not. I may say that our idea was merely to levy sufficient to establish machinery to carry out compulsory measures, not to provide means for killing the rabbits; because we believed that if compulsory measures were authorized, people would at once take steps to kill off the rabbits. We gathered that from the Tasmanian and South Australian Acts.

268. The Bill provides that in settled districts the Road Boards should have a permissive power?—Yes.

269. And in pastoral country the Commissioner of Crown Lands should have the power to act?—Yes; outside Road Board districts.

270. But where there is freehold country outside of the Road Board districts, would it not be desirable to have some other power besides the Commissioner for Crown Lands?—All the freehold country in Southland is included in Road Board districts, and assessment has for a long time been paid on all the freehold country in Southland.

271. Do you know how far the legislation in Tasmania has been effective?—I understand it has been effective. With regard to the previous question, I may say it was proposed that the Commissioner should be able to deal with waste lands of the Crown outside Road Board districts.

272. Do you think it would be desirable to make the Act applicable to the whole colony?—Yes; I think so.

273. Suppose the case of parts of the colony where there are no Road Boards; what machinery would you suggest?—In such cases, if there was a Sheep Inspector, I would attach the work to his department.

274. Where there is no Sheep Inspector?—Then there would be some difficulty.

275. Could it not be done by the freeholders forming themselves into a body—a kind of local Board?—Yes; but it would be more expensive. I presume they would want an Inspector.

276. Probably they would not like to come under the control of the Commissioner of Crown Lands?—Perhaps not.

277. It would then be necessary to have some kind of organization?—Yes.

278. Then could not the organization be supplied by the freeholders within the district?—Yes; but some independent person would be required to carry out the law.

279. Supposing a certain number of persons had power to constitute a certain district into a rabbit district, would not that get over the difficulty?—Yes; it might.

280. There is no clause of that character in this Bill?—No.

281. Would it not be desirable to insert one, so as to make provision for persons forming themselves into a Board?—Yes, I think so; and I think while we are legislating, it would be desirable to pass a Bill for the whole of New Zealand.

282. Did the rabbits come to you through the hundreds?—Yes; they come up the river along the river banks—that is, the wild grey rabbits come up from the sand-hills between Invercargill and Riverton.

283. Did you sign the petition signed by 44 persons praying for legislation?—Yes.

284. If all the owners and occupiers of land outside the hundreds—that is, in pastoral country—were compelled to pay the acreage rate proposed, and trusted upon that rate alone for the destruction of rabbits, how much per acre would be sufficient?—I should not recommend the raising of any rate for the purpose of destroying the rabbits. What I propose is the raising of a rate to create certain machinery, which machinery would convey power to the Board to enter upon lands where the holder neglected to do his work, and kill the rabbits at the expense of such negligent owner.

285. In the event of it being decided that the destruction of rabbits should be done by persons paid out of a rate, how much do you think that rate per acre would amount to?—It would be very considerable, but I have not gone into it.

286. *Mr. Andrew.*] What is your expenditure now?—It has cost me at the rate of 3d. per rabbit, without deducting the value of the skin. On calculating the cost, I should say it is about £487 a year; but that is independent of the amount lost yearly in wool and stock.

287. Would such an expenditure as that go on?—Yes, it would go on for ever unless my neighbours did not make the same exertions.

288. *Mr. W. Wood.*] How much per acre would that be?—About 4d.

289. Supposing all persons were equally energetic in suppressing the nuisance, how long would such an expenditure be necessary: two or three years?—I should think five years. I should not like to undertake to do it in less than five years; but even after that a rate (perhaps smaller) would be necessary.

290. *Mr. Manders.*] I did not catch what amount you expected to obtain from the assessment?—The assessment is proposed for the purpose of creating a machinery. It would be necessary to have an Inspector, with certain powers to enter upon land and destroy rabbits upon an individual's property, at his expense, if that individual would not do it himself. I think such machinery would be sufficient, for if a person once had a visit from the Inspector, he would find the process so expensive that in future he would kill his rabbits himself. I believe the plan has worked well in Tasmania and South Australia.

291. You only desire an assessment for the purpose of calling into existence machinery?—Yes.

292. You have not contemplated asking the Government for a bonus for rabbits killed. You are perhaps aware that was done in Tasmania?—No; I was not aware of it, and I did not propose it here. In answer to your first question, I may say, we expect the rate to bring in £600 or £700 a year in Southland alone.

293. *The Chairman.*] The maximum rating in the case of freehold and leasehold land is put down at a farthing and one-eighth of a penny. That is what you propose?—Yes; I think that would be a fair maximum.

294. What should be the maximum within the hundreds?—I have not gone into that. We thought the smaller the rate the less opposition might be looked for. Of course, if a higher rate were fixed, it would not be necessary to raise more than was wanted.

295. *Mr. Manders.*] Would there be any objection made by pastoral tenants and others, if a higher rate were fixed, say, one penny and one halfpenny respectively?—No; the amounts are only suggestive; but the £600 or £700 would be quite sufficient to commence with in Southland.

296. You have not contemplated asking the Government for a bonus?—No; we had no hope of

getting any material assistance from the Government; but I would suggest the necessity of giving the occupier of Crown lands some compensation for keeping such lands clear of rabbits.

297. I may tell you that the Provincial Council of Otago was very nearly voting £1,000 for the purpose of encouraging voluntary organizations. Suppose the Government was to offer some encouragement to voluntary organization, do you not think it would have a good effect?—Yes; I think it would have a very good effect.

298. You think it would be a good thing to have a power to hold over the head of a man if he would not do his duty in respect of killing the rabbits off?—Yes.

299. I notice that in this Bill you provide for a Commissioner of Crown Lands acting in districts where there is no Highway Board?—Yes.

300. Do you not propose any machinery for assisting him?—No; he would have powers vested in him under the Act.

301. Do you not think it desirable that if the inhabitants wish to form a voluntary association, power should be given to such an association to act?—Yes; but vested in a limited number of members; and there should also be a provision for enabling one landowner to put the machinery of the Act in motion by lodging an information.

302. It has been suggested that gunpowder should be distributed in larger quantities for rabbit-destruction purposes, on a declaration being made that it is intended to be used for such purposes?—Yes; that is a matter we are anxious to have attended to. At present the supply is limited to 10-lb. quantities.

303. It has also been suggested that dogs used for killing rabbits should not be taxed?—Yes.

304. Do you think the dog tax is oppressive?—Yes; it is very heavy.

305. How many dogs have you?—Over 100.

306. How much do you pay?—10s. per dog. We have already asked the provincial authorities to remit the tax, but they have declined to interfere.

307. Besides the expense of the tax, there is the expense of feeding the dogs?—Yes.

308. Are they fed upon rabbits?—Partly; they would not thrive upon rabbits. We give them pollard and other things as well.

309. Do you employ horses in the work at all?—No; the burrows are not very deep, and the rabbits are easily unearthed by means of a spade.

310. Have you any weasels?—No.

311. Do you know of weasels having been tried and driving rabbits from one place to another?—I have had no experience of weasels here, but I have had experience of them in Scotland.

312. What is the nature of your experience there?—That they are a great help in keeping the rabbits down.

313. What is the temperature of the part of Scotland in which you gained your experience of the weasels?—Colder than in Southland.

314. They were of a good deal of use?—Yes; but in my opinion it would be difficult to convey weasels to this colony, because they are such bad travellers.

315. Have you tried ferrets?—Yes; but I find them much too slow.

316. Are you aware of any weasels coming out?—Yes; I have some coming out. They were to have been despatched in July.

317. What number have you sent for?—As many as a man could take care of.

318. What expense is he to go to?—I have not limited him. It will be three months before I know the result. I may state to the Committee that I have used every endeavour to bring witnesses from the farming districts of Southland. Mr. Arthur Gerrard promised to come; but at the last moment, owing to a death in his family, he could not come. He wrote to me, and his letter I should like to lay before the Committee.

“SIR,—

“Limehills, 16th August, 1876.

“I am in receipt of yours of to-day, anent going to Wellington to give evidence as to rabbit legislation. I am sorry to reply that under present circumstances I do not feel at liberty to go. At same time, I am fully convinced that legislation in the matter is urgently required. It is of no use for small holders of land to say that they can keep down the rabbits on their own holdings unless their neighbours do so. I have only a small holding comparatively, and I have three men killing. Within the last three years I have expended many hundreds of pounds endeavouring to clear myself of this dreadful pest. But so long as there is, which there is alongside of me, a large unoccupied reserve, and neighbours who do not kill, my endeavours will be fruitless. At same time, I am fully convinced if the matter were taken in hand by every one, we would be able to overcome them. I likewise feel assured that let the rabbits alone for other two years, there would be nothing in the country left to sustain either man or beast.

“Yours truly,

“Mr. Cowan.”

“ARTHUR GERRARD.”

I may also state that a great number of persons signed the petitions against legislation, because it was supposed we proposed to tax all people to pay the cost of destruction of the rabbits. The petitions were signed under a totally mistaken notion, and I am sure that when the proposals are explained, there will be no opposition. I learned at several interviews with farmers that this was the feeling.

Mr. GEORGE M. BELL being in attendance, was examined as follows:—

319. *The Chairman.*] You reside in Southland, Mr. Bell?—Yes; at Waimea Station.

320. *Mr. W. Wood.*] What extent of land do you occupy?—80,000 acres: 40,000 freehold and 40,000 leasehold.

321. Did you sign the petition in favour of legislation upon the rabbit question?—Yes.

322. With regard to the cost. If all were rated, and if the rate alone were trusted upon for

furnishing means wherewith to destroy the rabbits, what amount per acre would be required?—It would cost about 4d. per acre per annum to keep down rabbits in my country, supposing the skins were made use of, and if they realized present prices in other localities it might be more.

323. But in four or five years a smaller sum would be necessary?—I think so; still a rate would be required for years in order to keep them down. As to such a rate being levied for the purpose of providing the means for killing the rabbits, I may say we came to the conclusion such a plan would not be so effectual as would the plan of compelling individuals to kill them on their own properties. I doubt if it could be done for 4d. per acre, if the State were to kill. Such work done by the State is always more expensive than if done by private individuals. The machinery we ask for is to be put in motion in cases where the occupiers of the land will not do their duty; and is intended to have the same operation as the thistle law in Victoria. It is provided that if a man does not cut the thistles on his estate, the local body should have power to go on his estate and cut them for him. The penalty might be exercised once, but not oftener, for the cost would be so much greater that the owner would do it himself another time. In this case, if the Road Board sent its officers on to a man's land once to kill rabbits, that would be quite sufficient to convert him to the prudence of seeing to the matter for the future himself.

324. *Mr. Andrew.*] You were present when Mr. Cowan gave his evidence?—Yes.

325. Has your experience been such that you can indorse all that he has said?—Yes; but I may state that my land is not quite of the same character as Mr. Cowan's. Part of it is low undulating downs.

326. Have you much under plough?—5,000 acres has been ploughed and laid down in grass; and we have great difficulty in keeping the rabbits out of the English-grass paddocks.

327. Do you know if the rabbits destroy young trees?—Yes; they have commenced on pine trees and young fruit trees. I may mention that I have had some experience in Victoria of the rabbit nuisance.

328. Did you hold much land there?—About 20,000 acres.

329. Were you troubled with rabbits?—Yes; they commenced to come in my time.

330. How long did you suffer from the rabbit nuisance in Victoria?—About eighteen months.

331. And what was your experience?—Much the same as it has been here. The rabbits were made very light of at first, but within two years in some places the stock was completely driven off the land. I have seen in Victoria over 20,000 acres without a hoof of stock upon it, and this owing entirely to the rabbits. The land had been stocked before, and formed some of the richest and most fertile land in the colony, and moreover was interspersed with free selectors, small holdings of, say, 50 or 60 acres; and in a short time it was perfectly bare of animal life except the rabbits. I may mention the runs of Messrs. Andrew, Murray, and Calvert, of Colac, particularly.

332. Has any attempt been made to clear the runs?—Yes; the whole of the rabbits are now cleared off.

333. At what expense?—At a cost of 15s. per acre. Mr. Murray's land was for two years without any stock, and selectors' land adjoining was equally bare; and I may say the rabbits were cleared off their land not by the selectors themselves, but by the large holders, for their own protection.

334. When you say 15s. per acre, that does not include the loss of feed and so forth?—No; that was the actual expense of destroying the rabbits.

335. Have you ever taken steps to introduce into Southland natural enemies of the rabbit?—No; we have tried ferrets though, but found the place too cold and wet for them. Cats are the only things which do any good. I should like to suggest that the dog tax should be levied at per pack and not per head. We should considerably increase the number of dogs if this were done.

336. How many dogs do you keep to a pack?—About twenty and upwards, but if the tax were reduced we should increase the number.

337. Do you think a dog tax should be removed altogether?—It should be made a nominal sum for dogs used for the destruction of rabbits.

338. *The Chairman.*] Do you think anything could be done with regard to poisoning rabbits?—No; but I may mention we have lately had a proposal submitted to us for destroying rabbits, but it was submitted to us under a pledge of secrecy, as the inventor thinks he may get a bonus from the Government if it is successful. From what we saw of the plan, we did not think it likely to prove a great success, owing to the expense of working it.

339. *Mr. Andrew.*] Have you ever heard of rabbits being destroyed by syphilis?—It was said to have been tried in Victoria, and many people would not eat rabbits on that account; but I have the best authority for saying it was never attempted.

340. Can you suggest any other method of killing rabbits except by means of dogs and nets?—Traps would be very useful, and would be perhaps the most effectual mode, if we could get men accustomed to the work. Hitherto we have never succeeded in getting good trappers. They had some in Victoria, and the traps consequently were most successful.

341. Is there anything else you would like to say to the Committee?—In reference to the rate for providing machinery under the proposed Act, I may say the objection to it in Southland was solely upon the ground that it was thought the rate was being raised for the purpose of forming a fund out of which to kill the rabbits on large properties, and people thought it unfair that the inhabitants generally should be called upon to pay for this. We believe that the machinery we propose will be quite sufficient, especially if power be given to one or two persons to call the machinery of the Act into operation. Landowners would hail with pleasure any attempt to relieve them of the pest. Under this Act each owner would be glad to give information, if his neighbour were a nuisance. I do not think a rate to form a fund for killing rabbits would be generally acceptable. I would suggest that compensation should be given to the pastoral tenant who may be compelled to kill rabbits on Crown lands.

MONDAY, 28TH AUGUST, 1876.

Captain CAMPBELL WALKER, Conservator of State Forests, being in attendance, was called and examined.

342. *The Chairman.*] You are of course aware of the rabbit nuisance. We wish to elicit from you what effect the existence of the nuisance would be likely to have upon the planting of trees. I suppose it would have no effect upon the old trees, or the Native forests?—Certainly not as regards the old trees; but I think it is very probable the young growths of the Native forests would be injured.

343. Are you aware whether the rabbits destroy the young kowhai trees?—I have not been able to judge from forests here; but from what I have seen elsewhere, I think so.

344. You believe that rabbits will injure the young re-growth?—Yes.

345. Have you been in Southland at all?—I have not.

346. What would be the effect of the rabbit nuisance as regards the planting of young trees?—It would be quite impossible to raise plantations of young trees if the place is overrun with rabbits, without incurring expenditure which would preclude their being a financial success.

347. Do you think the rabbits would injure the young trees?—That is my experience in Great Britain and on the Continent. I have made a note of an extract from my reports on Forest Management, which bears on the question:—

Extract from "Reports on Forest Management (p. 115), Duke of Athol's Woods and Plantations."

"The great difficulty which Mr. McGregor (the forester) has to contend against, is game, particularly rabbits, hares, and fallow deer. The only plan to adopt would be those carried on by Mr. McCorquodale at Scone—namely, wire netting round the fences and cradles, or other protection, to each tree; but anything of this sort adds considerably to the expense, and can never be generally adopted in extensive planting operations. The truth of the saying, that 'you cannot rear both young trees and game at the same time,' is fully corroborated in the case of the Duke's estate."

348. You have had considerable experience in India?—Yes.

349. Are there rabbits in India?—Not to my knowledge.

350. Or anything of a similar character?—There is great damage done by rats; but nothing of the character of rabbits.

351. Do you think that the introduction of the mongoose would be of any use to check the rabbits?—I do not know. I am aware that they are very useful in killing snakes.

352. Do you think they would live here?—I should think so; they live on the hills in India.

353. Have you been in parts of New Zealand where the rabbits are destructive?—I have been in the localities, but not to inspect them. Auckland is the only province I have inspected.

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