

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

I.—S H E E P.

THURSDAY, 11TH SEPTEMBER, 1884 (Hon. G. R. JOHNSON, Chairman).

Mr. W. D. Wood, examined.

1. *Hon. the Chairman*: In this inquiry into the working of the Sheep and Rabbit Act it is desirable that we should keep the subjects, as well as the district, separate. (To witness): You have a run in the Marlborough Sheep District?—Yes, Swyncombe Run; it formerly belonged to Captain Keene.

2. It is in the Kaikoura Subdivision?—Yes.

3. Is there scab on your run?—At the present time part of the flock is under the surveillance of the Scab Inspector, owing to the fact of one of my neighbours' sheep having strayed into my paddock, and which was branded with the letter S. I have no actually scabby sheep on the run, yet in the eye of the law we are held to be virtually scabby from the circumstance of my neighbour's sheep, which was branded with the letter S, having strayed into my paddock. That necessitates all the sheep in my paddock being branded with the letter S, and the clean certificate being cancelled.

4. Are you satisfied with the working of the Sheep Act in your district?—No; I do not consider the Act has been carried out. It is any one's Act, according to the interpretation put upon it by different Inspectors.

5. But have not the Inspectors instructions to carry it out strictly?—I could hardly know what their instructions are.

6. Do you think the Act requires amendment, or is it under instructions from the Government being carried out that the Act is working unsatisfactorily?—I only know that the Act is not wholly in force.

7. But if it were put in force?—I think then it would be all that is necessary.

8. Have you any amendment to the Act to offer, or do you suggest anything to improve its administration?—The difficulty of carrying out the Act as it is now arises from there being a large quantity of land called "no man's land," or rather it is land which belongs to the Government, and not leased to any one. On these lands there is a large number of wild sheep, which are scabby, and will stray among the clean flocks. As long as these wild sheep adjoin the runs it is almost impossible to keep the runs clean.

9. Has no effort been made to get rid of these sheep?—In some instances I believe there have been efforts made, but not on all Government lands.

10. What extent is there of this "no man's land"?—I could not say. It is on the tops of the hills and mountains, but it is a very large area in the whole of the Marlborough District.

11. Does it all lie in one block?—No; it is in different blocks.

12. Would it be possible to fence off this "no man's land"?—It would be possible, taking the line of fence below the snow-line, but it would be a great expense to do it—an expense which I think the tenants are at present not able to meet. I should like to suggest that the Government should act towards their tenants as a landlord, and, so far as Government land is concerned, that they should assist their tenants by fencing this land. They might charge interest on the outlay. It might be something like a bottomry bond upon a vessel. The law ought to be made so as to make it compulsory for tenants to fence land. If they had not the means, then I think the Government should assist the tenants in fencing, and charge so much per cent.—say, 5 per cent. at least. I may state, in my opinion, it is not possible to clean runs unless they are fenced. For instance, on one run I am told it takes fourteen days to muster the sheep. A man went out with his blankets, &c., and did not return for fourteen days.

13. Which run is that?—Mr. Rees's, of Waipapa. If it came on cloudy or stormy a man would have to return with whatever sheep he can get; the rest have to be mustered at another time, or perhaps they are not mustered at all.

14. You said you did not think the Act is carried out impartially, can you give the Committee any instances to which you refer?—It is "no man's Act," in that it is not carried out strictly.

15. But is it carried out with impartiality: in other words, can you give instances to show that it is not applied equally to all?—I can give an instance in the case of Mr. Ingles. He has been fined for having scabby sheep. On another run the fine has not been enforced against the owner. In the latter case the owner has entered into a bond to expend the money in fencing.

16. *Mr. Lance.*] To whom do these other runs belong—to Mr. Gibson?—Yes, to Mr. Gibson.

17. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have they lately been sold?—Not lately.

18. You referred to Mr. Ingles's run as an instance where the fine was not enforced?—No; there it was enforced.

Hon. Mr. Waterhouse: It was enforced in one case and not in the other.

19. *Hon. the Chairman.*] It was in Mr. Gibson's case that it was not enforced. Can you state how long these runs (Waipapa) have been infected: is it a very long period?—About twenty years; I cannot speak positively.

20. Are any of them free from scab?—They do not hold a clean certificate, I believe.