

18. Individual settlers and groups of settlers have proved again and again that the suppression of rabbits is perfectly practicable in many parts of the country by methods which are now well known to every settler.

19. The recommendation, therefore, of the Committee is, that every Inspector in charge of a district should have ample power given him to suspend or summarily dismiss, for neglect of duty, any rabbit agent under his supervision; and that the services of such Inspector should be dispensed with upon failure to deal effectively with the rabbits in his district within a reasonable time.

20. The Committee maintains that a firm, impartial, and judicious administration of the Act is all that is necessary to produce the most satisfactory results.

21. It still remains to refer to the Crown lands reserves and commonages. Of these, very large areas, including the roughest and most inaccessible portions, are at present unleased, the inducements held out by the Crown Lands Department of long leases and extended acreage having only partially succeeded in securing tenants. The Committee recognizes that the question of how to deal with these unoccupied tracts of country is the most difficult that has come before it, and strongly recommends every inducement being offered for their permanent occupation. It is there that the most secure breeding grounds are afforded for rabbits, and so long as they remain unoccupied there is no hope of effectually preventing the adjoining lands from being constantly re-stocked by them. The "natural enemies" will here prove the best and most economical means of permanently diminishing the nuisance; and the Committee strongly urges that the Government should, without delay, take steps to provide for a large and constant supply of stoats and weasels, and also for the breeding of a large number of ferrets locally by contract.

22. A long time, however, must elapse before these animals can multiply sufficiently to be able to cope satisfactorily with the pest, and in the meanwhile the present system of destroying the rabbits by contract or otherwise will have to be continued. Under these circumstances there is great danger that a large proportion of the "natural enemies" will be killed. It must rest with the Government alone to take every precaution against such a result.

23. Another difficulty arises from the fact that within a few years a large number of the Crown pastoral leases will terminate, and, therefore, that the tenants are daily becoming less interested in the destruction of the rabbits upon their holdings, and, consequently, less inclined to spend money for that purpose. At the same time the lands included in these leases, from their positions and character, are generally more liable than private lands to be overrun by the pest, and therefore more expensive to deal with. Should this lead to a large increase of the rabbits at the end of the term, there must be a corresponding decrease of rent to the Government under the new leases. In order, if possible, to avoid such a result, the Committee is of opinion that it would be advisable for the Government, in any case in which the tenant was willing to surrender his lease, to accept such surrender at any time within eighteen months before the expiry thereof, and thereupon to offer the lease for a fresh term. This course, the Committee thinks, is preferable to giving a bonus in any shape for rabbit-skins, or to assisting the pastoral tenants of the Crown in any other way.

24. Lastly, the Committee recognizes that the means at present available for the destruction of the pest are not radical cures, and that until some discovery shall have been made more searching and fatal in its effects upon rabbits than any thing at present known, their absolute eradication cannot be looked for. Such a discovery is not beyond hope. Somewhat similar discoveries, which have proved of the greatest value, are on record; and the Committee recommends the Government to take such steps, including the offer of a bonus, as may appear to them best calculated to bring about the attainment of such a desirable object.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SHEEP ACT.

The Committee is of opinion—

1. That "The Sheep Act 1878 Amendment Act, 1884," (which provides for the destruction of lice in sheep), should be modified in the direction of allowing greater facilities for the travelling of sheep intended for slaughter.

2. That, with respect to ewe-flocks, no person should be compelled to dip any such flock during lambing time.

3. That the penalties provided for in section 3 of the above-mentioned Act should be assimilated to those named in section 5 thereof.

20th July, 1886.

G. RANDALL JOHNSON,
Chairman.

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS.

THURSDAY, 27TH MAY, 1886.

THE Rabbit Nuisance Committee of the Legislative Council met, pursuant to notice, at 11 a.m.

Present: Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson, Hon. Mr. Menzies.
The order of reference was read.

On motion of the Hon. Mr. Buckley, the Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson was appointed Chairman.

The Committee deliberated, and the Clerk was directed to inform the Chairman of the Rabbit Nuisance Committee, appointed by the House of Representatives, that this Committee is ready to meet the Committee of the House forthwith, if convenient, and to deliberate as a Joint Committee.