

each side of such fence shall be reserved for the purpose of giving access to such fence, and be under the exclusive control of such Trustees.—Carried.

10. *Resolved*, That the above resolutions be embodied in a report to be submitted to the Joint Committee for approval.

The Committee then adjourned.

THURSDAY, 8TH JULY, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

*Present*: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. McMillan, Mr. J. McKenzie, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

The Hon. the Chairman submitted to the Committee a draft report on the subject of the rabbit nuisance, which was as follows:—

The Joint Committee appointed to inquire into the best means of dealing with the rabbit pest, have the honour to report as follows:—

They have examined eighteen witnesses, and also obtained information from more than sixty persons resident in various parts of the colony, as well as from such of the County Councils as were able and willing to reply to the questions submitted to them, regarding the rabbit nuisance and the working of "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1882."

The information thus obtained shows that the rabbits have been very materially diminished, and can be permanently kept down, at moderate cost, in those infested districts in which strenuous and combined efforts have been made to destroy them, but that the area over which the pest has spread is constantly increasing.

Thus, at the present time, rabbits are making their way into the Provincial District of Canterbury from the Amuri in the north, and from the McKenzie Country in the south and west; whilst in the North Island they are spreading from the Wairarapa into Hawke's Bay, and from the Waikato into the King Country.

Moreover, there does not seem to be any good reason for expecting that rabbits will be either permanently excluded, or absolutely eradicated, from any portion of the colony: at any rate not from those districts which include or immediately border upon forest lands or the higher and rougher and inaccessible country. It appears, however, to be quite practicable to check their advance, or to keep them down so as to prevent any serious damage being caused by them. But the Committee cannot too forcibly impress upon all those interested in this question that such results can only be obtained by combined and concerted action on the part of all landholders, on the one hand, and the Government (which, as a landlord, the Committee recognize has the largest interest at stake) on the other, in the adoption of the means which experience proves to be most effective and best suited to the character of the country to be dealt with.

At the present time the systematic use of phosphorized grain (more or less during all seasons of the year), and the turning out in large numbers of the natural enemies of the rabbit, have done greater service in reducing the pest than any other of the many methods hitherto tried for this purpose.

The poisoning with phosphorized grain appears to have been as yet almost entirely confined to the winter months, but the Committee wish to point out that experience has proved it to be also very efficacious in the breeding season and summer; and that in some districts the rabbits are being satisfactorily destroyed all the year round with very little aid from other means than this.

On pastoral lands and the rougher country, however, the natural enemies of the rabbit appear to be absolutely necessary; and of these, stoats, weasels, and martens are the most hardy and best adapted to high mountains, whilst in warmer and more sheltered localities ferrets increase rapidly in numbers, and, in some instances, have proved capable, without any assistance at all, of preventing the increase of rabbits on country where they had previously been diminished by poison.

There appears, therefore, good reason to expect that these remedies, aided by the erection of wire-netting fences and the ferretting and digging down burrows wherever the nature of the country admits of or requires it, will prove sufficient to enable all to cope successfully with the nuisance. But two points relating to the use of these means require special attention, namely:—

First. That as poisoning, like other methods of destruction, has the effect, more or less, of driving the rabbits from place to place, landholders, in order to obtain the best results, should arrange with their neighbours, as far as possible, to adopt simultaneous action in laying phosphorized grain; and

Second. The destruction of rabbits by means of professional rabbiters with packs of dogs, by traps, and by fumigation, should be prohibited in those districts in which the natural enemies have been turned out.

With regard to "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1882," which was re-enacted last year without any material alteration, the Committee are of opinion that upon the whole it has worked well, and that it can be administered efficiently and satisfactorily by judicious officers. They, however, recommend that it should be so amended as to provide more surely for simultaneous action on the part of landholders in the destruction of rabbits; and that, whilst the maximum penalty for neglect or breach of the provisions of the Act should be increased to £100, the defendant in any case should have the right to produce evidence in his favour in mitigation of the penalty inflicted, and, where the penalty exceeds £10, to appeal to a higher tribunal.

With these amendments, the Committee think that the only just ground of complaint against the Act will be done away with, and the dissatisfaction which has been freely expressed against the arbitrary powers conferred on the Inspectors will to a large extent cease.