

WEDNESDAY, 14TH 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. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. J. McKenzie, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

The Hon. the Chairman laid before the Committee a letter from Mr. Beetham, M.H.R., forwarding a letter from the chairman of a public meeting at Masterton relating to the rabbit question, with the newspaper reports of the proceedings.

The Committee then proceeded to the consideration of the draft report.

Report read *seriatim*.

Page 1, paragraph 1 amended: Mr. Buchanan moved, That in line 3, after "witnesses," the words "possessed of much practical experience" be inserted.—Carried.

Page 1, paragraph 2: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit the paragraph as printed, and insert the following in lieu thereof:—

The information thus obtained shows that, although the rabbits have in some districts somewhat diminished in numbers, the Committee is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that, not only is the colony suffering a heavy annual loss from the very great numbers still existing in infested districts, but that the area infested is annually increasing.

Page 1, paragraph 3 amended in line 13: Captain Russell moved, To insert after "Hawke's Bay," the following: "Where their further spread has been arrested by the erection of a rabbit-proof fence, the cost of which was defrayed by a voluntary rate contributed by many of the sheepowners in the Hawke's Bay Sheep District, and administered by a Board elected by the contributors."—Carried.

Page 1, paragraphs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit these paragraphs as printed, and to insert the following in lieu thereof:—

This annual loss assumes a seriousness which, in the opinion of the Committee, places the whole question in a position of importance second to none which can engage the attention of the Legislature.

Taking the above facts and conclusions as a basis, the first question which obviously suggests itself is, Has the experience of the past disclosed any means by which the pest can be reduced to harmless dimensions in the different classes of country affected, and at a reasonable cost?

The answer to this must be in the affirmative.

Evidence of a most conclusive character was given before the Committee in 1884 that the liberal use of phosphorized grain, followed up by the filling-in of rabbit burrows and water-runs, the liberation of stoats and weasels, ferrets, cats, &c., and the use of other means disclosed by the evidence, had, in numerous instances, effectually settled the difficulty in most descriptions of country; and the evidence now before the Committee, after an interval of two years, is absolutely conclusive in the same direction.

It is obvious, therefore, that the whole question is thus narrowed down to two important issues: (1.) Is it desirable to amend the present Rabbit Nuisance Act? (2.) Has its administration been of the efficient character which all must admit should be made absolutely imperative in connection with such an important question?

With regard to the first question, the Committee are of opinion that the provisions of the Act are, on the whole, fairly calculated to effect the purposes for which it was enacted.—Carried.

Captain Russell moved to insert the following after the words "same direction" in the last line of new paragraph 4: "But the Committee is of opinion that the means here alluded to should be supplemented by the erection of rabbit-proof fences."—Carried.

Page 1, paragraph 9: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit lines 49, 50, and 51, as far as "officers."—Agreed to. Also after "provide" in line 52, to omit "more surely."—Carried.

Mr. Cowan moved in line 54 to strike out "any," and insert "every" in lieu thereof.—Agreed to.

Page 1, paragraph 10: Mr. Cowan moved, To strike out "these amendments," for the purpose of inserting "the right of appeal and production of evidence in mitigation of penalty."—Negatived.

Page 2: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit paragraphs 11 and 12.—Carried.

Page 2, paragraph 13, line 18: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit the words "nevertheless they are," and to insert the words "they are also strongly."—Carried.

Also in line 18: Mr. McKenzie moved, To strike out the words "still free from rabbits, or only slightly infested with them."—Carried.

In line 20: Mr. Buchanan moved, To strike out "permitted," and to insert "empowered by law."—Carried. Also in line 21 to strike out the words "have power to levy rates within the district," and to insert the words "be enabled to claim pound for pound from the Government on rates to be levied within districts not infested by the pest, such rates and subsidy."—Carried.

Also in line 23: Hon. Mr. Robinson moved, To insert after "works" "on Crown and freehold lands."—Carried.

Captain Russell moved, That the following new clause be inserted at end of paragraph 13:—

That, where a rabbit-proof fence is erected as a protective fence through Crown lands, the land on which the fence is erected, and to the extent of one chain in width on each side of it, should be vested in the Chairman of the Board of Trustees.—Carried.

Mr. Lance moved to insert:—

That power should be granted to any local body to enable it to enter on any reserve for the purpose of destroying rabbits.—Carried.

The Hon. Mr. Robinson moved to insert:—

That the owner shall be entitled to call upon the owner or owners of adjoining lands to con-