

Individual settlers and groups of settlers have proved again and again that rabbit suppression is perfectly practicable in every class of country by methods which are now well known to every settler, and at moderate cost.

The Legislature has clothed the Government with ample power to compel the neglectful settler to do his duty to himself and others. The House, therefore, has the right to ask why this is not being done.

The earnest recommendation of the Committee is, that every Inspector in charge of a district should have ample power given him by circular 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.

The Committee altogether denies that a speedy suppression of the rabbit pest involves any harsh treatment or arbitrary display of authority; but, on the contrary, they maintain that a firm, impartial, and judicious administration of the Act is all that is necessary to produce the most satisfactory results.

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 them, "and they would strongly recommend 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 this continues to be the case 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.

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 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.

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 for sale by auction. 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.

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 more searching and fatal in its effects upon the rabbit than any thing at present known has been made, its 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.

Paragraph 1 agreed to.

Paragraph 2: Mr. Lance moved, To strike out all words down to "the colony," inclusive, for the purpose of inserting the following: "From information thus obtained the Committee is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that, although the rabbits have in some districts materially diminished in numbers, the colony is not only."—Carried.

Hon. Mr. Menzies moved, That the following words be inserted after "numbers": "and can be permanently kept down at moderate cost in those districts in which strenuous and combined efforts have been made to destroy them."—Carried.

Paragraph 2, line 10: Hon. Mr. Walker moved, To strike out the word "annually" for the purpose of inserting "constantly."—Carried.

Paragraph, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 3 agreed to.

Paragraph 4: Mr. Lance moved, To omit all the words after "loss," in line 18, down to "question," inclusive, for the purpose of inserting the following: "has assumed such serious proportions that, in the opinion of the Committee, it occupies."—Carried.

Paragraph, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 5, line 23: Hon. Mr. Robinson moved, To strike out the words "and at a reasonable cost."—Carried.

Paragraph, as amended, carried.

Paragraph 6: Mr. Cowan moved, To amend the paragraph by striking out the word "affirmative," for the purpose of inserting "negative, except in exceptional cases."—Negatived.

Hon. Mr. Holmes moved, To add the following words after "affirmative": "except where the country is high, rocky, sandy, or scrubby."—Carried.

Hon. Mr. Robinson moved, To reconsider the paragraph with a view of striking out the words