

13. And not be deputed to local bodies?—Oh, yes! it might be deputed to local bodies or to individuals, but the direction of these efforts should be all in the hands of one department. In other words, you will not be able to cope with this difficulty unless you have concentrated effort. You will have one county or district coping ably with the rabbits, perhaps, and the adjacent district neglecting them. It is essential you should have one authority to keep the various local agencies up to the mark. By having it under the control of one department, I do not necessarily mean the employment of a large number of officials all over the country. I mean that the department should avail itself of whatever agency may be most suitable for the particular district affected.

14. Has there been an increase in the parts already affected with rabbits?—Judging from the knowledge that I have from the Crown Lands Department, I should say there has rather been a decrease; in other words, the efforts put forward have curtailed the evil, or kept it within limits.

15. You do not think there has been an increase during the last year?—I think that the evil is spreading over a greater area—to wit, along the main Canterbury range, in the back-country.

16. Then, you are not aware whether any of these Crown lands have been thrown up in consequence of the nuisance lately?—No; there have been proposals made to the department to throw up lands; but the reason usually given is the low price of wool and the non-paying character of the country. The rabbit nuisance is sometimes assigned: but more frequently of late the reason given is the low price of wool.

17. Do you think the Government should give a price for rabbit-skins as an inducement to kill rabbits?—That may suit in some districts; but I do not think there should be any cast-iron rule on the subject. I think the department should have the discretion of employing any means that might seem best under particular circumstances.

18. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] Why was the land held over from sale of runs not used for occupation, for either sale or lease, in 1882–83?—Some of the land was too far inland for settlers to take it up; and then there have been the low prices for agricultural produce ever since; while the extension of the railway into the interior of Otago has been much longer delayed than then anticipated, and at the present moment settlement has been sufficiently extended to meet the local wants of the gold-fields districts in the matter of oats and wheat, and there will be no extension of settlement there to any appreciable degree until there is an opportunity of sending produce to the coast, and only then, of course, if produce is at a paying price. In other words, there was too much land withheld from the runs in 1882, and the department foresaw that; but it was a political matter withholding a certain portion of the country, and that overruled the department's view of the matter.

19. Is there any intention on the part of the Government to place this land within the reach of parties willing to occupy it?—No; I believe not.

20. These are the reserves that are being so much complained about that they are not being occupied; and one great cause is the increase in the rabbit pest?—The people do not complain; but the runholders do. Another cause which I ought to mention why the rabbits have got hold of some districts is on account of the large commonages. I may instance one, the Bengier commonage of twenty thousand acres, a high piece of country specially reserved for the digging population round Roxburgh. It is in the Tuapeka County; but neither the county nor the district would be responsible for clearing the rabbits, and the charge fell upon the Government, and, after a year or two of unpleasant experience of paying to clear country which yielded no revenue, the department stepped in and took it away. We had a similar experience in regard to the Cromwell commonage of fourteen thousand acres; also in regard to the commonages of the lake district. But this evil has been considerably lessened by the department assuming the right to deal with these commonages, and reletting them.

21. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you say the Government does assume that?—Yes. These commonages are simply in existence during the good-will of the Government.

22. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] And the possession of some of these has been resumed by the Government?—They have been relet as runs. They were the cause of a very great nuisance to the surrounding runholders, because they were a breeding-ground for rabbits.

23. You are acquainted with the manner in which the Act has been worked: has the system of Inspectors worked satisfactorily?—I could not say. It has not come within my observation.

24. With regard to the Government purchasing skins: This is one of the suggestions that we have from Australia. A great many men who are out of employment might take to rabbiting for a time and assist to abate the pest, provided they could sell the skins at a good rate. Under the present system, if the skins are not paid for at a specified rate, the young rabbits are not taken at all, and they are left to accumulate and breed. Now, suppose the Government stepped in and, instead of spending money on a large staff of Inspectors, gave a fixed rate for the skins, without reference to their size, throughout the year: would not that be a good means towards exterminating the pest?—I think it would work fairly well wherever the rabbits were numerous; but where they were spreading over the country I do not think it would have the slightest effect in stopping the evil. Rabbiters would only work where the rabbit has established itself in great numbers. The rabbit might be thinned out, but would breed next season, and it would be a never-ending process.

25. But I would look upon this as a contribution towards the extermination of the rabbit. If 2d. were given by the Government and 1d. by the settlers, there would thus be a combination of parties paying for the extermination of the rabbit?—But you could not rely on that. You might get one settler out of six to do that, but the other five would not, I feel certain. You come back to this: that you must have one controlling authority, and endow that authority with a great deal of discretion.

26. But this would not take away the authority from the Government. They would still hold the authority, because they would hold the purse-strings?—I was assuming that it was to be locally administered.