

from the counties. I then saw that unless there was some overruling authority to compel the local bodies to do their work, the difficulty of coping with the rabbits would be simply unending.

74. Would you recommend, then, such legislation, with local administration?—I think I have already conveyed that impression in my evidence.

75. Are you of opinion that the rabbit question should be dealt with by a subdivision of districts and the erection of fences, as well as by destruction?—By every means possible. What would be suitable in one district would be unsuitable in another. Let the whole thing be under one central authority, using its discretion to avail itself of whatever means are most suitable to the circumstances of the particular district.

76. Would you not grant the district powers to rate themselves for prevention?—Yes; that might also be done.

77. And you would also recommend that the districts should be allowed to elect their own Boards?—Always subject to the authority I have so much insisted upon.

78. *Mr. Fulton.*] Would it not be better that the Government should simply have the control in this way: that they should leave the administration entirely to the local bodies, but have power to compel them to carry out their proper functions?—That would be desirable.

79. And there should be no further interference with the local bodies than that?—Yes. Compulsion, of course, is well enough so long as you can enforce it; but suppose the local bodies remain inert, then I should leave it in the hands of the central authority to interfere and do what was necessary.

80. With regard to the Land Department, have complaints come to you as to the inefficiency of the present administration of the Rabbit Act?—No.

81. Have you had any complaints made to you within the last year or two that rabbits are considerably increasing?—So far as my knowledge goes they are decreasing. In other words, they have succeeded in reducing their number in particular districts, but the infected area is increasing.

82. Complaints have not come to you that rabbits are increasing in infected districts?—No; I cannot say that we have had a single complaint to that effect.

83. *Mr. McKenzie.*] Is it a fact that the rabbits have got over a larger area of country since the present Act was passed?—Yes, the evil is gradually spreading.

84. And you think that the present Act does not meet the requirements of the colony?—I do not know the provisions of the present Act.

85. You insist upon a central authority. Of course the present Act is administered under a central authority. Do you think that has been a success?—I am not in a position to express a reliable opinion.

86. With regard to the abandoned country?—There is not so much as there was. Owing to the long leases and larger areas, country has been taken up that would not have been taken up before.

87. Do you think that Parliament would be justified in continuing the present expenditure, seeing that during the last four years things have been worse than they were before?—That raises another question: Where should we have been if the Government had not used these means to cope with the evil?

88. Can you of your own knowledge give the Committee any idea that the Government expenditure has assisted in that matter?—In my opinion it has.

89. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You are not aware that the past season has had a direct influence on the number of rabbits?—I am not aware. I have heard some statements about the matter, but nothing worth noting down.

90. Could you indicate the terms entered into with adjoining runholders in the case you have referred to?—I could not say, but the Rabbit Department would be able to do so.

91. With regard to reserves, did your remarks on Crown lands apply to them as well as to Crown lands?—Yes.

92. And to educational reserves?—The Land Department has nothing to do with educational reserves.

93. I believe there are large educational reserves in Otago?—About half a million acres.

94. Are they all leased?—Yes.

95. And all occupied?—All occupied, with probably slight exceptions.

Mr. H. S. VALENTINE, of Waimea South, examined.

96. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What experience have you had in matters connected with the rabbit pest?—I have had great experience. We cover a large tract of country, about three hundred thousand acres, of which perhaps about a hundred thousand is leasehold country, and that is the worst rabbit-country.

97. You suffer very much from it?—Very much.

98. In what way do they affect you?—They eat the grass, and reduce the carrying-capacity of the country.

99. I suppose you have taken means to kill the rabbits?—If we had not done so, and that very extensively, we should soon have no country. We have taken every possible means of destroying them—poisoning and shooting them, and so on. For the last five years, after allowing for the value of the rabbit-skins, we must have spent nearly £20,000 in this way.

100. And have you succeeded in reducing the number?—To a very great extent. The country is better now than it has been since they became a nuisance. We are carrying more sheep now by ten thousand than we were three years ago.

101. Which means have you found the most effectual?—The poisoning was the most effectual.

102. Have you tried natural enemies?—Ferrets—not many.