

417. Generally. In the Waitaki District I am told the rabbits are getting along at the foot of the main range. Is there any part of that country where a fence would help to keep the rabbits back from the Canterbury Plains?—I do not think so, unless taken a considerable distance back into the Waitaki. I think the country is too rocky and rough and intersected by too many streams for a fence to be of any use. I believe they would get at the back.

418. You are not prepared to recommend that fencing should be carried out in any particular district?—No. There is one place where the rabbits are threatening where it might be carried out, and that is in the north part of the South Island, in the direction of Lake Tennyson.

419. Do you think that rabbits can be kept out by fencing?—The owner of ground that can be rabbit-fenced could destroy his rabbits at the fence, and could keep them from coming in from the other side. Rabbit-fencing should be included in the Rabbit Act.

420. But you do not know of any place where you would recommend it?—I do not.

421. You mean that it should be left to private owners?—Fences may be necessary to keep back an invasion of the rabbit.

422. Are you aware whether there are any rabbits on the Native lands in the North Island?—With the exception of one place in the Wairarapa I am not aware of any.

423. What did you do with that place?—I think we poisoned it.

424. Did you get rid of the rabbits?—There are rabbits there still, I believe,

425. Do you find any difficulty in dealing with Native lands where there are rabbits?—No.

426. You cannot compel the Natives to do the work?—No; but we do it ourselves.

427. Do you think that sufficient efforts have been made to let these unoccupied lands?—I do not.

428. Can you suggest a plan by which they can be more readily let?—I think if a great many of them were let at a lower rental, and in larger blocks, and for longer leases, it would induce occupation more than under the present conditions.

429. In the report made by the Committee two years ago there was a recommendation that, in the letting of these lands, care should be taken so that they were not left idle between the expiration of one lease and the entry of another tenant. Have any steps been taken in that direction?—I could not say for certain.

430. Have you any suggestion to make regarding these lands, for the purpose of getting rid of the rabbits?—You refer to reserves, and lands of that description?

431. I refer to lands that are not actually in the occupation of private owners?—I made a suggestion three years ago—which I do not think I could improve upon—that lands upon which proper steps were not being taken to clear off the rabbits should be declared abandoned lands, and the Government should step in, take possession, and let them to others, who would clear them of rabbits, and then, after a certain time, they might be returned to owner.

432. You recommend that, in the case of leased lands, the neglect to kill rabbits should be a cause of forfeiture?—I am speaking now of the reserves set aside for certain bodies, who do not exercise their ownership upon them.

433. That the Government should take possession of them?—Yes.

434. Has that been done in any case?—No. I am not certain; but I think one of the commonages was taken—a part of the Clyde Commonage.

435. With regard to the Act now in force, have you any suggestion to make?—None.

436. Does it supply sufficient authority to enable you to kill rabbits?—It gives quite enough power. In fact, there are many complaints made that it is too strict, and that the defendant in a case has no answer to the charge made against him.

437. Have you taken proceedings in many cases against landowners for not killing rabbits?—I cannot speak personally to that effect. The department has had a good many cases, notably down south.

438. And there is a Wairarapa case mentioned in this morning's paper?—Yes.

439. Is there any difficulty in obtaining convictions for breaches of the Act?—No. As a rule the fines are so small that it is very little use in bringing cases forward.

440. Would you recommend that the working of this Act should be placed in the hands of local bodies?—I certainly should not, from my experience of the time when it was in the hands of local bodies.

441. Please indicate why you think it would not work?—Members of local bodies, as a rule, are frequently friends or persons interested with the owners of the land where the Act is brought into force, and this generally tends to an abuse of the provisions of the Act, or to their not being carried out.

442. But your experience to that effect was surely at a time when the rabbits were not so numerous and the consequent loss to property not so great?—I believe myself that the rabbits were more numerous and the loss greater.

443. The loss, at the time you refer to, fell on the large owners?—And the small ones as well, in Otago and Southland.

444. The small owners have suffered more this year than ever before?—I have heard so.

445. Would it be desirable to hand over the working of the Act to trustees specially appointed for that purpose?—That course would decidedly be better than the other.

446. Do you in any case try to enlist the services of the local bodies in carrying out the Act?—Only in the winter season, when simultaneous poisoning is necessary, when we endeavour to get the parties interested to meet, in order to carry this out.

447. You do not depute any authority to the local body?—No.

448. What do you think of a proposal to cut up the country into districts, each district having its own Board of Trustees, with power to raise rates for the purpose of killing rabbits and putting up fencing, and so on?—If carried out in its integrity such a system might work.