

1686. *Mr. Cowan.*] Describe to the Committee the manner in which the rabbits first spread into your district?—They started from the sandhills near Riverton; but I cannot help thinking there were a few odd ones taken up into different parts of the country with the idea of having a little sport, the people having no suspicion they would increase to such an extent as they have done.

1687. But it is a fact that the bulk of the rabbits spread from Riverton and Invercargill in a very few years?—Yes.

1688. Could you state in what number of years that plague scattered over the district?—I never travelled over that district till nine years ago, but it must be twelve or thirteen years since they commenced to spread, and in the first two years they spread wonderfully. On Mr. Holmes's station I gave exemption-tickets for five hundred dogs, and still they were spreading.

1689. Then is it your opinion from past experience that the portions of New Zealand which are not now infested are more than likely to become so in a few years?—I think so. I think they will keep spreading.

1690. Do you not think some further inducement should be offered by the Government to reduce the pest than the means now adopted?—I am a strong advocate for natural enemies.

1691. Then you think it should go more in the way of increasing the number of natural enemies than in offering a bonus for the skins?—I think so.

1692. Do you not think that a landholder should be allowed to bring evidence as against that of the Inspector as to what he has been doing to reduce the rabbits?—I think the Magistrate would always take that into consideration.

1693. Does the Magistrate listen to evidence adduced by the other side?—In all cases I have had he has done so, and inflicted a penalty according to the evidence.

1694. You have not heard that a Resident Magistrate stated in Southland that evidence adduced on the other side is of no value, because the Act states that the statement of an Inspector is sufficient?—He is not bound as to the amount of the penalty.

1695. Is it your opinion that the destruction of rabbits in summer should be more stringently carried out than hitherto?—Yes, early-summer work is most important.

1696. Do you not think a small bonus might be offered by the Government for young rabbits?—I am afraid that would lead to not killing the does till they had got the nest.

1697. You are an advocate of working in summer in addition to winter poisoning?—I enforce that in my district. I do not press them in the autumn, when the harvest is on, but I insist on as much work as possible during the early part of the summer.

1698. What principle have you adopted in paying the subsidy to tenants adjoining unoccupied Crown lands?—Four years ago I requested the tenants to send in an offer to poison the country where bounded by bush; and their offers were considered and accepted. Each year since I have acted on my own judgment. On patches of reserves of about fifty acres or so, in the lower portion of the district, I have kept two men at work all the year round, shifting from one patch to another.

1699. Are they paid weekly wages?—Yes.

1700. Are they allowed to keep the skins?—No.

1701. *Hon. Mr. Williamson.*] You are aware that there are tailless cats in this country; might you not have been mistaken as to this rabbit which climbed over the netting?—I was so situated that I could not be mistaken.

1702. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you agree to this: that rabbits should be entirely let alone between the two winter poisonings, in order that they might collect in colonies and thus be poisoned with more effect?—Yes, it would be far better to leave them alone for a bit.

1703. Do you advocate hunting with dogs at all?—Only at the end of September or October, after the poisoning is over. In my district there is a great deal of bush-land, and I am certain the does go into this in the winter time. In the beginning of September you would not start five rabbits all along the Aparima River. Then you will see them coming out of the bush to collect on the river-flats to breed; and that is the time to catch them—before they have thrown out a nest of young ones.

1704. Are the rabbits a serious pest in the parts of your district occupied by small settlers?—Taking acre for acre, I believe there are more rabbits amongst the small settlers than there are on the large runs.

1705. Would there be great difficulty in keeping them in check?—If the settlers exert themselves they could keep them down.

1706. Are they at the present time a serious pest to the settlers?—No.

1707. How should poisoned oats be laid—broadcast or in heaps?—A man should take a bag and let a little run through his fingers. On shingle places you can scatter it the same as for sowing oats.

1708. Have you ever tried grain slightly malted?—No.

1709. Do you use sugar or rhodium?—I have used a little rhodium; I do not think it makes much difference. I use a little salt. If the grain is properly mixed three grains will kill a rabbit. I think the salt keeps the oats moist.

1710. Do you think it desirable that the Government should take steps to provide a breeding-establishment for stoats and weasels?—I think it would be a very good thing indeed.

1711. You think the experiment is worth trying?—Yes.

1712. Can you suggest any steps that might be taken with a view of materially exterminating the rabbits?—Nothing beyond what I have already suggested. A few ferrets are useless: you want them in large numbers.