

479. We have met that difficulty before by withholding aid from men who merely wished to breed rabbits?—I would not give a bonus except for young skins, and then only in summer-time.

480. Would you recommend that a rabbit-proof fence should be made a legal boundary-fence?—Yes.

481. Is it not a fact that the value of Government land has very materially fallen during the last twelve or eighteen months?—Very much so.

482. What is the cause of that?—There are two causes—the low price of wool, and the expenses to be incurred from rabbitty land.

483. Can you state from recollection how many men are employed by the Government in this department in the whole colony, including Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors, and other assistants?—There are fifty Inspectors and thirty-two agents.

484. Is that all?—Yes.

485. How many of these are in the South Island?—There are twenty-four agents and about twenty-eight Inspectors.

486. Can you give the expense of the Rabbit Department approximately altogether?—I could not give that information.

487. How much do you think the Sheep Department would cost?—About £10,000 to £12,000.

488. Do you not think locally-elected trustees from the persons interested would be able to attend to the work of cleaning a district quite as well as from a central authority at Wellington?—I do not think so, generally. No doubt in some parts it would work admirably; but to apply that system to the whole colony would be a mistake.

489. Do you think it possible to clear rabbits out of any district in the colony?—I do not—not to completely exterminate them. You may keep them within bounds; but with our present appliances I do not think you will completely exterminate them.

490. *Mr. Fulton.*] You admit that in parts of the country the rabbits have increased?—Yes; that is, they are over a larger area.

491. Do you think the dry summer is the only cause of that?—Also the low price of everything.

492. Do you not think the low price of skins has had to do with it?—Decidedly so; also the low price of wool and other articles.

493. But the low price of skins has prevented persons from being so active in keeping the rabbits down?—It has had something to do with it.

494. What steps have you taken in the agricultural districts to keep this in check?—There have been no other steps taken than the usual ones.

495. Respecting the Taieri County, have you had any communication or information leading you to suppose that the rabbits had increased there considerably?—I have not.

496. Would you be surprised to hear that the people from one end to the other say that they have?—It would surprise me. I have heard nothing to that effect.

497. How are the agents paid?—So much per day, according to the number of days they are at work during the month.

498. How do you know the number of days they are at work?—The Inspector employs them. He is the only check I know of.

499. What means has he of knowing?—No other means than that.

500. What are the special duties of agents?—They are directed to go over certain portions of the country and to report—when, if necessary, the Inspector goes over the ground.

501. And are they employed pretty continuously?—Yes.

502. In fact, to all intents and purposes, they are yearly servants?—In all except name.

503. And who appoints these agents?—The Inspector submits their names. He is allowed to appoint them himself, and discharge them, if necessary.

504. Are the agents paid for cleaning certain portions of the Crown lands?—No.

505. Through the Inspectors, do they let contracts?—Every contract has to be submitted to the department.

506. How do you find out whether these contracts have been faithfully carried out?—The Inspector for the district is the only check.

507. Is there any stated rate at which these contracts are let?—The outside one is averaged at £25 per one thousand acres, and it very rarely exceeds that amount.

508. How far are those contracts which you let successful?—I have nothing to lead me to believe that they are not so.

509. Are the contracts for cleaning with poison or otherwise?—It wholly depends on the locality. If it is one of the large runs it is done by poison.

510. And also owing to the season of the year?—Yes.

511. How do you arrive at the value of what you should give the adjoining owners?—The Inspector generally knows the country very well, and he goes over the ground, and the owner says he will do the work for a certain price, and if not considered excessive it is accepted.

512. When do you expect the rabbit reports to be in?—Almost daily.

513. Will those contain the names of agents, with their salaries and their districts?—Yes.

514. Do you not think that local bodies might very well deal with this nuisance in circumstances similar to those of the Taieri?—They might do it in certain places, but not on the whole. I only speak from my experience of the state of the country under the former Boards.

515. On account of their partiality and disinclination to enforce the penalties?—Yes, and other causes.

516. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] What was the nature of the complaint from Fortrose?—It was to the