

783. What natural enemies?—Ferrets and cats. Stoats and weasels would do very well in the back-ranges.

784. Have you any stoats and weasels?—None in the Kaikoura District. Mr. Low turned out six stoats at the mouth of the Acheron.

785. There have been a great number of ferrets turned out in the Kaikoura District from time to time?—Yes.

786. Can you state anything in regard to their increase?—We find that on rocky faces and sandy river-flats they do very well; but wherever the ground is damp or clayey they do not seem to thrive at all. They breed very well, but it is necessary to turn out a constant supply of them.

787. Why?—Because I think a large number die. They are not really hardy animals.

788. What do they die from?—From damp and exposure. They are also subject to distemper.

789. Is that very fatal with them?—Very fatal indeed.

790. At what age is it taken?—At any age, I think.

791. Does not dry ground kill ferrets?—They die from the want of water.

792. I suppose this last season a good number of them died on that account?—We have heard so.

793. You have no further information to give to the Committee regarding the use of natural enemies, and other means of killing the rabbits?—I think there should be more unanimity in the way of poisoning and turning out natural enemies. A great deal of money is wasted through turning out ferrets at the wrong time. Then, before being turned out, ferrets should be trained to the food they are going to subsist on. We have a system in the Clarence District of fencing in a portion of ground where there is a burrow with wire-netting, and placing boxes of ferrets in the enclosure and feeding them with live rabbits every day, so that by the time the ferrets are turned out after two or three weeks' treatment of this description they go in search of the same food. I have heard of a live rabbit being taken into a box of ferrets, and they would not touch it. Then, in cold country ferrets should be turned out in spring; and, even supposing the following winter does kill them, they will have earned their cost by the number of rabbits they have killed. A number of landowners should agree with the Inspector as to the time to poison. They should choose the summer, when there is very little feed, and also in the winter.

794. Simultaneous poisoning is not at present the custom?—No; but we have been trying at Kaikoura to carry out that system, and with a great deal of success.

795. Have you any power under the Act to compel simultaneous poisoning?—No, only to order a man to do all such things as may be necessary to destroy rabbits.

796. Is not poisoning generally adopted to kill rabbits?—The farmers prefer that.

797. Supposing you sent round an order to each owner calling upon them to kill rabbits on a certain date, would they not all set to work to do so at the same time?—We find they do not. Generally there is one excuse or another for putting it off. If the order was in the same words as under the Act of 1881—"If within seven days the order is not complied with"—it would be better; but the wording of the Act is "immediately," and I have noticed from judgments from the Bench that the inclination is to read "immediately" as within one or two months. Mr. Whiteford seems to think that must be considered a reasonable time.

799. Would you recommend any amendment of the Act in that direction?—I should think it would be very useful for the Inspector to have the power. It would not be right, however, to make it a hard-and-fast rule—for instance, where there is a good deal of packing to be done. It should be made applicable according to the country to be dealt with. In regard to the Clarence runs, it would take about six weeks to make our arrangements.

800. Are you satisfied with the staff that is under you?—Yes.

801. Do they act as in other districts, and appoint agents to report to them?—No: we have only one rabbit agent—at Kaikoura, under Inspector Clifton—Mr. Miles—and it is proposed to appoint one at the Clarence shortly.

802. The duties of the agent are to ride about and see where the rabbits are?—Yes; and we use Mr. Miles to lay poison when he is not inspecting country.

803. The district is not a very large one?—No, but it is very rough.

804. Is not the district about Blenheim—Renwicktown—in your district?—No; I am not acquainted with that.

805. Who has charge of that?—Mr. Bayly or Mr. Passau.

806. Do the rabbits go high up the mountains?—Yes, they follow the snow. They will go up as far as they can get the feed.

807. Do you think there is any better system of keeping down the rabbits than the present one?—I am very strongly convinced of the necessity of wire-netting right through the country. I am also of opinion there should be local Boards of Advice to work with the Inspector.

808. Do you mean the County Councils and so forth?—No; they should be elected from those most interested in the matter.

809. You mean trustees?—Yes.

810. And these should have the power to raise money for the purpose of erecting wire-netting fencing?—Yes; and to keep it under control.

811. Where would the Inspector come in?—He would still have to administer the Act. You could not do without the Rabbit Act.

812. Would the trustees have to act under the directions of the Inspector, or would they be empowered to decide on what course they thought best themselves?—The Inspector should have instructions to accept the advice of the Board in all matters connected with fencing and the carrying-out of the Act; and where he did not see his way clear to do so, he should report to the head of the department or the Colonial Secretary.