

Mr. J. C. BROWN, M.H.R., examined.

907. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Can you give us any information regarding rabbits in the neighbourhood of Lawrence?—They are very numerous in the Tuapeka County.

908. Have they been so for a long time, or is it only lately?—They are more numerous now than last year, I suppose, on account of the dry season to a great extent. Speaking of my own district, I do not think the Inspectors are able to cope with the difficulty.

909. Do you think they are making a proper effort to cope with it?—I have no doubt they do their best according to their lights; but the settlers complain very much of the Inspectors in their action.

910. Have you small holdings in that district?—We have small and large holdings, up to twenty thousand acres.

911. Do you say the Inspectors are found fault with for being too active, or for want of action?—For both. The complaint is they have been too exact in some cases, and in others they have shown a want of attention—that is, the Act is said to be not impartially administered by them.

912. Can you state to the Committee in what respect it is not carried out with impartiality?—The settlers complain that they are very harshly dealt with, inasmuch as their neighbours, on whose properties rabbits are quite as numerous, are not summoned. It is a very vexed question in our district. There was recently a conference of delegates from Tuapeka and surrounding districts, who met at Lawrence, for the purpose of suggesting alterations in the Act.

913. What was the result of that conference?—They recommended that there should be a bonus for skins, and that the administration of the Act should be by an elective Board.

914. Did they embody their resolutions in any report, and forward it to the Government?—I am not quite sure whether they did so. They interviewed the County Council, requesting their co-operation.

915. Do the complaints in regard to the Inspectors come from the runholders or from the small holders?—From both runholder, and settlers, great and small.

916. Who have suffered most in you district, the large or small holders?—I think they have all suffered, more or less. On Cargill and Anderson's run they gave last year £1 per hundred for the skins, expending over £3,000 last year.

917. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] Do you mean that £3,000 has been spent on the skins alone?—For the extermination of rabbits on the run—poisoning, trapping, &c.

918. *Mr. Buchanan.*] That sum would be the total expenditure on all heads?—Yes; it cost them over £3,000 last year. There is another large property—Clark's—where they have also spent a large sum.

919. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have the small holdings generally been very much infested with rabbits?—Yes, most of them.

920. Is it not possible to keep the rabbits down on them?—No doubt.

921. The land is all clear?—Yes; there is not much bush and not much rock for cover.

922. Why, then, are there so many rabbits on these small holdings?—I cannot tell you. The settlers say they do all that is possible to clear them. Mr. Cooper, when he was down, was waited upon, and the settlers explained to him their difficulties. They also saw the Minister, and suggested that a bonus should be given and the Inspector's services dispensed with.

923. What I wish to ascertain is this: whether, in the case of these small holdings, the owners are really making an effort on their own behalf, or whether they have been swamped by rabbits from unoccupied lands?—No; there are no very large areas of unoccupied lands—some few chains along the Clutha River, commonage and mining reserves.

924. Then, if the small holders made a fair effort, their land should not be infested to any serious extent?—I believe there are cases where no efforts, or very little, have been made by small holders; but most of them expend large sums in endeavouring to clear the pest.

925. But those who spend a large sum are probably the larger holders?—No; both classes are doing their best.

926. Have you any commonages in your district?—Yes, small ones.

927. In fact, not to such an extent as would be a cause of annoyance?—They complain that the reserves are not sufficiently cleaned.

928. You cannot say, of your own knowledge, that the Inspectors neglect their duties?—I cannot; but they are complained of by holders of large and small properties.

929. What steps have been taken to kill the rabbits in your district?—Principally poisoning and dogs.

930. Has the natural enemy been turned out there?—Not in the neighbourhood of Lawrence, but at Cargill and Anderson's run they have turned out a great many ferrets and mongooses.

931. How long have they had rabbits in this district?—It is at least five years since they first showed themselves in great numbers.

932. It is only lately they have become troublesome?—They have been troublesome all the time, but worse this year.

933. *Hon. Mr. Robinson.*] You are the representative of the district to which you have been alluding?—Yes, except Cargill and Anderson's.

934. You do not know anything of this practically?—I know what I have seen.

935. And you are not directly interested in this matter?—No.

936. But you know all the farmers about?—Yes.

937. And you talk with them about their rabbits?—Yes; they come to me about them.

938. You gather from what they tell you that the Inspectors, if not altogether useless, do not give satisfaction?—Yes; some of them hold very strong opinions upon the matter.

939. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] Do I understand you to say that the settlers consider the Inspectors