

972. Do you look forward with hope to having the pest stamped out in the high country?—Yes; I think in the high country the natural enemy would be a great help.

973. Do you know the amount of legal expenses incurred annually in these prosecutions in your district?—I have suggested to the Magistrate who sat with me that the solicitor's fees should be smaller on account of there being numerous cases. As to the expenses, I can only give an approximate amount. It might be £150, fees and Court expenses.

974. What are the reserves to which you have referred?—They are mining reserves of a few chains up the Clutha and Tuapeka Rivers, Gabriel's Gully, Weatherstone, Waipori, and Waitahuna.

FRIDAY, 11TH JUNE, 1886.

Mr. V. PYKE, M.H.R., examined.

975. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You are the member for the Dunstan District?—Yes.

976. Are there many rabbits in that district?—An enormous quantity. In fact, nearly the whole of it is very rocky and affords shelter for the rabbits, so that it is almost impossible to extirpate them.

977. How far does that district run?—Half-way between Clyde and Cromwell, but previously to the last division of districts it ran up to Lake Wanaka. It now extends southwards to the Big Hill, near Tuapeka and to the Pomahaka River.

978. It is a very large district?—Yes.

979. And the whole of it is infested with rabbits?—Yes.

980. Badly?—Very badly indeed.

981. And has been so for years?—Ever since they first made their way across the Mataura.

982. Are they increasing or decreasing?—I do not think they are increasing, because the efforts of the runholders as well as the agriculturists to destroy them have been unceasing. The rabbits will not take the poison when there is plenty of grass, and during that season they breed infinitely. The system of rabbit-inspections has proved an utter failure, and I express the opinion of the agricultural portion of my constituency when I say that they should be altogether abolished, especially in Otago, as there is no scab there, and no nuisance except so far as the rabbits are concerned, and there the Inspectors are held to be utterly useless. The one fact which renders it impossible to reduce the number of rabbits—I will not speak of extirpation—to any great extent is that the rabbiters, who now constitute a profession separate and distinct, and who regard rabbiting in the season as a good deal better than gold-mining, as no doubt it is—take care to keep up the supplies, by leaving plenty of suckers to breed. There have been several meetings of farmers, more especially in my district, and they have arrived at one conclusion, in which I entirely agree, after careful consideration, extending over many years. It is that Rabbit Inspectors should be abolished, and that the money expended upon them should be devoted by the Government to the purchase of skins. All skins should be bought at an equal price, whether skins of suckers or adults, so as to give an inducement to kill young as well as old.

983. Would you give a bonus all the year round?—Yes; but the price would have to be altered in some places.

984. In summer do you think persons would cease to kill if the bonus were reduced?—In the summer killing is almost at an end. It is in the winter that the skins are a great harvest.

985. For that reason, would not the young ones be left to grow up?—Not if a uniform price were given, and if it were made a free occupation. It is not so now. I suppose because it suits the runholders and rabbiters best they taboo all rabbit-killing to everybody except those rabbiters whom they have engaged for the purpose. You will see the newspapers full of notices threatening with all the penalties of the law any person who shall destroy rabbits on a run without authority to do so. That is done not for the purpose of protecting the rabbits, but for the protection of the rabbiters. This is a great grievance, and as long as this practice is persevered in the nuisance will remain as it is.

986. It is the runholders that actually issue these notices?—Yes; I could show you any number in the country papers.

987. Is it directly with the object of protecting rabbiters, or simply for the purpose of protecting the runholder from trespassers on the land?—It must be to protect the rabbiters, because the notices generally contain a sentence referring to the taking of skins.

988. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] Would you advocate taking the administration of the Act out of the hands of the department?—Yes; so far as the Rabbit Inspectors are concerned.

989. If that were done would it not be necessary to employ somebody to put pressure on persons to kill the rabbits?—No, I think not. If they did not kill the rabbits the runholders would have no sheep, the farmers no crops, and each man would act as an inspector on his neighbours.

990. Do you find that each person who has an interest of that description takes steps to kill down rabbits at present?—Yes. There may be exceptions, but very few.

991. Are those exceptions among the large owners or the small owners?—I am not aware of any exceptions, but there may be; if so, they are very few indeed.

992. Do the Inspectors insist on killing rabbits?—They give notices occasionally.

993. Is the action of the Inspectors effectual?—It is regarded rather as harassing than effective. They do not always choose the proper season to call upon persons to lay down poison. For instance, there were great complaints in one part of my district this year that the Inspectors ordered the settlers to lay down poison at an inopportune time.

994. What part of the year?—Just before I came up here—about six weeks before the House met—and before the winter season fairly set in.

995. They considered it was too early?—Yes; and that the corn would only be wasted at the time.

996. You have very high lands and broken country in your district?—Yes.