

1023. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Of course, the danger of referring this matter to such a Board as that is thought to be this: that pressure will be brought to bear on members, so that the administration of the Act would be partial?—I do not think so. It is a matter of general interest to the whole community. I should like to mention that a meeting was held lately in what was formerly part of my district—at Cromwell—at which the principal remedy suggested was the giving of a bonus to the runholders. That might relieve them of some portion of the expenditure, but I do not think it would have the effect of reducing the number of rabbits. The idea is to subsidize the runholders.

1024. Who are the runholders—occupiers of Crown lands?—Entirely.

1025. Probably the leases run out at the same time?—No; it was specially arranged that they should run out at different intervals. I suppose there is a larger number of runholders in Otago than in any other provincial district. The lands in question were let as runs in 1882, but the leases expire at various intervals.

1026. With regard to the proposed bonus to runholders, was it a proposal to assist only those who had a short term?—No. I will send the circular I have received on the subject up to the Committee.

1027. Is there a large quantity of unoccupied Crown lands in your district?—At the upper end there is, but that is a wilderness of rocks and rivers, ravines and mountains.

1028. *Mr. Cowan.*] Do you think it desirable for the Government to offer a premium for the discovery of a disease to kill the rabbits?—Yes, if proper precautions were taken to warn the people that the disease was being introduced; anything that would tend to destroy the pest, except the introduction of stoats and weasels, we should adopt.

1029. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] Have you heard of a disease in Canada that carries off the rabbits?—I have read of it; that is all.

TUESDAY, 15TH JUNE, 1886.

Mr. RITCHIE examined.

1030. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You are from the Palmerston South District?—Yes.

1031. Have you had considerable experience with rabbits?—I have had about nine years' experience.

1032. Are they very thick in your district?—They were when we started poisoning them.

1033. And now?—So far as we ourselves are concerned, there are only a very few indeed. I am speaking of our own run; the district is fairly clean.

1034. What sort of country is it generally—agricultural or pastoral?—What we have ourselves, is pastoral country, and there is a considerable quantity of agricultural land on the flats. It is mixed country.

1035. And are the rabbits equally distributed between the agricultural and pastoral country, or are they a greater nuisance in one than in the other?—In the lower country I think they are pretty clear. They are more numerous in the higher country.

1036. There is no special complaint this year about rabbits on the agricultural lands?—No; this winter, I think, they could be cleared.

1037. What steps have you taken to kill the rabbits?—We have used phosphorus principally; also shooting and ferreting, and clearing the scrub and filling in the holes. Four or five years ago we poisoned very heavily, and since then I have always kept a certain number of men with dogs and guns, also ferreting. I think it has done good. We use dogs in the summer and poisoning in the winter.

1038. Do you think that with that process you can extirpate them?—I think so. I have begun to fill in the holes now. I think that will be a great benefit. It entails a large expenditure, but it is an expense that will eventually pay for itself. The holes we have are principally under-runners.

1039. Are the under-runners entirely under ground?—Partly underground. They may run a long distance down the spurs before they come out. They are underground watercourses principally.

1040. Have you turned out any natural enemies?—Yes, ferrets.

1041. Ferrets only?—Yes.

1042. And have they proved successful?—So far as I can see, they have. I turned them out on the back country, and I suppose they followed up the rabbits. I have been breeding a large number of them.

1043. In regard to poisoning, do you phosphorize oats or wheat?—Oats. I have a special apparatus for mixing the poison. It is air-tight and steam-tight, and does the work very well.

1044. What quantity of phosphorus do you mix?—About 1½lb. to 100lb. of oats.

1045. Do you mix with sugar or rhodium?—We put in a little sugar and sometimes salt. We put it down in very small heaps. I found that if we spread it out the sheep were apt to lift it, and the rabbits eat it more freely if put down in small heaps, where they take it at night.

1046. What is your experience as to the time during which the grain remains sufficiently strong to kill rabbits?—I was asking my man the other day about that, and he said he knew it to last as long as five weeks in winter. Rainy weather keeps the poison a long time; in warmer weather it evaporates.

1047. With regard to mixing the poison you say you adopt a special plan?—I have a square boiler which revolves in boiling water, and is kept at a certain heat. Most people boil the water in the cylinder and then add the oats; but we always boil the water in the outside boiler, just large enough to allow the cylinder to revolve in, and put the oats dry into the cylinder, and then add the water, and, after putting in the phosphorus, which must be thoroughly melted, we screw on the steam-tight lid, and keep revolving for an hour or two, when it is ready for use. The water in the