

1886.
NEW ZEALAND.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON RABBIT AND SHEEP ACTS

(REPORT OF).

Report brought up 20th July, 1886, and ordered to be printed.

ORDERS OF REFERENCE.

Extracts from the Journals of the Legislative Council.

WEDNESDAY, THE 26TH DAY OF MAY, 1886.

Ordered, "That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the best means of dealing with the rabbit pest, with power to confer or sit with any similar Committee appointed by the House of Representatives, and to agree to a joint or separate report; to have power to send for persons, papers, and records, to report within one month. The Committee to consist of the Hon. Mr. Acland, the Hon. Mr. Holmes, the Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson, the Hon. Mr. Menzies, the Hon. Mr. Peter, the Hon. Mr. Robinson, the Hon. Mr. Walker, the Hon. Mr. Williamson, the Hon. Mr. Wilson, and the mover."—(*Hon. Mr. P. A. Buckley.*)

FRIDAY, THE 11TH DAY OF JUNE, 1886.

Ordered, "That it be an instruction to the Rabbit Nuisance Committee to consider also the administration of the Sheep Act."—(*Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*)

FRIDAY, THE 25TH DAY OF JUNE, 1886.

Ordered, "That the time for bringing up the report of the Rabbit Nuisance Committee be extended for a fortnight."—(*Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*)

FRIDAY, THE 9TH DAY OF JULY, 1886.

Ordered, "That the time for bringing up the report of the Rabbit Nuisance Committee be extended for a fortnight."—(*Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*)

Extracts from the Journals of the House of Representatives.

THURSDAY, THE 20TH DAY OF MAY, 1886.

Ordered, "That a Committee be appointed to inquire into the best means of dealing with the rabbit pest, with power to confer or sit together with any similar Committee which may be appointed by the Legislative Council, and to agree to a joint or separate report; to have power to send for persons, papers, and records; three to be a quorum; to report in a month. The Committee to consist of Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Fulton, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. J. McKenzie, Captain Russell, Mr. McMillan, and the mover."—(*Hon. Mr. Larnach.*)

WEDNESDAY, THE 9TH DAY OF JUNE, 1886.

Ordered, "That it be an instruction to the Committee appointed on the rabbit question to also consider the administration of the Sheep Act."—(*Mr. Buchanan.*)

FRIDAY, THE 18TH DAY OF JUNE, 1886.

Ordered, "That the Rabbit Nuisance Committee have leave to postpone bringing up their report for a fortnight."—(*Captain Russell.*)

THURSDAY, THE 1ST DAY OF JULY, 1886.

Ordered, "That the Rabbit Nuisance Committee have leave to postpone bringing up their report for a week."—(*Captain Russell.*)

REPORT.

THE Joint Committee appointed to inquire into the best means of dealing with the rabbit nuisance, and also to consider the administration of the Sheep Act, has the honour to report as follows:—

THE RABBIT NUISANCE.

1. It has examined eighteen witnesses possessed of much practical experience, and also obtained information from more than sixty persons resident in various parts of the colony, as well as from such of the County Councils as were able and willing to reply to the questions submitted to them, regarding the rabbit nuisance and the working of "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1882."

2. From information thus obtained the Committee is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that, although the rabbits have in some districts materially diminished in numbers, and can be permanently kept down at moderate cost in those districts in which strenuous and combined efforts

have been made to destroy them, the colony is not only suffering a heavy annual loss from the very great numbers still existing in infested districts, but that the area infested is constantly increasing.

3. Thus at the present time rabbits are making their way into the Provincial District of Canterbury from the Amuri in the north and from the McKenzie Country in the south and west; whilst in the North Island they are spreading from the Waikato into the King Country, and from the Wairarapa into Hawke's Bay, where their further spread has been arrested by the erection of a rabbit-proof fence, the cost of which has been defrayed by a voluntary rate contributed by many of the sheepowners in the Hawke's Bay Sheep District, and administered by a Board elected by the contributors.

4. This annual loss has assumed such serious proportions that, in the opinion of the Committee, it occupies a position of importance second to none which can engage the attention of the Legislature.

5. Taking the above facts and conclusions as a basis, the main question which obviously suggests itself is, Has the experience of the past disclosed any means by which the pest can be reduced to harmless dimensions in the different classes of country affected.

6. The answer to this must be in the affirmative unless in exceptional cases.

7. Evidence was given before the Committee in 1884 which showed most conclusively that the liberal use of phosphorized grain, followed up by the filling-in of rabbit burrows and water-runs, the liberation of stoats and weasels, ferrets, cats, &c., and the use of other means disclosed by the evidence, had, in some instances, been successful in some descriptions of country; and the evidence now before the Committee, after an interval of two years, is conclusive in the same direction.

8. The Committee is also of opinion that the means here alluded to should be supplemented by the erection of rabbit-proof fences.

9. It is obvious, therefore, that the whole question is narrowed down to two important issues—

(1.) Is it desirable to amend the present Rabbit Nuisance Act?

(2.) Has its administration been of the efficient character which is indispensable in connection with such an important question?

10. With regard to the first question, the Committee is of opinion that the provisions of the Act are, on the whole, fairly calculated to effect the purposes for which it was enacted.

11. It, however, recommends that it should be so amended as to provide for simultaneous action on the part of landholders in the destruction of rabbits; and that, whilst the maximum penalty for neglect or breach of the provisions of the Act should be increased to £100, the defendant in every case should have the right to produce evidence in mitigation of the penalty inflicted, and, where the penalty exceeds £10, to appeal to a higher tribunal.

12. These amendments, the Committee thinks, will do away with the only just ground of complaint against the Act, and it is also of opinion that the dissatisfaction which has been freely expressed against the arbitrary powers conferred on the Inspectors will to a large extent cease.

13. The Committee is also of opinion that, if the ratepayers in any one or more counties in the colony express by petition to the Governor their desire to have the administration of the Rabbit Nuisance Act placed in the hands of Trustees elected by themselves, such request should be granted, and such Trustees should be empowered to levy rates for the purpose of doing such things as are now done by the Government in connection with the Rabbit Nuisance Act, and also for the purpose of the erection of wire-netting fences or for any other protective works which may be considered necessary by such Trustees either in reducing or preventing the spread of the rabbits; and that the Government should assist local efforts by granting a subsidy to the extent of _____ pound to every pound raised by local rates and spent in the administration, destruction, or spread of the rabbits; subject, however, to the supervision of the Government Inspector, and, on condition that, in case of failure to exclude or destroy the pest, the administration of the Act should be resumed by the Government, and the powers of the Trustees should be withdrawn.

14. Where a rabbit-proof fence is erected as a protective fence through Crown lands, the Committee is of opinion that the land on which the fence is erected, and to the extent of one chain in width on each side of it, should be reserved from sale and placed under the control of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and that power should be granted to any local body to enable it to enter and expend its funds on any reserve under its control for the purpose of destroying rabbits.

15. In accordance with this opinion the Committee recommends that the necessary machinery for the formation of such districts be provided by legislative enactment.

16. With regard to the second question, namely, the efficiency of the past administration of the Act, it is with much regret that the Committee finds itself compelled to reply emphatically in the negative, and to reaffirm in the strongest manner that portion of the report of the Committee of 1884, quoted below, which deals with this portion of the question:—

The Committee, however, is strongly of opinion that the most frequent cause of failure to destroy rabbits, and consequent public dissatisfaction, is the evident unfitness of many of the officers for the important and responsible duties imposed upon them. The various witnesses examined were naturally reluctant to name individual cases, but the Committee is none the less satisfied that many appointments have been made of men whose previous history furnished nothing but a record of failure in other walks of life, and incapacity and unfitness for any responsibility such as is contemplated by this Act. To carry out its provisions with vigour, it is necessary that the Inspectors should be allowed to exercise large powers; and when it is remembered that, under present arrangements, these same officers are intrusted with the working of the Sheep Act, it will be at once recognized that they have duties to perform involving great responsibility, and requiring the use of much tact and judgment.

The Committee think these considerations cannot fail to give weight to the remarks above made relating to the appointment of officers, and to impress the Government with the duty which rests upon them of at once dispensing with the services of men unqualified for such an important duty.

17. The Committee feels bound to point out that few or no steps have been taken by the Government to remedy the state of affairs indicated by the above quotation.

18. Individual settlers and groups of settlers have proved again and again that the suppression of rabbits is perfectly practicable in many parts of the country by methods which are now well known to every settler.

19. The recommendation, therefore, of the Committee is, that every Inspector in charge of a district should have ample power given him to suspend or summarily dismiss, for neglect of duty, any rabbit agent under his supervision; and that the services of such Inspector should be dispensed with upon failure to deal effectively with the rabbits in his district within a reasonable time.

20. The Committee maintains that a firm, impartial, and judicious administration of the Act is all that is necessary to produce the most satisfactory results.

21. It still remains to refer to the Crown lands reserves and commonages. Of these, very large areas, including the roughest and most inaccessible portions, are at present unleased, the inducements held out by the Crown Lands Department of long leases and extended acreage having only partially succeeded in securing tenants. The Committee recognizes that the question of how to deal with these unoccupied tracts of country is the most difficult that has come before it, and strongly recommends every inducement being offered for their permanent occupation. It is there that the most secure breeding grounds are afforded for rabbits, and so long as they remain unoccupied there is no hope of effectually preventing the adjoining lands from being constantly re-stocked by them. The "natural enemies" will here prove the best and most economical means of permanently diminishing the nuisance; and the Committee strongly urges that the Government should, without delay, take steps to provide for a large and constant supply of stoats and weasels, and also for the breeding of a large number of ferrets locally by contract.

22. A long time, however, must elapse before these animals can multiply sufficiently to be able to cope satisfactorily with the pest, and in the meanwhile the present system of destroying the rabbits by contract or otherwise will have to be continued. Under these circumstances there is great danger that a large proportion of the "natural enemies" will be killed. It must rest with the Government alone to take every precaution against such a result.

23. Another difficulty arises from the fact that within a few years a large number of the Crown pastoral leases will terminate, and, therefore, that the tenants are daily becoming less interested in the destruction of the rabbits upon their holdings, and, consequently, less inclined to spend money for that purpose. At the same time the lands included in these leases, from their positions and character, are generally more liable than private lands to be overrun by the pest, and therefore more expensive to deal with. Should this lead to a large increase of the rabbits at the end of the term, there must be a corresponding decrease of rent to the Government under the new leases. In order, if possible, to avoid such a result, the Committee is of opinion that it would be advisable for the Government, in any case in which the tenant was willing to surrender his lease, to accept such surrender at any time within eighteen months before the expiry thereof, and thereupon to offer the lease for a fresh term. This course, the Committee thinks, is preferable to giving a bonus in any shape for rabbit-skins, or to assisting the pastoral tenants of the Crown in any other way.

24. Lastly, the Committee recognizes that the means at present available for the destruction of the pest are not radical cures, and that until some discovery shall have been made more searching and fatal in its effects upon rabbits than any thing at present known, their absolute eradication cannot be looked for. Such a discovery is not beyond hope. Somewhat similar discoveries, which have proved of the greatest value, are on record; and the Committee recommends the Government to take such steps, including the offer of a bonus, as may appear to them best calculated to bring about the attainment of such a desirable object.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SHEEP ACT.

The Committee is of opinion—

1. That "The Sheep Act 1878 Amendment Act, 1884," (which provides for the destruction of lice in sheep), should be modified in the direction of allowing greater facilities for the travelling of sheep intended for slaughter.

2. That, with respect to ewe-flocks, no person should be compelled to dip any such flock during lambing time.

3. That the penalties provided for in section 3 of the above-mentioned Act should be assimilated to those named in section 5 thereof.

20th July, 1886.

G. RANDALL JOHNSON,
Chairman.

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS.

THURSDAY, 27TH MAY, 1886.

THE Rabbit Nuisance Committee of the Legislative Council met, pursuant to notice, at 11 a.m.

Present: Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson, Hon. Mr. Menzies.
The order of reference was read.

On motion of the Hon. Mr. Buckley, the Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson was appointed Chairman.

The Committee deliberated, and the Clerk was directed to inform the Chairman of the Rabbit Nuisance Committee, appointed by the House of Representatives, that this Committee is ready to meet the Committee of the House forthwith, if convenient, and to deliberate as a Joint Committee.

THURSDAY, 27TH MAY, 1886.

The Rabbit Nuisance Committee of the House of Representatives met, pursuant to notice, at 11 a.m.

Present: Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Fulton, Mr. Kerr, Mr. J. McKenzie, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The order of reference was read.

On motion of Mr. Fulton, Captain Russell was appointed Chairman.

The Committee deliberated, and then proceeded to meet the Committee appointed by the Legislative Council, and to sit as a Joint Committee.

JOINT RABBIT NUISANCE COMMITTEE.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter. House of Representatives—Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Fulton, Mr. Kerr, Hon. Mr. Larnach, C.M.G., Mr. J. McKenzie, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The orders of reference were read.

On motion of Mr. J. Mackenzie, the Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson was voted to the chair.

The Committee deliberated.

Resolved, That Mr. Bailey, Mr. McKerrow, and Mr. Valentine be summoned for Friday next (to-morrow), the 28th May.

Resolved, That a Sub-committee be appointed, to consist of Mr. Cowan, Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson, Mr. J. McKenzie, Hon. Mr. Menzies, and Captain Russell, to draw up a series of questions relating to the rabbit pest, and to be sent to such gentlemen as the Committee may deem advisable.

Then the Committee adjourned till to-morrow, Friday, the 28th May, at 10.30 a.m.

FRIDAY, 28TH MAY, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Wilson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Fulton, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. J. McKenzie, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

A letter from the Hon. Secretary of the Hawke's Bay Rabbit Pest Prevention Committee, *re* the means adopted for prevention of the spread of the pest, was laid before the Committee by Captain Russell.

Mr. McKerrow, Surveyor-General, was examined, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Mr. H. S. Valentine was examined, and, being thanked, withdrew.

It was proposed to take the evidence of Mr. Bailey on Monday.

Then the Committee adjourned till Monday, the 31st May, at 10.30 a.m.

MONDAY, 31ST MAY, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Walker. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Fulton, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Hon. Mr. Larnach, C.M.G., Mr. J. McKenzie, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

A list of questions drawn up by the Sub-committee, to obtain information on the rabbit nuisance, was read by the Hon. the Chairman to the Committee, which, being considered *seriatim*, were agreed to be adopted, and were ordered to be printed.

Maps of the North and Middle Island, showing sheep divisions and subdivisions, were laid before the Committee.

Sir Norman Campbell attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Resolved, That the evidence taken before this Committee be printed.

The Committee deliberated.

Then the Committee adjourned till Tuesday, the 1st June, at 10.30 a.m.

TUESDAY, 1ST JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Walker. House of Representatives—Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Fulton, Mr. Lance, Mr. J. McKenzie, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Bailey, Chief Inspector, Sheep Department, was examined.

Mr. Bailey laid before the Committee a paper containing extracts from the *Australasian* on the use of wire-netting to fence against rabbits, and, being thanked, withdrew.

A report from Mr. Forster was laid on the table by Mr. Lance.

Deliberation ensued.

Mr. Bailey was requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee.

Then the Committee adjourned till Thursday, the 3rd June, at 10.30 a.m.

THURSDAY, 3RD JUNE, 1886

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Walker. House of Representatives—Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Lance, Hon. Mr. Larnach, C.M.G., Mr. Kerr, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Cooper, Under-Secretary, attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Mr. Bailey, Chief Inspector, attended and gave further evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew. The report of the Chief Inspector of Otago was laid before the Committee.

Resolved, That Mr. J. C. Buckland, M.H.R., and Mr. J. C. Brown, M.H.R., be requested to give evidence before the Committee at the next meeting.

Then the Committee adjourned till to-morrow, Friday, the 4th June, at 11.30 a.m.

FRIDAY, 4TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Walker. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Lance, Mr. Kerr, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Forster attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Further papers laid before the Committee: (1.) Summary of payments made during the last financial year for destruction of rabbits on Crown lands, exclusive of agents' wages. (2.) A petition from pastoral tenants in Otago, referred to the Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee by Classification Committee of the House of Representatives.

The Committee deliberated, and then adjourned till Tuesday, the 8th June, at 10.30 a.m.

TUESDAY, 8TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Robinson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Fulton, Mr. Kerr, Mr. J. McKenzie, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

The Committee deliberated.

The Hon. the Chairman stated that copies of the "questions" had been posted to fifty-seven private persons (a list of whom was laid on the table) and to the Chairman of each County Council.

Mr. Cowan moved, That Mr. A. A. Macdonald be summoned to give evidence.

The Committee divided, and the names were taken down as follows:—

Ayes, 9.—Hon. Mr. Acland, Mr. Buchanan, Hon. Mr. Buckley, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. J. McKenzie, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Captain Russell.

Noes, 4.—Mr. Fulton, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Mr. Kerr, Hon. Mr. Menzies.

So it was resolved in the affirmative.

Mr. McKenzie moved, That Captain Raymond be summoned.

The Committee divided, and the names were taken down as follows:—

Ayes, 6.—Hon. Mr. Acland, Mr. Buchanan, Hon. Mr. Buckley, Mr. Cowan, Mr. J. McKenzie, Hon. Mr. Menzies.

Noes, 7.—Mr. Dodson, Mr. Fulton, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Mr. Kerr, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Captain Russell.

So it passed in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr. J. McKenzie, That Mr. Ritchie, Palmerston South, be summoned.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr. Buchanan, That Mr. Grace, of Gladstone, be summoned; also that the two Inspectors of Wairarapa District be summoned.

Resolved, That Mr. Inspector Forster be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee.

Mr. Dodson mentioned that partially-malted oats had, in some cases, been found very effectual for the purpose of poisoning rabbits in the summer months; and, on his motion, it was *Resolved*, That a letter be sent to Mr. Charles Redwood, requesting information on this subject.

The Hon. Mr. Holmes laid upon the table a price-list from Messrs. Burgoyne, Burbridge, Cyriax, and Farries, 19, Coleman Street, London, from which it appears that this company is prepared to deliver *carbonis bisulphidum* free on board the vessels (in iron drums) at £21 per ton, and phosphorus, in quantities of 50lb., at 2s. 1d. per lb.

The petition of Thomas Brydone and others was read and considered.

On the motion of Mr. Fulton, *Resolved*, That this petition be returned to the House of Representatives, inasmuch as, in the opinion of this Committee, it refers to matters beyond the scope of the order of reference to this Committee.

Then the Committee adjourned till to-morrow, Wednesday, the 9th June, at 10.30 a.m.

WEDNESDAY, 9TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon.

Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Robinson. House of Representatives—Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. J. McKenzie, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Inspector Forster attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Papers laid before the Committee: (1.) Letter from Mr. Fraser, of the Vincent County Council, 20th May, 1886. (2.) Memorandum from Mr. Thompson, Arrow, 3rd May, 1886. (3.) Memorandum from Mr. Blundell, Blenheim.

Resolved, That Mr. Pyke, M.H.R., be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee. Then the Committee adjourned till Friday, at 10.30 a.m.

FRIDAY, 11TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Peter. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

An order of reference was read to the Committee to consider also the administration of the Sheep Act.

Mr. J. C. Brown, M.H.R., attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Mr. Pyke, M.H.R., attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Mr. Under-Secretary Cooper attended and gave further evidence.

Papers: A letter from Mr. Inspector Forster to the Hon. the Chairman was laid before the Committee.

The Committee deliberated, and adjourned till Tuesday, the 15th June, at 10.30 a.m.

TUESDAY, 15TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. J. McKenzie, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Ritchie attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Papers: (1.) Letter from Mr. Pyke, M.H.R., enclosing certain resolutions referred to in his evidence before the Committee. (2.) Letter from Mr. Acton-Adams, referring to a supply of stoats and weasels. (3.) Letter from Mr. Inspector Forster, *re* the working of "The Sheep Act Amendment Act, 1884." (4.) Letter from Mr. Pool, *re* his method of destroying rabbits.

Telegrams from Mr. Grace and Mr. Drummond were laid before the Committee.

The Committee deliberated.

Resolved, That the Hon. the Chairman do communicate the desire of the Committee to Mr. Poole that he should forward to them a description of his method for the destruction of rabbits, subject to the conditions contained in his letter.

The Clerk was instructed to summon Mr. Brydone and Mr. Roberts, to give evidence before the Committee, to-morrow, Wednesday, the 16th June, at 10.30 a.m.

The Committee thereon adjourned till to-morrow, Wednesday, the 16th June, at 10.30 a.m.

WEDNESDAY, 16TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Walker. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Fulton, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. J. McKenzie, Mr. McMillan.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Brydone attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Mr. Roberts attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

On the motion of Hon. Mr. Menzies, *Resolved*, that the following resolution be adopted, *viz.*: That the attention of the Government be drawn to the proposal of Messrs. Cuff and Graham, of Christchurch, to supply stoats and weasels, with a recommendation that their offer should be accepted for a large and continuous supply; also that the Government be requested to instruct their Agent at San Francisco to endeavour to send as many pine martens as he can procure.

The Committee deliberated, and adjourned till to-morrow, Thursday, the 17th June, at 10.30 a.m.

THURSDAY, 17TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. McMillan.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Under-Secretary Cooper was present and made a statement.

Mr. McDonald, Inspector of Sheep and Rabbits, attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Mr. Fraser attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

The Committee deliberated, and adjourned till to-morrow, Friday, the 18th June, at 10.30 a.m.

FRIDAY, 18TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Mr. Lance, Hon. Mr. Larnach, C.M.G., Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed,

Mr. Orbell, Inspector of Sheep and Rabbits, from Wairarapa, attended and gave evidence.

On the motion of Mr. Buchanan, *Resolved*, That Mr. Orbell be then examined on the administration of the Sheep Act.

Mr. Orbell was examined accordingly, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Mr. Drummond, Inspector of Sheep and Rabbits, also from Wairarapa, attended and gave evidence.

Mr. Drummond was also examined on the Sheep Act, and, being thanked, withdrew.

The Committee deliberated, and then adjourned till Tuesday, the 22nd June, at 10.30 a.m.

TUESDAY, 22ND JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. J. McKenzie.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Buckland, M.H.R., was examined, and, being thanked, withdrew.

A letter from the Chairman of the Wyndham Road Board, *re* the rabbit nuisance, was laid before the Committee.

Resolved, That Mr. Grace, Mr. Douglas, Inspector for Southland, and Mr. Bailey, Chief Inspector of the Sheep Department, be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee deliberated, and then adjourned till to-morrow, Wednesday, the 23rd June, at 10.30 a.m.

WEDNESDAY, 23RD JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Kerr, Mr. J. McKenzie, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. N. Grace, of Wairarapa, attended and gave evidence, and, being thanked, withdrew.

Mr. Inspector Bailey was further examined, and, being thanked, withdrew.

The Committee deliberated, and then adjourned till to-morrow, Thursday, the 24th June, at 10.30 a.m.

THURSDAY, 24TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Kerr, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. Inspector Douglas was examined, and, being thanked, withdrew.

A telegram from Mr. Pool, of Dunedin, *re* his method for destruction of rabbits, was laid before the Committee.

A return, furnished by Mr. Inspector Bailey, of the number of natural enemies turned out by the Government and by private individuals during the years 1884–86 was laid before the Committee.

Deliberation ensued.

The Committee then adjourned till Wednesday, the 30th June, at 10.30 a.m.

WEDNESDAY, 30TH JUNE, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Dodson, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

A petition from Peter Robinson, on the subject of the rabbit nuisance, which was referred from the Public Petitions Committee of the House of Representatives to the Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee, was laid before the Committee, and read.

A paper, *re* Stenhouse's rabbit-exterminator, was also laid before the Committee. Deliberation ensued.

On motion of Hon. Mr. Menzies, *Resolved*, That a Sub-committee, consisting of the Chairman and four other members of this Committee, be appointed to consider the information laid before the Committee, and prepare resolutions to be submitted to this Committee, on Friday, as a basis for the report.

The Committee thereon proceeded to select by ballot the said Sub-committee, which being done, the Hon. the Chairman declared that Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Mr. Lance, and Captain Russell were chosen as a Sub-committee. It was further resolved that the Sub-committee should consider the administration of the Sheep Act.

Then the Committee adjourned till Friday, the 2nd July, at 10.30 a.m.

FRIDAY, 2ND JULY, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

The Hon. the Chairman laid upon the table a letter received by him from Mr. Raymond, relating to the use of phosphorized oats in summer months.

The resolutions arrived at by the Sub-committee, and recommended as a basis for the report of the Joint Committee, were read by the Hon. the Chairman, and were as follows:—

1. That "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1882," has upon the whole worked well, and can be administered efficiently and satisfactorily by judicious officers.—Carried.

2. That any amendments made in the Act should be in the direction—

(a.) Of enabling Inspectors to compel simultaneous poisoning.—Carried.

(b.) That the maximum penalty for offences under sections 9 and 10 of the Act should be increased to £100.—Carried.

(c.) That the defendant in any proceedings under the Act should be allowed to produce evidence in mitigation of penalties.—Carried.

(d.) That a right of appeal should be given in any cases in which the penalty inflicted exceeds £10.

Mr. Dodson moved an amendment as follows: That the words "£10" be erased, and the words "£25" be substituted in lieu thereof.

And the question being put, "That the words £10 stand part of the motion," the Committee divided, and the names were taken down as follows:—

Ayes, 5.—Mr. Kerr, Mr. McMillan, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Captain Russell, Hon. Mr. Walker.

Noes, 5.—Hon. Mr. Acland, Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Dodson, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Mr. Lance.

And, the numbers being equal, the Chairman gave his casting vote with the Ayes.

The original question being put, it was resolved in the affirmative.

(e.) That powers be given to local bodies to expend moneys from their revenues in destroying rabbits on their reserves.—Carried.

3. That every effort should be made to multiply the natural enemies of the rabbit—namely, the stoat, weasel, marten, &c.; and that the Government be urged to import these animals continuously in large numbers.—Carried.

4. That the Inspectors should insist upon simultaneous poisoning with phosphorized grain within their respective districts during the winter months as often as may be necessary, and, where it is practicable, at least twice during the summer months.—Carried.

5. That a bonus be offered by the Government of 1d. per skin for all young rabbits (suckers).—Negatived.

6. That the Government be recommended to offer a bonus for the discovery of some means for destroying rabbits effectually, by disease or otherwise, provided that the life or health of any kind of stock be not endangered thereby.—Carried.

7. That in districts infested with rabbits the Government should, in any case in which the holder of a pastoral lease is willing to surrender such lease, accept such surrender at any time within eighteen months before the expiry of such lease, and thereupon offer the lease for a fresh term for sale by auction.—Carried.

8. That in any district where there are only a few or no rabbits the ratepayers should be allowed to form themselves into a "body corporate" for the purpose of administering the Rabbit Nuisance Act within their district; provided that a petition to that effect, signed by at least three-fifths of such ratepayers, be forwarded to the Governor, who should thereupon proclaim the boundaries, &c., of the district: the management of the affairs of the body corporate to be under the control of a Board, consisting of seven Trustees, to be elected by the ratepayers; and the moneys so raised to be expended upon works necessary to carry out the objects of the body corporate, including the erection of wire-netting fences. The Government Inspector, however, at all times to have authority to inspect and to report to the head of the department upon the condition of the district, and, in case rabbits shall be found to have spread or increased therein, the Governor, by Proclamation, to abolish such body corporate, and thereupon the provisions of the Rabbit Nuisance Act to be administered within such district in like manner as in other infested districts.—Carried.

9. Wherever any fence for the exclusion or protection against rabbits is erected by Trustees (as in the last resolution mentioned) upon unoccupied Crown lands, at least one chain in width on

each side of such fence shall be reserved for the purpose of giving access to such fence, and be under the exclusive control of such Trustees.—Carried.

10. *Resolved*, That the above resolutions be embodied in a report to be submitted to the Joint Committee for approval.

The Committee then adjourned.

THURSDAY, 8TH JULY, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. McMillan, Mr. J. McKenzie, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

The Hon. the Chairman submitted to the Committee a draft report on the subject of the rabbit nuisance, which was as follows:—

The Joint Committee appointed to inquire into the best means of dealing with the rabbit pest, have the honour to report as follows:—

They have examined eighteen witnesses, and also obtained information from more than sixty persons resident in various parts of the colony, as well as from such of the County Councils as were able and willing to reply to the questions submitted to them, regarding the rabbit nuisance and the working of "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1882."

The information thus obtained shows that the rabbits have been very materially diminished, and can be permanently kept down, at moderate cost, in those infested districts in which strenuous and combined efforts have been made to destroy them, but that the area over which the pest has spread is constantly increasing.

Thus, at the present time, rabbits are making their way into the Provincial District of Canterbury from the Amuri in the north, and from the McKenzie Country in the south and west; whilst in the North Island they are spreading from the Wairarapa into Hawke's Bay, and from the Waikato into the King Country.

Moreover, there does not seem to be any good reason for expecting that rabbits will be either permanently excluded, or absolutely eradicated, from any portion of the colony: at any rate not from those districts which include or immediately border upon forest lands or the higher and rougher and inaccessible country. It appears, however, to be quite practicable to check their advance, or to keep them down so as to prevent any serious damage being caused by them. But the Committee cannot too forcibly impress upon all those interested in this question that such results can only be obtained by combined and concerted action on the part of all landholders, on the one hand, and the Government (which, as a landlord, the Committee recognize has the largest interest at stake) on the other, in the adoption of the means which experience proves to be most effective and best suited to the character of the country to be dealt with.

At the present time the systematic use of phosphorized grain (more or less during all seasons of the year), and the turning out in large numbers of the natural enemies of the rabbit, have done greater service in reducing the pest than any other of the many methods hitherto tried for this purpose.

The poisoning with phosphorized grain appears to have been as yet almost entirely confined to the winter months, but the Committee wish to point out that experience has proved it to be also very efficacious in the breeding season and summer; and that in some districts the rabbits are being satisfactorily destroyed all the year round with very little aid from other means than this.

On pastoral lands and the rougher country, however, the natural enemies of the rabbit appear to be absolutely necessary; and of these, stoats, weasels, and martens are the most hardy and best adapted to high mountains, whilst in warmer and more sheltered localities ferrets increase rapidly in numbers, and, in some instances, have proved capable, without any assistance at all, of preventing the increase of rabbits on country where they had previously been diminished by poison.

There appears, therefore, good reason to expect that these remedies, aided by the erection of wire-netting fences and the ferretting and digging down burrows wherever the nature of the country admits of or requires it, will prove sufficient to enable all to cope successfully with the nuisance. But two points relating to the use of these means require special attention, namely:—

First. That as poisoning, like other methods of destruction, has the effect, more or less, of driving the rabbits from place to place, landholders, in order to obtain the best results, should arrange with their neighbours, as far as possible, to adopt simultaneous action in laying phosphorized grain; and

Second. The destruction of rabbits by means of professional rabbiters with packs of dogs, by traps, and by fumigation, should be prohibited in those districts in which the natural enemies have been turned out.

With regard to "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1882," which was re-enacted last year without any material alteration, the Committee are of opinion that upon the whole it has worked well, and that it can be administered efficiently and satisfactorily by judicious officers. They, however, recommend that it should be so amended as to provide more surely for simultaneous action on the part of landholders in the destruction of rabbits; and that, whilst the maximum penalty for neglect or breach of the provisions of the Act should be increased to £100, the defendant in any case should have the right to produce evidence in his favour in mitigation of the penalty inflicted, and, where the penalty exceeds £10, to appeal to a higher tribunal.

With these amendments, the Committee think that the only just ground of complaint against the Act will be done away with, and the dissatisfaction which has been freely expressed against the arbitrary powers conferred on the Inspectors will to a large extent cease.

To deal efficiently with the rabbit nuisance it is necessary that large powers should be placed in the hands of the officers appointed to carry out the provisions of the Act, but it is not intended that they should be exercised in an arbitrary or unjust manner. A firm, impartial, and judicious administration of the Act will produce far more satisfactory results than any hasty and spasmodic display of great authority. In the hands of fitly-qualified men it can be made effective without unduly oppressing any one; but it must not be forgotten that it can easily be made an engine of tyranny and the cause of serious opposition to all endeavours to stamp out the pest if administered with unnecessary harshness, partiality, or want of judgment. It is therefore of the utmost importance that every appointment to an office under it should be made with the greatest care, and such officers as have shown incapacity or unfitness for their office, or who have acted improperly in the discharge of their duties, should at once be removed. Moreover, for the more efficient working of the Act, the officer in charge of a district should be held responsible for that district and for the conduct of those under him.

The complaints brought to the notice of the Committee relate, in far the greater number of cases, to the faults of officers in administering the Act; but, whilst giving due weight to these, the Committee cannot recommend that the administration of the Act should be handed over to the local bodies, such as County Councils or Road Boards.

Nevertheless they are of opinion that, in parts of the colony still free from rabbits, or only slightly infested with them, the ratepayers, if they so wish it, should, for the purpose of more effectually preventing the spread or increase of rabbits, be permitted to place the administration of the Act within their district in the hands of Trustees, to be elected by themselves, who should have power to levy rates within their district, to be spent in the erection of wire-netting fences or the carrying-out of other protective works, subject, however, to the supervision of the Government Inspector, and on condition that, in case of failure to exclude or destroy the pest, the administration of the Act should be resumed by the Government, and the powers of the Trustees should be withdrawn.

In accordance with this opinion the Committee recommend that the necessary machinery for the formation of such districts be provided by legislative enactment.

It still remains to refer to the Crown lands reserves and commonages. Of these, very large areas, including the roughest and most inaccessible portions, are at present unleased, the inducements held out by the Crown Lands Department of long leases and extended acreage having only partially succeeded in securing tenants. Arrangements have, however, been made, at the expense of the Government, for the destruction of rabbits upon them—in many instances with the occupiers of adjoining lands, and in others by contracts with professional rabbiters. In this way the pest has been to a certain extent kept in check, but more should be done. At the same time the Committee recognize that the question of how to deal with these unoccupied tracts of country is the most difficult that has come before them. It is there that the most secure breeding-grounds are afforded for rabbits, and so long as this continues to be the case there is no hope of effectually preventing the adjoining lands from being constantly re-stocked by them. The "natural enemies"—feline and raptorial—will here prove the best and most economical means of permanently diminishing the nuisance; and the Committee recommend that the Government should without delay take steps to provide for a large and constant supply of stoats, weasels, martens, ferrets, and, if possible, for the introduction of a species of hawk somewhat more powerful and rapacious than that which is indigenous to New Zealand.

A long time, however, must elapse before these animals can multiply sufficiently to be able to cope satisfactorily with the pest, and in the meanwhile the present system of destroying the rabbits by contract will have to be continued. Under these circumstances there is great danger that a large proportion of the "natural enemies" will be killed. It must rest with the Government alone to take every precaution against such a result.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that within a few years a large number of the Crown pastoral leases will terminate, and, therefore, that the tenants are daily becoming less interested in the destruction of the rabbits upon their holdings, and, consequently, less inclined to spend money for that purpose. At the same time, the lands included in these leases, from their positions and character, are generally more liable than private lands to be overrun by the pest, and therefore more expensive to deal with. Should this lead to a large increase of the rabbits at the end of the term, there must be a corresponding decrease of rent to the Government under the new leases. In order, if possible, to avoid such a result, the Committee are of opinion that it would be advisable for the Government, in any case in which the tenant was willing to surrender his lease, to accept such surrender at any time within eighteen months before the expiry thereof, and thereupon to offer the lease for a fresh term for sale by auction. This course, the Committee think, is preferable to giving a bonus in any shape for rabbit-skins, or to assisting the pastoral tenants of the Crown in any other way.

Lastly, the Committee recognize that the means at present available for the destruction of the pest are mere palliations, not cures, and that until some discovery more searching and fatal in its effects upon the rabbit than anything at present known has been made, its absolute eradication, and the cessation of the present large expenditure in connection with it, cannot be looked for. Such a discovery is not beyond hope. Somewhat similar discoveries, which have proved of the greatest value, are on record; and the Committee recommend the Government to take such steps, including the offer of a bonus, as may appear to them best calculated to bring about the attainment of such a desirable object.

On the motion of Mr. Buchanan, it was resolved, That the consideration of the report be postponed till next meeting of the Committee.

Then the Committee adjourned till Wednesday next, the 14th July, at 10.30 a.m.

WEDNESDAY, 14TH JULY, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Buckley, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lance, Mr. J. McKenzie, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and confirmed.

The Hon. the Chairman laid before the Committee a letter from Mr. Beetham, M.H.R., forwarding a letter from the chairman of a public meeting at Masterton relating to the rabbit question, with the newspaper reports of the proceedings.

The Committee then proceeded to the consideration of the draft report.

Report read *seriatim*.

Page 1, paragraph 1 amended: Mr. Buchanan moved, That in line 3, after "witnesses," the words "possessed of much practical experience" be inserted.—Carried.

Page 1, paragraph 2: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit the paragraph as printed, and insert the following in lieu thereof:—

The information thus obtained shows that, although the rabbits have in some districts somewhat diminished in numbers, the Committee is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that, not only is the colony suffering a heavy annual loss from the very great numbers still existing in infested districts, but that the area infested is annually increasing.

Page 1, paragraph 3 amended in line 13: Captain Russell moved, To insert after "Hawke's Bay," the following: "Where their further spread has been arrested by the erection of a rabbit-proof fence, the cost of which was defrayed by a voluntary rate contributed by many of the sheepowners in the Hawke's Bay Sheep District, and administered by a Board elected by the contributors."—Carried.

Page 1, paragraphs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit these paragraphs as printed, and to insert the following in lieu thereof:—

This annual loss assumes a seriousness which, in the opinion of the Committee, places the whole question in a position of importance second to none which can engage the attention of the Legislature.

Taking the above facts and conclusions as a basis, the first question which obviously suggests itself is, Has the experience of the past disclosed any means by which the pest can be reduced to harmless dimensions in the different classes of country affected, and at a reasonable cost?

The answer to this must be in the affirmative.

Evidence of a most conclusive character was given before the Committee in 1884 that the liberal use of phosphorized grain, followed up by the filling-in of rabbit burrows and water-runs, the liberation of stoats and weasels, ferrets, cats, &c., and the use of other means disclosed by the evidence, had, in numerous instances, effectually settled the difficulty in most descriptions of country; and the evidence now before the Committee, after an interval of two years, is absolutely conclusive in the same direction.

It is obvious, therefore, that the whole question is thus narrowed down to two important issues: (1.) Is it desirable to amend the present Rabbit Nuisance Act? (2.) Has its administration been of the efficient character which all must admit should be made absolutely imperative in connection with such an important question?

With regard to the first question, the Committee are of opinion that the provisions of the Act are, on the whole, fairly calculated to effect the purposes for which it was enacted.—Carried.

Captain Russell moved to insert the following after the words "same direction" in the last line of new paragraph 4: "But the Committee is of opinion that the means here alluded to should be supplemented by the erection of rabbit-proof fences."—Carried.

Page 1, paragraph 9: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit lines 49, 50, and 51, as far as "officers."—Agreed to. Also after "provide" in line 52, to omit "more surely."—Carried.

Mr. Cowan moved in line 54 to strike out "any," and insert "every" in lieu thereof.—Agreed to.

Page 1, paragraph 10: Mr. Cowan moved, To strike out "these amendments," for the purpose of inserting "the right of appeal and production of evidence in mitigation of penalty."—Negatived.

Page 2: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit paragraphs 11 and 12.—Carried.

Page 2, paragraph 13, line 18: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit the words "nevertheless they are," and to insert the words "they are also strongly."—Carried.

Also in line 18: Mr. McKenzie moved, To strike out the words "still free from rabbits, or only slightly infested with them."—Carried.

In line 20: Mr. Buchanan moved, To strike out "permitted," and to insert "empowered by law."—Carried. Also in line 21 to strike out the words "have power to levy rates within the district," and to insert the words "be enabled to claim pound for pound from the Government on rates to be levied within districts not infested by the pest, such rates and subsidy."—Carried.

Also in line 23: Hon. Mr. Robinson moved, To insert after "works" "on Crown and freehold lands."—Carried.

Captain Russell moved, That the following new clause be inserted at end of paragraph 13:—

That, where a rabbit-proof fence is erected as a protective fence through Crown lands, the land on which the fence is erected, and to the extent of one chain in width on each side of it, should be vested in the Chairman of the Board of Trustees.—Carried.

Mr. Lance moved to insert:—

That power should be granted to any local body to enable it to enter on any reserve for the purpose of destroying rabbits.—Carried.

The Hon. Mr. Robinson moved to insert:—

That the owner shall be entitled to call upon the owner or owners of adjoining lands to con-

tribute to the construction of a dividing fence between their respective lands, as provided in section 9 of "The Fencing Act, 1881," which fence shall be rabbit-proof, according to schedule of rabbit-proof fence attached herewith.

Page 2, paragraph 14: Read and agreed to.

Mr. Buchanan moved that the following be inserted after paragraph 14:—

With regard to the second question, it is with much regret that the Committee find themselves compelled to reply emphatically in the negative, and to indorse in the strongest manner that portion of the report presented to the House by the Committee of 1884, and quoted below, which deals with this portion of the question:—

The Committee, however, is strongly of opinion that the most frequent cause of failure to destroy rabbits, and consequent public dissatisfaction, is the evident unfitness of many of the officers for the important and responsible duties imposed upon them. The various witnesses examined were naturally reluctant to name individual cases, but the Committee is none the less satisfied that many appointments have been made of men whose previous history furnished nothing but a record of failure in other walks of life, and incapacity and unfitness for any responsibility such as is contemplated by this Act. To carry out its provisions with vigour, it is necessary that the Inspectors should be allowed to exercise large powers; and when it is remembered that, under present arrangements, these same officers are intrusted with the working of the Sheep Act, it will be at once recognized that they have duties to perform involving great responsibility, and requiring the use of much tact and judgment.

The Committee think these considerations cannot fail to give weight to the remarks above made relating to the appointment of officers, and to impress the Government with the duty which rests upon them of at once dispensing with the services of men unqualified for such an important duty.

The Committee feel bound to point out to the House that few or no steps have been taken by the Government to remedy the state of affairs indicated by the above quotation.

Individual settlers and groups of settlers have proved again and again that rabbit suppression is perfectly practicable in every class of country by methods which are now well known to every settler, and at moderate cost.

The Legislature has clothed the Government with ample power to compel the neglectful settler to do his duty to himself and others. The House, therefore, has the right to ask why this is not being done.

The earnest recommendation of the Committee is, that every Inspector in charge of a district should have ample power given him by circular to suspend or summarily dismiss, for neglect of duty, any rabbit agent under his supervision; and that the services of such Inspector should be dispensed with upon failure to deal effectively with the rabbits in his district within a reasonable time.

The Committee altogether deny that a speedy suppression of the rabbit pest involves any harsh treatment or arbitrary display of authority; but, on the contrary, they maintain that a firm, impartial, and judicious administration of the Act is all that is necessary to produce the most satisfactory results.—Carried.

Paragraph 15 amended: Mr. Buchanan moved, 'To omit in lines 32, 33, 34, and 35, from "arrangements" to "same time" inclusive.—Carried. Also in line 37, after the word "them," to insert "and they would strongly recommend every inducement being offered for their permanent occupation."—Carried. Also in lines 39 and 40 to omit the words "feline," "raptorial."—Carried. Also in line 41, after "Committee," to omit "recommend," and insert "strongly urge."—Carried. Also in line 42, after "stoats," insert "and."—Agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Robinson moved, That "polecats" be added after "weasels" in line 42.—Negatived.

Mr. Buchanan moved, After "weasels," to omit the remainder of the paragraph, and insert "and also for the breeding of a large number of ferrets locally by contract."—Carried.

Paragraph 15, as amended, was carried.

Page 2, paragraph 16, read and agreed to.

Page 2, paragraph 17, line 58: Mr. J. McKenzie moved, To strike out all the words after "Government" to end of paragraph, and to insert "to assist the pastoral tenants of the Crown by bearing a portion of the cost of the destruction of the pest during the last two or three years of the lease."

Paragraph 17 carried.

Page 2, paragraph 18: Mr. Buchanan moved, To omit, in line 64, "mere palliatives."—Carried. And after "not" to insert "radical."—Carried. Also in line 66 to omit "and the cessation of the present large expenditure in connection with it."—Carried.

Paragraph 18, as amended, carried.

Then the Committee adjourned.

FRIDAY, 16TH JULY, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Lance, Mr. J. McKenzie, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The amended draft report was considered.

DRAFT REPORT.—RABBIT NUISANCE.

THE Joint Committee appointed to inquire into the best means of dealing with the rabbit pest has the honour to report as follows:—

It has examined eighteen witnesses "possessed of much practical experience," and also obtained information from more than sixty persons resident in various parts of the colony, as well as from such of the County Councils as were able and willing to reply to the questions submitted to them regarding the rabbit nuisance and the working of "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1882."

The information thus obtained shows that, although the rabbits have in some districts somewhat diminished in numbers, the Committee is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that, not only is the colony suffering a heavy annual loss from the very great numbers still existing in infested districts, but that the area infested is annually increasing.

Thus at the present time rabbits are making their way into the Provincial District of Canterbury from the Amuri in the north and from the McKenzie Country in the south and west; whilst in the North Island they are spreading from the Wairarapa into Hawke's Bay, "where their further spread has been arrested by a rabbit-proof fence, the cost of which has been defrayed by a voluntary rate contributed by many of the sheepowners in the Hawke's Bay Sheep District, and administered by a Board elected by the contributors," and from the Waikato into the King Country.

This annual loss assumes a seriousness which, in the opinion of the Committee, places the whole question in a position of importance second to none which can engage the attention of the Legislature.

Taking the above facts and conclusions as a basis, the first question which obviously suggests itself is, Has the experience of the past disclosed any means by which the pest can be reduced to harmless dimensions in the different classes of country affected, and at a reasonable cost?

The answer to this must be in the affirmative.

Evidence of a most conclusive character was given before the Committee in 1884 that the liberal use of phosphorized grain, followed up by the filling-in of rabbit burrows and water-runs, the liberation of stoats and weasels, ferrets, cats, &c., and the use of other means disclosed by the evidence, had, in numerous instances, effectually settled the difficulty in most descriptions of country; and the evidence now before the Committee, after an interval of two years, is absolutely conclusive in the same direction.

But the Committee is of opinion that the means here alluded to should be supplemented by the erection of rabbit-proof fences.

It is obvious, therefore, that the whole question is just narrowed down to two important issues: (1.) Is it desirable to amend the present Rabbit Nuisance Act? (2.) Has its administration been of the efficient character which all must admit should be made absolutely imperative in connection with such an important question?

With regard to the first question, the Committee is of opinion that the provisions of the Act are, on the whole, fairly calculated to effect the purposes for which it was enacted.

It, however, recommends that it should be so amended as to provide for simultaneous action on the part of landholders in the destruction of rabbits; and that, whilst the maximum penalty for neglect or breach of the provisions of the Act should be increased to £100, the defendant in every case should have the right to produce evidence in his favour in mitigation of the penalty inflicted, and, where the penalty exceeds £10, to appeal to a higher tribunal.

These amendments, the Committee thinks, will do away with the only just ground of complaint against the Act, and it is also of opinion that the dissatisfaction which has been freely expressed against the arbitrary powers conferred on the Inspectors will to a large extent cease.

The Committee is also strongly of opinion that in parts of the colony the ratepayers, if they so wish it, should, for the purpose of more effectually preventing the spread or increase of rabbits, be empowered by law to place the administration of the Act within their district in the hands of Trustees, to be elected by themselves, who should "be enabled to claim pound for pound from the Government on rates to be levied within districts not infested by the pest, such rates and subsidy to be spent in the erection of wire-netting fences or the carrying-out of other protective works on Crown or freehold land;" subject, however, to the supervision of the Government Inspector, and, on condition that, in case of failure to exclude or destroy the pest, the administration of the Act should be resumed by the Government, and the powers of the Trustees should be withdrawn.

Where a rabbit-proof fence is erected as a protective fence through Crown lands, the Committee is of opinion that the land on which the fence is erected, and to the extent of one chain in width on each side of it, should be vested in the Chairman of the Board of Trustees; that power should be granted to any local body to enable it to enter on any reserve for the purpose of destroying rabbits; and that any owner shall be entitled to call upon the owner or owners of adjoining lands to contribute to the construction of a dividing fence between their respective lands, as provided in section 9 of "The Fencing Act, 1881," which fence shall be rabbit-proof, according to schedule of rabbit-proof fence attached hereto.

In accordance with this opinion the Committee recommends that the necessary machinery for the formation of such districts be provided by legislative enactment.

With regard to the second question, it is with much regret that the Committee finds itself compelled to reply emphatically in the negative, and to indorse in the strongest manner that portion of the report presented to the House by the Committee of 1884, and quoted below, which deals with this portion of the question:—

The Committee, however, is strongly of opinion that the most frequent cause of failure to destroy rabbits, and consequent public dissatisfaction, is the evident unfitness of many of the officers for the important and responsible duties imposed upon them. The various witnesses examined were naturally reluctant to name individual cases, but the Committee is none the less satisfied that many appointments have been made of men whose previous history furnished nothing but a record of failure in other walks of life, and incapacity and unfitness for any responsibility such as is contemplated by this Act. To carry out its provisions with vigour, it is necessary that the Inspectors should be allowed to exercise large powers; and when it is remembered that, under present arrangements, these same officers are intrusted with the working of the Sheep Act, it will be at once recognized that they have duties to perform involving great responsibility, and requiring the use of much tact and judgment.

The Committee think these considerations cannot fail to give weight to the remarks above made relating to the appointment of officers, and to impress the Government with the duty which rests upon them of at once dispensing with the services of men unqualified for such an important duty.

The Committee feels bound to point out to the House that few or no steps have been taken by the Government to remedy the state of affairs indicated by the above quotation.

Individual settlers and groups of settlers have proved again and again that rabbit suppression is perfectly practicable in every class of country by methods which are now well known to every settler, and at moderate cost.

The Legislature has clothed the Government with ample power to compel the neglectful settler to do his duty to himself and others. The House, therefore, has the right to ask why this is not being done.

The earnest recommendation of the Committee is, that every Inspector in charge of a district should have ample power given him by circular to suspend or summarily dismiss, for neglect of duty, any rabbit agent under his supervision; and that the services of such Inspector should be dispensed with upon failure to deal effectively with the rabbits in his district within a reasonable time.

The Committee altogether denies that a speedy suppression of the rabbit pest involves any harsh treatment or arbitrary display of authority; but, on the contrary, they maintain that a firm, impartial, and judicious administration of the Act is all that is necessary to produce the most satisfactory results.

It still remains to refer to the Crown lands reserves and commonages. Of these, very large areas, including the roughest and most inaccessible portions, are at present unleased, the inducements held out by the Crown Lands Department of long leases and extended acreage having only partially succeeded in securing tenants. The Committee recognizes that the question of how to deal with these unoccupied tracts of country is the most difficult that has come before them, "and they would strongly recommend every inducement being offered for their permanent occupation." It is there that the most secure breeding-grounds are afforded for rabbits, and so long as this continues to be the case there is no hope of effectually preventing the adjoining lands from being constantly re-stocked by them. The "natural enemies" will here prove the best and most economical means of permanently diminishing the nuisance; and the Committee strongly urges that the Government should, without delay, take steps to provide for a large and constant supply of stoats and weasels, and also for the breeding of a large number of ferrets locally by contract.

A long time, however, must elapse before these animals can multiply sufficiently to be able to cope satisfactorily with the pest, and in the meanwhile the present system of destroying the rabbits by contract will have to be continued. Under these circumstances there is great danger that a large proportion of the "natural enemies" will be killed. It must rest with the Government alone to take every precaution against such a result.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that within a few years a large number of the Crown pastoral leases will terminate, and, therefore, that the tenants are daily becoming less interested in the destruction of the rabbits upon their holdings, and, consequently, less inclined to spend money for that purpose. At the same time the lands included in these leases, from their positions and character, are generally more liable than private lands to be overrun by the pest, and, therefore, more expensive to deal with. Should this lead to a large increase of the rabbits at the end of the term, there must be a corresponding decrease of rent to the Government under the new leases. In order, if possible, to avoid such a result, the Committee is of opinion that it would be advisable for the Government, in any case in which the tenant was willing to surrender his lease, to accept such surrender at any time within eighteen months before the expiry thereof, and thereupon to offer the lease for a fresh term for sale by auction. This course, the Committee thinks, is preferable to giving a bonus in any shape for rabbit-skins, or to assisting the pastoral tenants of the Crown in any other way.

Lastly, the Committee recognizes that the means at present available for the destruction of the pest are not radical cures, and that, until some discovery more searching and fatal in its effects upon the rabbit than any thing at present known has been made, its absolute eradication cannot be looked for. Such a discovery is not beyond hope. Somewhat similar discoveries, which have proved of the greatest value, are on record; and the Committee recommends the Government to take such steps, including the offer of a bonus, as may appear to them best calculated to bring about the attainment of such a desirable object.

Paragraph 1 agreed to.

Paragraph 2: Mr. Lance moved, To strike out all words down to "the colony," inclusive, for the purpose of inserting the following: "From information thus obtained the Committee is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that, although the rabbits have in some districts materially diminished in numbers, the colony is not only."—Carried.

Hon. Mr. Menzies moved, That the following words be inserted after "numbers": "and can be permanently kept down at moderate cost in those districts in which strenuous and combined efforts have been made to destroy them."—Carried.

Paragraph 2, line 10: Hon. Mr. Walker moved, To strike out the word "annually" for the purpose of inserting "constantly."—Carried.

Paragraph, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 3 agreed to.

Paragraph 4: Mr. Lance moved, To omit all the words after "loss," in line 18, down to "question," inclusive, for the purpose of inserting the following: "has assumed such serious proportions that, in the opinion of the Committee, it occupies."—Carried.

Paragraph, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 5, line 23: Hon. Mr. Robinson moved, To strike out the words "and at a reasonable cost."—Carried.

Paragraph, as amended, carried.

Paragraph 6: Mr. Cowan moved, To amend the paragraph by striking out the word "affirmative," for the purpose of inserting "negative, except in exceptional cases."—Negatived.

Hon. Mr. Holmes moved, To add the following words after "affirmative": "except where the country is high, rocky, sandy, or scrubby."—Carried.

Hon. Mr. Robinson moved, To reconsider the paragraph with a view of striking out the words

“except where the country is high, rocky, sandy, or scrubby,” in order to insert “unless in exceptional cases.”—Carried.

And the words were so inserted.

Paragraph 6, as amended, was carried.

Paragraph 7: Mr. Lance moved, To erase in line 25 the words “of a most conclusive character.”—Carried. Also in same line to insert, after “1884,” the words “which showed most conclusively.”—Carried.

Mr. Cowan moved, To omit the word “numerous” in line 28, and insert “some.”—Carried. Also in same line to strike out “effectually settled the difficulty,” and to insert “been successful” —Carried. Also to insert “some” in lieu of “most” in same line.—Carried.

Hon. Mr. Menzies moved to erase “absolutely” in line 29.—Carried.

Paragraph, as amended, carried.

Paragraph 8 agreed to.

Paragraph 9: Mr. Lance moved, To omit “all must admit should be made absolutely imperative,” for the purpose of inserting “is indispensable.”—Agreed to.

Paragraph 10 agreed to.

Paragraph 11 agreed to.

Paragraph 12 agreed to.

Paragraph 13: Mr. McKenzie moved, To insert the word “any” between “that in” and “parts” in line 47.—Carried. Also in line 51 to insert, after “levied,” “for the purpose of administering the Rabbit Nuisance Act, and.”—Carried. Also in same line to insert, after “within,” the word “their.”—Carried. Also, after “districts,” to insert the words “and within districts.”—Carried.

Mr. Buchanan then moved the following resolution: “That no power be given to demand pound for pound from the Government by districts already infested by rabbits.”—Carried.

The Committee then adjourned till next (Saturday) morning at 10.30 o'clock a.m.

SATURDAY, 17TH JULY, 1886.

The Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10.30 o'clock a.m.

Present: Legislative Council—Hon. G. R. Johnson (Chairman), Hon. Mr. Acland, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Robinson, Hon. Mr. Walker, Hon. Mr. Williamson. House of Representatives—Mr. Cowan, Mr. Lance, Hon. Mr. Larnach, C.M.G., Mr. J. McKenzie, Mr. McMillan, Captain Russell.

The minutes of the two preceding meetings were read and confirmed.

Consideration of report resumed.

Paragraph 13: Mr. J. McKenzie moved, To rescind the resolution passed the previous day on Mr. Buchanan's motion, “That no power be given, &c.”—Carried, and resolution rescinded. Also to strike out paragraph 13, with a view to insert a new one.—Carried. Also that the following new clause be inserted: “The Committee is of opinion that, if the ratepayers in any one or more counties in the colony express, by petition to the Governor, that they are desirous of having the control and administration of the Rabbit Nuisance Act placed in the hands of Trustees elected by themselves, such request should be granted, and such Trustees should be empowered to levy rates for the purpose of doing such things as are now done by the Government in connection with the Rabbit Nuisance Act; and also for the purpose of the erection of wire-netting fences, or for any other protective works which may be considered necessary by such Trustees either in reducing or preventing the spread of the rabbits; and that they should assist local efforts by granting a subsidy to the extent of a pound to every pound raised by local rates, and spent in the administration, destruction, or spread of the rabbits; subject, however, to the supervision of the Government Inspector; and on condition that, in case of failure to exclude or destroy the pest, the administration of the Act should be resumed by the Government, and the powers of the Trustees should be withdrawn.”—Carried.

Paragraph 14: Hon. Mr. Menzies moved, To strike out in line 58 the words “vested in,” and to insert “reserved from sale, and placed under the control of.”—Carried.

Line 58: Mr. McMillan moved, To insert, after “enter,” the words “and to spend its funds.”—Carried. Also to insert, after “reserve,” the words “under its control.”—Carried.

Hon. Mr. Williamson moved, To strike out all the words in lines 60, 61, 62, 63.—Carried.

Paragraph 14, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 15 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 16, line 3: Mr. Lance moved, To insert, after the word “question,” the following: “namely the efficiency of the past administration of the Act.”

In line 34: Hon. Mr. Menzies moved, To strike out “it is with much regret that the Committee finds itself compelled to reply emphatically in the negative.”—Passed in the negative. Also in line 4 to strike out “indorse,” and to insert “reaffirm.”—Carried.

Paragraph 16, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 17 agreed to.

Paragraph 18, line 22: Hon. Mr. Larnach moved, To strike out “every class of,” and to insert “many parts of the.”—Carried. Also in line 23 to strike out “at a moderate cost.”—Carried.

Paragraph 18, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 19: Hon. Mr. Peter moved, To strike out the paragraph.—Carried.

Paragraph 20, line 27: Hon. Mr. Larnach moved, To strike out the word “earnest.”—Carried.

In line 28: Hon. Mr. Peter moved, To strike out “by circular.”—Carried.

Paragraph 20, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 21, lines 31, 32: Hon. Mr. Larnach moved, To strike out all the words from “altogether” down to “they,” both inclusive.—Carried.

Paragraph 21, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 22, lines 41, 42: Captain Russell moved, To erase "this continues to be the case," and to insert "they remain unoccupied."—Carried.

Paragraph 22, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 23, line 49: Mr. McMillan moved, To insert, after "contract," the words "or otherwise."—Carried.

Paragraph 23, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 24, line 62: Mr. Cowan moved, To strike out "for sale by auction."—Carried.

Paragraph 24, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraph 25 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the report, as amended, be adopted.

The Hon. Mr. Menzies desired to record his disagreement to the adoption of the report, as follows:—

I dissent from the conclusions expressed in several clauses of the report, but chiefly to clause 13, because the weight of evidence is greatly in favour of the administration of the Act being conducted by the Government, and because the local Rabbit Boards, where they have been tried, have not worked well; and to clause 16, because the sweeping assumption that the administration has not been efficient is also contrary to the evidence.—J. MENZIES, 17th July, 1886.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORT ON THE SHEEP ACT.

The Committee deliberated with the view of framing a report.

Resolved, That the Hon. the Chairman, Captain Russell, and Mr. Lance be requested to draw up a report, based upon the following resolutions, namely:—

1. That in case of sheep infected with lice the owner should, upon making a written declaration to the effect that such sheep are intended for slaughter, be exempted for a period of three weeks from the date of such declaration from any penalty on account of such sheep under sections 3 and 5 of "The Sheep Act 1878 Amendment Act, 1884;" but that, in case such sheep are not slaughtered within the period named, the then owner of such sheep should be liable to all such penalties just as if no such declaration had been made.

2. That it should not be compulsory to dip any ewe-flock during lambing-time; and

3. That the penalties provided for in section 3 of the above-named Act should be assimilated to those in section 5.

The Committee then adjourned.

The Committee rose at 1 p.m.

JOINT RABBIT NUISANCE COMMITTEE.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 28th May, 1886. (Hon. Mr. G. R. JOHNSON, M.L.C., Chairman.)

Mr. JAMES MCKERROW, Surveyor-General, examined.

1. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You are Under-Secretary for Crown Lands, I believe?—I am Secretary for Crown Lands.

2. This Committee is inquiring into the rabbit nuisance. Can you give us any information regarding the Crown lands and reserves which are unoccupied?—Yes.

3. Perhaps I had better refer you to a return given by Mr. Barron, and laid before the Committee in 1881. It gives the approximate area of unoccupied Crown lands in the colony. Probably there has been a good deal of change since then?—Yes.

4. Could you indicate roughly to the Committee where the unoccupied lands lie, and their area?—I could supply the information by to-morrow, but I could not do so at present. I may say generally that it is principally in Otago where the unoccupied Crown lands are. In the re-letting of the runs in 1882 a very considerable area in Otago was reserved for settlement. This has not been all occupied as yet, and very considerable areas are under no tenure whatever; but, in order to minimize the evil of the rabbit pest, the Commissioner of Crown lands, acting in concert with the Rabbit Department, has made temporary arrangements with the adjacent runholders to keep these unoccupied areas of country clear. In that way they have virtually been kept free of the rabbit pest. Then, again, there is a large area of high mountain-country in Otago which has been in a continual state of transition from being taken up and abandoned and re-taken up. The department saw some four or five years ago that this sort of thing was likely to continue unless greater encouragement was given to the lessees. The Land Act was amended so that, instead of the maximum term of lease being confined to ten years, it was extended to twenty-one years. This extension of time, together with the policy of the department in combining what had hitherto been small runs into one large run, and placing it before the public at a very low upset rental, in a considerable degree has prevented the abandonment of the back-country.

5. In speaking of extending the area you mean—?—I will give an example. In the lake-country of Wakatipu, for instance, the runs used to be from five to fifteen thousand acres. Partly on account of some of the persons taking up these runs having little capital and no great knowledge of sheep-farming, when a severe snow-storm or other drawback came in their way they would throw them up. They had no resource to carry over a difficulty; and when the rabbit difficulty came on they were helpless. We had to amalgamate these small runs, and some of them now contain as much as fifty and sixty thousand acres. Since that policy was adopted we have had less trouble with this country.

6. But the Wakatipu country is still the most infested with rabbits?—Well, not so much as it was. I may say generally, not only in the Otago country, but wherever you have high mountains covered with snow, and the difficulty of mustering, it is there where the rabbits breed. That high country, indeed, may be said to be the breeding-ground for rabbits, and there is a good deal of country of that sort in the interior of Otago.

7. It is stated in Mr. Bailey's report that the rabbits are making back on the main range?—If you hunt them they go back there as a safe retreat. It is also the nursery-ground, and it is from there that the runs get replenished when they are clean. And, as far as I can form an opinion on the subject, it is almost hopeless to eradicate the rabbits in the back-country: it will be a continual fight with them, and the effort should be to confine them as much as possible to the high mountains.

8. You believe the only way is to keep them down; you cannot kill the rabbit out?—Yes.

9. It is said that the rabbits are coming down from the Mount Cook Range, so that eventually they would appear in Canterbury. Is that so?—That is so. I have just had information that they are spreading all along behind the McKenzie country; and, judging from what happened in Otago and Southland, possibly a year or two hence they will come down in myriads on the plains of Canterbury, unless efforts are made to check them.

10. You have described the course adopted by Government for the purpose of getting these lands taken and the rabbits checked upon them. Can you suggest any other means which have not yet been tried?—No; but I should say that any means that are tried—and I hold this very strongly—should all be directed from one central authority.

11. You think that the Act now in force is sufficiently stringent?—I cannot say that I am acquainted with the terms of it.

12. You mean, then, that the authority for working this should remain in the hands of the Government?—Decidedly.

13. And not be deputed to local bodies?—Oh, yes! it might be deputed to local bodies or to individuals, but the direction of these efforts should be all in the hands of one department. In other words, you will not be able to cope with this difficulty unless you have concentrated effort. You will have one county or district coping ably with the rabbits, perhaps, and the adjacent district neglecting them. It is essential you should have one authority to keep the various local agencies up to the mark. By having it under the control of one department, I do not necessarily mean the employment of a large number of officials all over the country. I mean that the department should avail itself of whatever agency may be most suitable for the particular district affected.

14. Has there been an increase in the parts already affected with rabbits?—Judging from the knowledge that I have from the Crown Lands Department, I should say there has rather been a decrease; in other words, the efforts put forward have curtailed the evil, or kept it within limits.

15. You do not think there has been an increase during the last year?—I think that the evil is spreading over a greater area—to wit, along the main Canterbury range, in the back-country.

16. Then, you are not aware whether any of these Crown lands have been thrown up in consequence of the nuisance lately?—No; there have been proposals made to the department to throw up lands; but the reason usually given is the low price of wool and the non-paying character of the country. The rabbit nuisance is sometimes assigned: but more frequently of late the reason given is the low price of wool.

17. Do you think the Government should give a price for rabbit-skins as an inducement to kill rabbits?—That may suit in some districts; but I do not think there should be any cast-iron rule on the subject. I think the department should have the discretion of employing any means that might seem best under particular circumstances.

18. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] Why was the land held over from sale of runs not used for occupation, for either sale or lease, in 1882–83?—Some of the land was too far inland for settlers to take it up; and then there have been the low prices for agricultural produce ever since; while the extension of the railway into the interior of Otago has been much longer delayed than then anticipated, and at the present moment settlement has been sufficiently extended to meet the local wants of the gold-fields districts in the matter of oats and wheat, and there will be no extension of settlement there to any appreciable degree until there is an opportunity of sending produce to the coast, and only then, of course, if produce is at a paying price. In other words, there was too much land withheld from the runs in 1882, and the department foresaw that; but it was a political matter withholding a certain portion of the country, and that overruled the department's view of the matter.

19. Is there any intention on the part of the Government to place this land within the reach of parties willing to occupy it?—No; I believe not.

20. These are the reserves that are being so much complained about that they are not being occupied; and one great cause is the increase in the rabbit pest?—The people do not complain; but the runholders do. Another cause which I ought to mention why the rabbits have got hold of some districts is on account of the large commonages. I may instance one, the Bengier commonage of twenty thousand acres, a high piece of country specially reserved for the digging population round Roxburgh. It is in the Tuapeka County; but neither the county nor the district would be responsible for clearing the rabbits, and the charge fell upon the Government, and, after a year or two of unpleasant experience of paying to clear country which yielded no revenue, the department stepped in and took it away. We had a similar experience in regard to the Cromwell commonage of fourteen thousand acres; also in regard to the commonages of the lake district. But this evil has been considerably lessened by the department assuming the right to deal with these commonages, and reletting them.

21. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you say the Government does assume that?—Yes. These commonages are simply in existence during the good-will of the Government.

22. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] And the possession of some of these has been resumed by the Government?—They have been relet as runs. They were the cause of a very great nuisance to the surrounding runholders, because they were a breeding-ground for rabbits.

23. You are acquainted with the manner in which the Act has been worked: has the system of Inspectors worked satisfactorily?—I could not say. It has not come within my observation.

24. With regard to the Government purchasing skins: This is one of the suggestions that we have from Australia. A great many men who are out of employment might take to rabbiting for a time and assist to abate the pest, provided they could sell the skins at a good rate. Under the present system, if the skins are not paid for at a specified rate, the young rabbits are not taken at all, and they are left to accumulate and breed. Now, suppose the Government stepped in and, instead of spending money on a large staff of Inspectors, gave a fixed rate for the skins, without reference to their size, throughout the year: would not that be a good means towards exterminating the pest?—I think it would work fairly well wherever the rabbits were numerous; but where they were spreading over the country I do not think it would have the slightest effect in stopping the evil. Rabbiters would only work where the rabbit has established itself in great numbers. The rabbit might be thinned out, but would breed next season, and it would be a never-ending process.

25. But I would look upon this as a contribution towards the extermination of the rabbit. If 2d. were given by the Government and 1d. by the settlers, there would thus be a combination of parties paying for the extermination of the rabbit?—But you could not rely on that. You might get one settler out of six to do that, but the other five would not, I feel certain. You come back to this: that you must have one controlling authority, and endow that authority with a great deal of discretion.

26. But this would not take away the authority from the Government. They would still hold the authority, because they would hold the purse-strings?—I was assuming that it was to be locally administered.

Hon. Mr. Holmes: Oh, no.

27. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] I gather from what you have stated that you think, upon the whole, so far as your observation extends, that the Act has worked satisfactorily, in so far as that it has diminished the number of rabbits in the area in which they were most numerous a year ago?—Yes. I do not know whether it is due to the administration of the Act or the action of the settlers; but, so far as I know, the evil is lessened.

28. But the area of infested country is extending?—Yes.

29. You referred to the back of Canterbury: is it extending elsewhere?—I am afraid it is extending in the North Island as well, up the East Coast, although there is a great effort to confine it to the Wellington Province. At the present moment the Hawke's Bay runholders are erecting a fence twenty-one miles in length. I was there the other day, and I am sorry to say I saw rabbits on the wrong side of the fence, so I take it that the settlers have been a little too late.

30. But your remarks as to the administration apply here as well as to the South Island?—Yes.

31. Does anything suggest itself to you for reducing the rabbits in the high country in which hitherto no effectual measures have been applied?—No. I have already stated what the Land Department did so far as it could to assist the Rabbit Department; but regarding the actual mode of killing I have no suggestion to make.

32. *Mr. McMillan.*] Can you give the Committee any information with regard to the Marlborough and Amuri Districts?—I saw Mr. Bullen the other day, and asked him about the matter; and he tells me that the ferrets keep the rabbits within a safe limit: in other words, he has succeeded in abating the evil so far as he is concerned.

33. Yes, I understand that he has got over that difficulty; but is it not a fact that the rabbits are spreading away from that district?—I learn so from the newspapers; and that the settlers in the Amuri District have taken the matter into very serious consideration.

34. In regard to the runs abandoned in Otago, I think you stated that the Government made arrangements with the adjoining owners to keep the rabbits down?—Not on the abandoned country, but on the country that was withheld from settlement from the original runs.

35. *Mr. McKenzie.*] You mean land that has not been disposed of?—Yes, such as in the Ida Valley and in the Upper Clutha Valley. The department has been unable to arrange for the great back-country away up the mountains.

36. *Mr. McMillan.*] You also stated that a number of small runs were abandoned and you made larger runs of them. Would that in any way tend to reduce the rabbits?—It would be better if small runs could be maintained; but the fact is that the thing did not work. The country referred to is very mountainous, and the people who took up these runs had not sufficient resources. There was a continual throwing-up of the runs. The department, taught by experience that this sort of thing was likely to go on, favoured the letting of the country in larger areas.

37. Then the country was not suitable for small runs?—Yes, it was suitable for runs of twelve and fifteen thousand acres. There were little valleys in between and slopes on the sides of the hills. These areas might carry from two to four thousand sheep.

38. You say the Land Department has been working in concert with the Rabbit Department for the extermination of the rabbits. Would it not be better if the Rabbit Department was under the control of the Land Department altogether?—I do not see that it would make any difference. Assistance is already given by one department to the other, just as if they were under one control. The Commissioners of Crown Lands assist in every way they possibly can.

39. I have no doubt that that is so; but is it not just possible that the reverse might be the case?—It never has been. Such is conceivable, no doubt.

40. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] You state that you anticipate in a few years there will be myriads of the rabbits coming down on the Canterbury Plains. Can you form an idea of the direction whence they will come?—From the mountains.

41. From the McKenzie country mountains?—Yes. At present, I am informed, they are extending very much there, especially in that part called Mesopotamia.

42. *Mr. Cowan.*] Are you aware that the Government has been spending money in the destruction of rabbits on the abandoned country?—Yes.

43. In Southland that has been done to a considerable extent?—Yes.

44. You stated also that you did not feel in a position to give an opinion as to the best means of eradicating the rabbits?—No, I do not.

45. My own view is this: that, while poisoned oats are a capital remedy in winter, yet in summer some incentive should be given to the destruction of rabbits. Do you think a bonus given by the Government for rabbits killed in summer would have a very beneficial effect in reducing the pest?—I think it is worth trying. Mr. Bailey thinks that the Government should communicate with the eminent French chemist, M. Pasteur, to ascertain whether he could not, within his great knowledge, devise some fatal epidemic disease with which to inoculate the rabbits.

46. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] The remedy he discovered was for hydrophobia?—Yes. He has also made a valuable discovery in reference to the treatment of disease in silkworms, which is said to be worth millions to France.

47. *Mr. Cowan.*] Looking at the question from a general point of view, is it not a fact that the interests of the Government are extending every year in regard to this question?—Yes, because the evil is diminishing the carrying-capacity of the lands, and, by an indirect process, the rents.

48. Is it not in your knowledge that there are applications for reductions in Otago?—Yes; but more on account of the low price of wool and tallow.

49. But is it not within your knowledge that, in addition to the low value of wool, the small carrying-power of the country is assigned?—Yes, that tells as well; but the principal reason assigned by the runholders at the present time is the depression in prices.

50. Is the smaller carrying-capacity of the runs solely attributable to the rabbit pest?—Mainly so, but it is due also in a great measure to the short and uncertain tenures which the lessees used to have. They had no inducement to improve the country; hence there was no fencing in and saving of country at the proper season. But the restorative influences are now at work from giving longer leases.

51. Then, in regard to those properties which have got lenthened tenures, the applications for reductions of rent are not so common?—That is so. The department had great difficulty in educating the Legislature up to that point, but we have succeeded; and it has had a most beneficial effect upon the public estate, giving these long tenures.

52. *Mr. Kerr.*] You are aware that rabbits are coming in in great numbers from the Amuri to the Clarence District?—I have just heard rumours to that effect.

53. Do you think there is a suitable place to erect a fence so as to keep them back for a time?—Yes, I think so. It would be a question of expense. It would be a very costly thing to fence off such a large extent of boundary.

54. Would it be cheaper to keep them off than to kill them when they come on?—To fence would be the best.

55. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] Have the Government made any attempt to kill the rabbits on the high mountains?—They have made no systematic attempt.

56. Have they made any attempt whatever?—Oh, yes; in Otago they have. They have made arrangements in some cases with the adjacent runholders to kill them off.

57. But they have taken no steps themselves except that?—They were responsible for the expenditure. On the west side of Lake Wakatipu the Government arranged with Mr. Cuthbertson, the manager of a run there, who undertook to poison that country, and spent a good deal of money with a great deal of effect, and that country is now let on one of those long leases that I spoke of, and we do not hear anything about it now.

58. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Have the Crown Lands Rangers any instructions on the head of rabbits?—No.

59. So that the Crown land which the Government may be anxious to get occupied, either by lease or by putting it into the market for sale, may be infested with rabbits, and may be placed in the market with that disadvantage?—Yes, that is so.

60. And there is nothing in operation except representations from the Rabbit Department or the Lands Department which would call your attention to the land being infested with rabbits?—No organized agency except that.

61. And, as a matter of fact, does the Rabbit Department periodically make such representations?—They do so whenever they think that the Land Department can assist them in any way. There are frequent representations from one department to the other, more verbal than official.

62. In the case which you have mentioned at Lake Wakatipu what would be the process of setting in motion this work of destruction?—The land would run through several hands, who would throw it up utterly discouraged by the incursions of the rabbits from the mountains behind; and then the Land Department would communicate with the Rabbit Department, and in this case they made arrangements with Mr. Cuthbertson to carry out the work of poisoning.

63. Authorized as to funds by the Lands Department?—No; by the Rabbit Department.

64. *Captain Russell.*] I understood you to say that you believed the control of the Rabbit Department should remain in the hands of the Government?—Decidedly.

65. At the same time I heard you say that you thought the people of Hawke's Bay had been a little too late in erecting their fence to prevent the incursions from the south?—A month ago I saw rabbits on the north side of it.

66. Are you not aware that the Hawke's Bay settlers laboured under disadvantages because they could not get anything done by the department, whereas if they had been able to get assistance the fence would have been put up two years ago?—We surveyed the line of fence at the expense of the Survey Department as soon as wanted. I do not know what application had been made to the Rabbit Department.

67. If there had been local administration when local knowledge was available do you not think that more rapidity would have been exercised in the erection of the fence?—No, I think not. There was a great deal of bother about who was to pay for this fence, and there were frequent meetings of those interested and adjournments of those meetings, all of which were characterized by a desire to get the Government to bear the expense.

69. I may remind you that I am the Chairman of the Rabbit Prevention Committee.—No doubt you can correct me if I am wrong, but I think I am right in saying that the reason why action was not taken earlier was the question as to who should bear the expense. I happen to know that, because strong representations were made to the Lands Department that they should bear the expense because of the large extent of Crown territory there.

70. But that difficulty arose because there was no local administration, and no power to create a local administration which was ready and willing to deal with the matter. Do you think that the infinite variety of circumstances under which rabbits spread can be dealt with by a central authority?—That is the very reason why I think that a central body should have the administration, so that there shall be concerted action taken suitable to the circumstances of each district.

71. The Hawke's Bay District have been unable to do anything until recently. Would that have been the case if there had been local administration?—I do not know.

72. What did they wish to do?—They wished to rate themselves, or to get hold of their own rates, or to get money by some means or other.

73. Is there any objection to creating rabbit districts, with local government to be elected by the ratepayers?—None whatever; but these local districts should be under the control of one authority. I had something to do with the Rabbit Act a few years ago, when the control was taken

from the counties. I then saw that unless there was some overruling authority to compel the local bodies to do their work, the difficulty of coping with the rabbits would be simply unending.

74. Would you recommend, then, such legislation, with local administration?—I think I have already conveyed that impression in my evidence.

75. Are you of opinion that the rabbit question should be dealt with by a subdivision of districts and the erection of fences, as well as by destruction?—By every means possible. What would be suitable in one district would be unsuitable in another. Let the whole thing be under one central authority, using its discretion to avail itself of whatever means are most suitable to the circumstances of the particular district.

76. Would you not grant the district powers to rate themselves for prevention?—Yes; that might also be done.

77. And you would also recommend that the districts should be allowed to elect their own Boards?—Always subject to the authority I have so much insisted upon.

78. *Mr. Fulton.*] Would it not be better that the Government should simply have the control in this way: that they should leave the administration entirely to the local bodies, but have power to compel them to carry out their proper functions?—That would be desirable.

79. And there should be no further interference with the local bodies than that?—Yes. Compulsion, of course, is well enough so long as you can enforce it; but suppose the local bodies remain inert, then I should leave it in the hands of the central authority to interfere and do what was necessary.

80. With regard to the Land Department, have complaints come to you as to the inefficiency of the present administration of the Rabbit Act?—No.

81. Have you had any complaints made to you within the last year or two that rabbits are considerably increasing?—So far as my knowledge goes they are decreasing. In other words, they have succeeded in reducing their number in particular districts, but the infected area is increasing.

82. Complaints have not come to you that rabbits are increasing in infected districts?—No; I cannot say that we have had a single complaint to that effect.

83. *Mr. McKenzie.*] Is it a fact that the rabbits have got over a larger area of country since the present Act was passed?—Yes, the evil is gradually spreading.

84. And you think that the present Act does not meet the requirements of the colony?—I do not know the provisions of the present Act.

85. You insist upon a central authority. Of course the present Act is administered under a central authority. Do you think that has been a success?—I am not in a position to express a reliable opinion.

86. With regard to the abandoned country?—There is not so much as there was. Owing to the long leases and larger areas, country has been taken up that would not have been taken up before.

87. Do you think that Parliament would be justified in continuing the present expenditure, seeing that during the last four years things have been worse than they were before?—That raises another question: Where should we have been if the Government had not used these means to cope with the evil?

88. Can you of your own knowledge give the Committee any idea that the Government expenditure has assisted in that matter?—In my opinion it has.

89. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You are not aware that the past season has had a direct influence on the number of rabbits?—I am not aware. I have heard some statements about the matter, but nothing worth noting down.

90. Could you indicate the terms entered into with adjoining runholders in the case you have referred to?—I could not say, but the Rabbit Department would be able to do so.

91. With regard to reserves, did your remarks on Crown lands apply to them as well as to Crown lands?—Yes.

92. And to educational reserves?—The Land Department has nothing to do with educational reserves.

93. I believe there are large educational reserves in Otago?—About half a million acres.

94. Are they all leased?—Yes.

95. And all occupied?—All occupied, with probably slight exceptions.

Mr. H. S. VALENTINE, of Waimea South, examined.

96. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What experience have you had in matters connected with the rabbit pest?—I have had great experience. We cover a large tract of country, about three hundred thousand acres, of which perhaps about a hundred thousand is leasehold country, and that is the worst rabbit-country.

97. You suffer very much from it?—Very much.

98. In what way do they affect you?—They eat the grass, and reduce the carrying-capacity of the country.

99. I suppose you have taken means to kill the rabbits?—If we had not done so, and that very extensively, we should soon have no country. We have taken every possible means of destroying them—poisoning and shooting them, and so on. For the last five years, after allowing for the value of the rabbit-skins, we must have spent nearly £20,000 in this way.

100. And have you succeeded in reducing the number?—To a very great extent. The country is better now than it has been since they became a nuisance. We are carrying more sheep now by ten thousand than we were three years ago.

101. Which means have you found the most effectual?—The poisoning was the most effectual.

102. Have you tried natural enemies?—Ferrets—not many.

103. You cannot speak much about them?—So far as I can tell, I do not think they are very satisfactory.

104. Do you find that the poisoned wheat has killed any of your sheep?—None at all, so far as we know.

105. You are acquainted with the present Rabbit Act?—I know there is such an Act.

106. Do you think its provisions are satisfactory?—No, I do not think so. I do not think the Government take sufficient precautions in regard to their own country to destroy the rabbits. I had to give up a hundred thousand acres in consequence of that. The land became so rough and infested that when the lease fell through I did not renew it.

107. When was that?—I think it fell through in 1882 or 1883.

108. What has become of that land now?—I believe it is lying idle.

109. Have any steps been taken to kill the rabbits upon that land?—Not so far as I know.

110. Was any engagement entered into with you at any time to clear the place of rabbits?—No.

111. Is it very difficult country?—Yes; the country I have thrown up is very difficult. It would be impossible to eradicate them altogether, but you might keep them down within reasonable bounds.

112. Have you at any time received instructions from the Inspector under the Act to kill rabbits?—If we have it is a long time ago. The Inspector has been thoroughly satisfied with our endeavours; and, indeed, it has been to our advantage to do all we could. During the last three years the rabbits have been reduced to a tenth of what they were.

113. The Inspector does visit you occasionally?—Yes.

114. And he is fully satisfied?—Yes.

115. And you think he performs his work well?—I believe so. I believe he is a very good man.

116. You say you are not satisfied with the present Act because it does not provide for the clearing of the waste lands of the Crown?—That is the principal reason.

117. Have you any objections to the Act?—No, I do not think so.

118. Do you think the present system of keeping the control over the Rabbit Department in the Government offices here is a right one, or would it be better to depute the authority to the local bodies?—I should say the local bodies have a better opportunity of knowing the circumstances of the various districts and how to deal with them.

119. Would there be an objection to the Government issuing instructions to the local bodies and leaving them to carry out those instructions, the Government keeping the control over the local bodies?—I think that would be a very fair way of doing it. I think the Government should have the supreme control over the whole affair.

120. Have rabbiters been employed in your district to any extent?—Yes; we have now about a hundred of our own men.

121. But have any been put on by instructions from the Inspectors?—No.

122. Have you tried dogs?—Yes; also guns and fumigation, and every other possible means.

123. When is the best time for poisoning?—We do it all the year round with the exception of six months. We begin in April and go on till September.

124. Do you find that the rabbits will take the poison in the summer?—In some places. It depends upon the nature of the country.

125. Then, if you were to eat down the country and put down bare poison they would take it?—Yes; they would not take it at all if they could get green food.

126. What kind of poison do you use?—Brown sugar and phosphorus.

127. Do you get it in New Zealand?—We import it.

128. The Government do not assist you in importing the phosphorus?—Not in the slightest degree.

129. Do you think the Government should assist you by importing it?—Yes, certainly. The Government might make some arrangements to ship it, about which there is some difficulty.

130. Have you tried arsenic?—Yes; but phosphorus is the best. I may mention that we get about four hundred thousand skins a year.

131. Do you think the offering of a bonus by the Government for the skins should be adopted?—It is the only equitable way that I can see of meeting the case generally. It would cost them a good deal of money, of course.

132. Suppose the Government were to offer to buy the skins at 2d. per skin, and the owner were to subsidize that amount with a little more?—They would have to do so. I do not think the skins pay us 35 per cent. of the cost of destruction.

133. Then you have no reason for thinking that the present Act should be so amended as to give greater power to compel persons to kill rabbits?—I think it sufficient for that at the present time. The only thing I complain of is that the Government itself does not take sufficient steps to clear its lands.

134. *Mr. McKenzie.*] You say you are satisfied with the way the department has been carrying out the inspection in your district?—Yes.

135. What is the name of your inspector?—Mr. Macdonald, I believe.

136. Does he force other people in your neighbourhood to do their work?—He treats us all alike, so far as I know.

137. Have you done the good work you seem to have done on your property from any compulsion on the part of the Inspector?—No; I should have done the same work if the Inspector had not been there at all. I kept two or three inspectors of my own.

138. Mr. Macdonald is considered a very superior sort of man in his particular department, is he not?—I do not know.

139. How many men do you employ yourself in rabbiting?—We have a permanent staff of about twenty all the year round. We have now got about a hundred men, during the poisoning season.

140. And how many acres have you got where you employ these hundred men, leasehold and freehold?—We have about a hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand acres, where they are actually working.

141. *Mr. Cowan.*] It is to be inferred from what you say that there is a time of the year when it does not pay to kill rabbits?—Yes—in summer.

142. I suppose the ground on which you make that statement is, that the commercial value of the skins which you get at that time does not pay for the cost of getting them?—That is so.

143. What do you suggest that the Government should give during the summer months as a bonus for the skins?—A bonus would certainly have the effect of stimulating the small settlers—and particularly the small men—to kill rabbits coming down on their farms.

144. It would also act as an inducement, I imagine, to the owners of the land to proceed with killing as they do at other times of the year?—Yes; anything in that way will undoubtedly stimulate them to carry on the work they are doing. Of course, large owners must carry on the work for their own protection. Although they get their leasehold lands at a nominal rent, the rent becomes a serious matter when they have to add to it the cost of keeping down the rabbits. Although the land may be got for 3d. an acre, the cost of the destruction of the rabbits brings it up to 9d.

145. I gather from your evidence, also, that the present Rabbit Act is not sufficiently strict to compel the Government to do its duty?—I do not know whether it is sufficiently strict in its powers and regulations; I only know that these regulations are not carried out, if it is so. I do not know why the Government should be treated in any other way from a squatter or a settler.

146. Is not the Government very much interested in this question?—Yes; and if they do not tackle it very seriously the result will be something appalling, perhaps.

147. *Mr. Kerr.*] As a matter of fact, the land which you have thrown up must cause you a great deal more expense in looking after?—Considerably.

148. It would be no use for you to endeavour to exterminate the rabbits from your own place, because you would get a constant supply from the Government lands?—Certainly. I had occasion to go up to Queenstown recently, and the rabbits are absolutely swarming on the unoccupied lands.

149. If you were to neglect to look after your lands for a period of six or twelve months, they would be absolutely worthless?—Yes, if we neglected the land for one season. It is only constant and careful watching that enables us to keep the rabbits down at all.

150. You think that they could be kept within reasonable bounds?—They could.

151. *Captain Russell.*] Do you avail yourself of wire-netting?—Yes, we have done everything.

152. Do you find it very useful?—In certain parts of the country—rugged country.

153. Is a perfectly rabbit-proof fence useful in preventing the spread?—Yes; it keeps them from coming down from the ranges.

154. And you think that where rabbits have not already invaded the country, it might intercept them?—Decidedly.

155. Then you think it wise to allow districts which are not already infected to levy rates to erect such fences?—Yes

156. Do you think that would have any effect?—Certainly.

157. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Of course a fence would be of material benefit in killing rabbits if you drove them to the fence and caught them at it, as in Australia; but will the fence keep out the rabbits? Do you know whether they go over it, or burrow under it?—If the fence is properly put down, they cannot burrow under it.

158. Do you know whether they can go over the fence?—I have heard of them going up trees in Australia, but never heard of them going over a fence here.

159. What special means would you advise for the purpose of destroying rabbits on high unoccupied lands?—Poisoning. I also think it would be a good thing to turn out stoats and weasels.

160. Ought this to devolve on the local body of the district?—If you are going to appoint special Boards for the purpose, I decidedly think it should be left to them.

161. *Mr Kerr.*] Do you not think it would be better to have Boards elected with power that the Government should see that each district carried out the work properly?—Decidedly.

162. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you recommend any other means besides poisoning for exterminating the rabbits?—Turning out natural enemies. That is, to keep them within certain limits. I believe that where stoats have already been turned out the result has been satisfactory. Stoats and weasels are better than ferrets. When a ferret has had his feed he goes to sleep, but a weasel will kill for the sake of killing.

163. Do you think the climate in the south is too cold for ferrets?—I do not know. I have seen something like mange among them.

Mr. McKenzie: They are liable to that.

165. *Hon. Mr. Buckley.*] Since the date of the circular produced (26th April, 1886), have you received any notice from the Inspectors?—I left home on the 3rd of May, and so that circular would not have had time to get down there by that time. We have never got any notice from any of the Inspectors.

166. The circular was sent to the Inspectors to instruct them to do their duty. I want to know whether, since the date of it or prior to it, did you get any notice from the Inspector to clear the land?—No.

167. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] Are you not aware that a notice has been posted up to the effect of that circular?—No. I am unable, however, to answer the question. The notice may have been received since I left home. I can easily ascertain. I can telegraph if you like.

168. *Mr. McKenzie.*] Do you think it would be a good thing for the Inspector to give notice to every one, so that action might be taken against any one who failed to do his duty?—Yes, it would strengthen his hands. But, at the same time, I think the matter is so well understood by every one who lives in a rabbit-infested country that I do not think it would do much good.

169. *Mr. Dodson.*] Have you tried fumigation down your way?—Yes, wherever we have found burrows where that could be done. We used bisulphide of carbon.

170. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you find that rabbits grow in colonies?—Distinctly. You will sometimes find them living in a barren piece of ground all huddled together.

MONDAY, 31ST MAY, 1886.

Sir N. CAMPBELL examined.

171. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You are living in the Amuri?—Yes.

172. When you were before a similar Committee to the present a few years ago, I think you told us that there were not many rabbits in that district then?—Not many.

173. But there were some?—Yes.

174. They have increased since then?—Yes. We have nearly exterminated them, but they have increased considerably in our immediate neighbourhood.

175. Where did they come from?—They have been there since I have been in the district.

176. I thought they were spreading down from the country north of you?—They are said to have spread down, but in reality they have not—they have spread up. The Inspector says they have come up from the Awatere; but that is not the case—they have come up from the Clarence River.

177. What means have you taken to reduce them?—Poisoning them and turning ferrets and cats among them; and there has also been one man employed shooting them.

178. What kind of poison did you use?—Phosphorized oats; also carrots and arsenic, and phosphorized wheat.

179. Which method do you prefer?—We found phosphorized oats the best.

180. In what proportions do you mix it?—We put $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of phosphorus to 100 lb. of oats.

181. Do you put in sugar?—Yes, about 1 lb., and rhodium or oil of anise. We find the rabbits take the poison more readily by mixing with it something of that sort. But we have not done any poisoning since I was before the Committee in September, 1884; we have done the work by natural enemies entirely—ferrets and cats.

182. Do you breed your own ferrets?—Yes.

183. What number do you turn out?—We have turned out about two hundred a year for the last two years. We have about a hundred and seventy-five now to turn out in the spring.

184. Have they increased in their wild condition?—No, I do not think they have—not very much. We have not enough rabbits to keep them going, and a great many of them die, I think.

185. Do you take any measures for feeding them?—No.

186. Before you turn them out do you put them into a loose yard, or open space fenced in, and prepare them for the wild life they are about to enter upon?—No; we generally turn them straight out, but they have a yard to run about in.

187. Do you give them wild rabbits to kill in that yard?—We have not got the rabbits. There is no doubt, I think, that many of them do die simply because they are not used to the rabbits.

188. Do cats kill ferrets or fight with them?—I could not say for certain. I have known them fight when confined together.

189. You do not think there would be any danger on the run with cats?—No; I do not think they would interfere with one another.

190. Then you use guns and ferrets?—We have one man out shooting—one of our own shepherds. We have had a man out for two winters. We have got so few rabbits now that we are giving him 1s. a skin for every one he gets, and he has his wages besides.

191. Have you any wire-netting fencing?—No; we have not tried that.

192. Then, I suppose the country outside yours is not infested with rabbits?—It is swarming with rabbits. That is our grievance. The Rabbit Act has been suspended, and our neighbours are allowed to do as they like.

193. To what do you attribute that?—I do not know, I am sure. We want very much to know. The Inspectors have suspended the Act in the Kaikoura District on their own authority.

194. Who is the Inspector at present?—Inspector Forster is now in charge of that district.

195. But he is the Superintending Inspector, is he not?—I do not know exactly what he is called.

Hon. Mr. Buckley: He is the Inspector.

196. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Are there Sub-Inspectors as well?—There are several Sub-Inspectors.

197. Who are they?—Inspector Clifton is at the head of the Kaikoura District. Then there is a Rabbit Inspector—Inspector Miles. Then, in the Amuri District, Inspector Cook is under Inspector Forster; and I believe another has been put on lately.

198. But who is the Inspector that you come in contact with?—Inspector Forster. He is in charge of the Kaikoura and Amuri Subdivisions.

199. Have you had any notice from him to kill rabbits?—No; he has never interfered with us.

200. Does he or his Sub-Inspector make periodical visits to inquire about the rabbits?—One Inspector went out last October. That is the only one we ever had. We wished them several times to come, but they do not care to do so.

201. And, for some reason or other that you cannot account for, the Inspectors do not enforce the Rabbit Act on the adjoining lands?—They do not. There is a large block of country that was recently being worked by the Bank of New Zealand, as we understand, and it has been swarming with rabbits for years. They turned out some ferrets, but they sold the rest that they had, and broke up their ferret establishment, and when the Inspectors asked them to do something they put on two men on a strip of country thirty-five miles in length by about five wide, to do the poisoning. Now the Sheep Department have taken charge of the district they are going ahead and are working hard; but it is too late now.

202. You are not speaking now with regard to what is taking place at the present moment?—No. I believe Inspector Clifton is doing his best to get the rabbits under.

203. For how long was it neglected in this way?—There was no pressure brought on them to do anything. When the Bank of New Zealand was working the country the Inspectors took no notice of it.

204. When did they begin to work energetically?—The Sheep Department, I understand, took the country over on the 23rd February last. It was abandoned for a month. Then, in addition to this, the rabbits have been allowed to increase up the Acheron and Guide, where the country is now swarming with rabbits.

205. The same thing applies to all this district?—To the Kaikoura and back portion of the Amuri District. We kept on trying to get the Inspectors to do something; but they pooh-poohed the idea, and ignored us, and said there was no more danger now than there was two years ago, while a month afterwards Inspector Forster wrote that the whole position was now most serious, and the pest was getting worse, utterly beyond the control of the owners of the infected runs. Things have got so serious that they are talking of running a wire-fence down the whole way. There was a meeting the other day, and a proposition was made to get the Government to assist.

206. Can you show the position of the lands that you are referring to?—[Plan produced.]—The Inspector tells us that the increase of rabbits on the Acheron and Guide Rivers is due to their having been hunted over from the Awatere by ferrets; but, in reality, there have been very few ferrets turned out in the Upper Awatere, and the rabbits in the Acheron and Clarence are of a different breed from the rabbits in the Awatere. I think that proves that they have not been hunted over, but have come up the Clarence.

207. I suppose that the ferrets would spread the rabbits?—There is no doubt about it: they do spread them.

208. How far have those rabbits spread down southwards?—I think they have got up to about Jollie's Pass.

209. Can you state what length of country they occupy?—There are a few rabbits right down to the Waiau River. The whole of the Marlborough Province, in fact, is overrun with rabbits; also a considerable portion of the Nelson Province.

210. You spoke of wire-fencing that they were going to put up?—They talk of erecting a fence from Lake Tennyson down to the Clarence River, over Jack's Pass, and down to the junction of the Hanmer and Waiau Rivers. That is to prevent the rabbits getting down into Canterbury. They also talk of running another fence from the Clarence over to the Conway.

211. You think that a fence carried to the Conway would shut out the bulk of the rabbits?—There is no doubt that it would keep out a great many of them; but it will be a very expensive work. It will cost about £100 per mile.

212. You can get it done for that?—I do not think you can get it done for less. Some wire-fencing we had put up cost us £100 per mile.

213. In regard to your own run, you say you have kept down the rabbits on that by means of ferrets, while the adjoining lands are much infested. How do you manage to keep them off your own run?—As regards the rabbits in the Clarence and the block of country I talk of, there are not a great many alongside of us. They have not actually come up on to us; but we are afraid that as soon as they start poisoning the rabbits will come up in a body and invade us.

214. Where do you obtain your phosphorus? Do you buy it in the colony?—We generally get it from Dalgetty and Co.'s, in Christchurch.

215. You do not have to import it?—We have never required a large enough quantity to make it worth while to do that. We have never allowed the rabbits to get the start of us.

216. Phosphorus is expensive, I believe, to import?—I do not know for certain. I think you can import it for about 4s. per pound.

217. Including all charges?—I think so. I know several people in Blenheim who used to import it; and it cost them about 4s.

218. How much would it cost to get it in small quantities here?—About 7s.

219. Nearly double the price of imported?—Yes.

220. It would be a great boon, then, if the Government imported it and sold it at cost-price?—Yes, I think so.

221. In the case of small holders the quantities they would have to buy would be naturally small?—Yes.

222. Do you know the Rabbit Act of 1882?—I have looked at it several times.

223. Do you think it has worked satisfactorily?—I cannot say. You see it never has been worked in our district.

224. Have you any suggestion to make in regard to it?—The only suggestion that I could make is that I would like to see it carried out.

225. Your objection, then, is not to the character of the Inspector?—They are utterly useless.

We should be better without them, as they only mislead people. They tell people at one time that there is nothing to be afraid of in regard to the rabbit nuisance, and soon afterwards they say the position is most serious, and that the country is swarming with rabbits. If they would go about and inspect the country they would be of some use.

226. Are you in favour of placing the administration of this Act in the hands of local bodies?—I am not prepared to say, because I do not know how that would work. I should say, however, that no change could be for the worse.

227. You have not thought the matter out?—No.

228. And you have no suggestion to make?—No.

229. Would you refer the administration to County Councils and so on, or to trustees specially appointed?—I think it would work if Boards were specially appointed for the purpose. A proposal was made at a meeting the other day that the sheep-farmers should elect members to constitute such a body; and I believe there is a proposal on foot now to ask Parliament to pass a Bill to create such Boards, with powers to rate the persons interested. The idea is also, if possible, to borrow £10,000 from the Government to put up this fence. It will require about sixty miles of wire-netting.

230. Are there any unoccupied Crown lands in the district?—Yes; there is a considerable quantity on the back of the Kaikoura Ranges.

231. Are those the lands you were just now speaking of?—No. There is a considerable portion not held by anybody. They are now killing wild sheep on it.

232. Are they taking steps to kill the rabbits as well?—No.

233. Perhaps there are no rabbits?—I do not know. I think most likely there are. The Inspector's idea in suspending the Act was that they said the Bank of New Zealand were endeavouring to clean the sheep, and it was a pity to harass them by putting the Rabbit Act into force.

234. Do you think that the duties entailed by the two Acts are too much for the same set of men to perform?—I do not think so. They have brought all this trouble upon themselves. If they had taken steps a little while ago the people would have done their best to keep the rabbits under. Now it will be a much more serious thing to get them under than it was two years ago.

235. *Mr. Fulton.*] Does poisoning cause distribution in the same way as ferrets do?—I think it causes the rabbits to clear out. They go away in a body. They get disgusted with the smell from the dead rabbits.

236. And do you think it would have that effect as much as ferrets?—No, I do not think so.

237. Do you breed cats for the purpose of destroying rabbits?—No; we pick them up wherever we can get them.

238. Is there anything which would prevent the administration of the Rabbit and Sheep Act at the same time?—I do not think so.

239. Then the action of the Inspectors was simply for the purpose of not putting too much pressure on the owners of the property referred to at the same time?—Yes.

240. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] I think I gather, Sir Norman, from your evidence you consider that the great difficulty in exterminating the rabbits arises from the Crown lands not being properly dealt with by the Inspectors?—I do not think it is so much the Crown lands, because there is very little in our neighbourhood: the lands I speak of are all lands held by runholders.

241. High lands?—Some of it; but none of it is so high or rough that you could not get rid of the rabbits if you liked. Ours is high country.

242. What elevation?—The range is about 5,000ft. high.

243. But in that kind of country there is a greater difficulty in exterminating the rabbits than there would be in the low country?—There would be, but the difficulty is not very serious. A lot of the land you could ride over.

244. But in such country as you have in the line of hills running to Mount Cook there would be a difficulty?—I should say there would be; but that is country that I know nothing about. I am speaking of the country in our neighbourhood.

245. Is there much forest in that neighbourhood?—Very little.

246. Have you had any experience in dealing with rabbits in forest?—No; but, to the best of my belief, as a rule they will not go into birch-bush.

247. The Committee have gathered that one of the serious difficulties will be to exterminate rabbits on high rough country, precipitous and broken, and subject to heavy snows during the winter. Now, what mode could you suggest which would be likely to be successful in such country as that?—I think the only thing there is poison and ferrets. You will find that when the snow is about that is the time when you can poison rabbits: there is nothing to eat, and they take poison greedily.

248. You think the snow would drive them from the hills?—There is no doubt about it.

249. Do you think that the ferret is the best natural enemy to let loose upon them?—I think the ferrets have done very good work. Mr. Bullen, in our neighbourhood, has cleared his run with ferrets only. I frequently ride through about nine miles of his run, and I have not seen a rabbit for the last six months, whereas you used to see swarms of rabbits.

250. And to what elevation would the ferrets thrive?—They will go wherever the rabbits will go, I think.

251. Have you any experience of the work of other natural enemies, such as weasels, polecats, and martens?—No; the only other natural enemy we tried were cats.

252. You may have some experience of the Grampians in the way of preventing the multiplication of rabbits and mountain-hares?—No; but I know the way in which they do increase, and hares too.

253. But you have not been familiar with any of the ranges of the Grampians?—No, I do not know the Grampian country.

254. *Mr. McMillan.*] You have stated to the Committee that in the Kalkoura district the Act was practically suspended by the Inspectors. I suppose you are aware that the Inspectors have no power to suspend the Act?—I understood so; also that the Committee which sat in 1884 recommended that the Rabbit and Sheep Act should be strictly carried out.

255. Was it not a fact that the difficulty the Inspectors had to contend with in regard to the land you have alluded to was more due to a question of ownership than anything else?—That arose when the country was thrown up in January last; but for some time previous to that the Bank of New Zealand were working the country, so that there could not then have been any such difficulty.

256. Then, while it was in possession of the Bank of New Zealand sufficient means were not taken to keep the rabbits down?—The only means taken were three men employed in poisoning this large tract of country.

257. When the bank threw it up, how long was it before any further steps were taken?—It was abandoned for a month—from the 24th of January till the 23rd of February—and when the Sheep Department took it over, we urged Inspector Forster to eradicate the rabbits. He did all he could to evade the responsibility, and said the department were responsible for the sheep, but not for rabbits.

258. How long have the rabbits been on your country?—There have been a few there, I suppose, for nine years.

259. Did they ever get very thick on it?—No.

260. What is the extent of your country?—It is about seventy-five thousand acres.

261. And how many sheep does it carry?—About fifty thousand sheep.

262. Can you tell the Committee the annual cost you are put to in keeping down the rabbits on that country?—Our ferrets cost us about £1 apiece to breed. I suppose it costs us about £300 a year.

263. I am speaking of the bonuses you give for the skins as well?—We had a man shooting in the winter of 1883, and paid him about £40; but we have not been doing anything since, except turning out ferrets and cats for the last two years.

264. So that you think £300 would be an outside expenditure?—About £300, I think, it costs us.

265. *Mr. Lance.*] You have a fence running over the Cloudy Range?—Two fences.

266. Would it be of any use to keep the rabbits from coming from the southwards to put wire-netting on that?—Yes, I think it would do good.

267. Have you men hunting rabbits on the Cloudy Range now?—Yes.

268. Is it not a fact that the rabbits have increased lately?—No; they have decreased. There are not so many there now as there were this time last year.

269. You say that if they are poisoned in the Clarence Valley it will drive them up on to the Cloudy Range?—I do not say, however, on that account that we wish them to stop poisoning there, so as not to drive them up.

270. The best thing to do in that case would be to do it simultaneously?—Yes.

271. When the Government begin poisoning in that valley, therefore, you will have to poison simultaneously?—Well, we have got so very few rabbits that it would be hardly worth while poisoning. We have a man there to keep a look-out for rabbits, and if a sufficient number turn up we will poison them at once.

272. In regard to these two fences they talk of putting up, if they were erected would that, in your opinion, make the country south of that fairly safe from rabbits?—I think they would be a very great protection. I really do not know, however, whether they have decided to erect those two fences or not.

273. I have a report from the gentlemen who have been out; and they have surveyed three lines. You think this country would be a good basis to commence operations?—There is no doubt it would be a great protection.

274. They propose to carry this from Lake Tennyson, and thence into a black-birch bush?—I have never been up Lake Tennyson, and I do not know that country. The people who do know it all seem to agree, however, that the rabbits cannot get round the head of Lake Tennyson.

275. Would it form a complete barrier if extended into that black-birch forest?—I do not know the country there, so I cannot say; but I do not think rabbits are likely to go into black-birch forest. There is nothing for them to eat there, and it is too wet and cold for them.

276. If they could get round this fence, and round the backbone of the Island, there would be no use of it?—Exactly. If they are not stopped there you might as well throw up the sponge.

277. *Captain Russell.*] Do I understand you to say that the rabbits had materially increased around you since placing ferrets upon your country?—Yes.

278. You say you have nearly exterminated all the rabbits in your own country?—Yes.

279. Did you use the word "exterminated" advisedly, or do you mean you dispersed the rabbits?—It is more extermination; because we have not spread them on to our neighbours' country, to the best of my belief. I know places where there have been several colonies of rabbits; and, what with poisoning, and ferrets, and cats, there are no rabbits there now. I do not mean to say that we have exterminated them altogether; but we have reduced their number.

280. You think they have been actually destroyed, and not driven off?—I am sure of it. The neighbour above us has got no rabbits at all.

281. You seem to dread the migration of rabbits, owing to poisoning?—Yes. As I have already said, however, I do not wish it to be inferred that for this reason we wish our neighbours to stop poisoning.

282. I suppose you think that any complete grappling with the rabbits can only be performed by erecting fences, as well as poisoning and natural enemies?—Fences will be a very great protection; but I think it is questionable whether the same amount of money spent in poisoning and

natural enemies would not be just as effective; because in the high country it will be so difficult and expensive to keep the fences in repair, and the snow will make it so much worse.

283. I was referring to such places as where there was a migration?—I think the fencing will stop them.

284. You say that the Act has been suspended. You mean that it has not been practically enforced?—It has not been enforced at all.

285. Apparently the Government administration has not worked satisfactorily with you?—The Act has not been worked at all.

286. Would you approve of creating rabbit districts, which should be administered by trustees, who should be elected by the ratepayers, the ratepayers being those who pay the sheep-rate in the district?—I think that would be a great improvement.

287. Do you think that would be better than administration by County Councils or Road Boards?—I certainly think it would. The general feeling in our district is in favour of something of that kind being done.

288. *Hon. Mr. Buckley.*] Do you know if anybody has been summoned for a breach of the Rabbit Act?—Yes; there have been some summoned.

289. Many?—On the 19th February there were a few convictions got—I think about half a dozen altogether; but they were principally against small farmers.

290. Not against the large holders?—There was one large holder—the holder of Waipapa. He was fined £1 5s., I think.

291. I am anxious to know upon what authority you say that the land was taken up by the Government from the Bank of New Zealand?—Simply from what I have heard.

292. Was it not in the possession of Gibson when it was abandoned?—Not to the best of my belief.

293. Have you any idea to whom the run belongs?—The general opinion in our district was that it belonged to the Bank of New Zealand; and I have pretty good authority for saying that it did, because the Bank of New Zealand asked me in September, 1884, if I would take charge of that country.

294. For the bank?—Yes.

295. Before it was abandoned?—Yes. It was in September, or the beginning of October, 1884. It was after the last Committee had sat.

296. *Hon. the Chairman.*] With regard to the rabbit-skins, you do not take sufficient from your run, I suppose, to export?—No, we have never sent any away. I know it does not pay expenses to send them away.

297. Not when there is a large quantity?—Men who have sent them away reckon to lose a third.

298. Would you recommend that a bonus should be offered by the Government for the skins?—I would not be prepared to recommend that.

299. You think it would not be necessary, or not advisable?—I think the people could dispose of the skins themselves. It would be offering a bonus for men to keep rabbits.

300. You do not think it would have the opposite effect?—No. It would be a rather dangerous experiment, I think.

301. *Mr. Fulton.*] Your opinions expressed with regard to the administration of the Act relate to purely pastoral country?—Yes.

302. Not to farms at all?—Where you have districts cut into small farms I do not think there is so much to be feared from rabbits.

303. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You say that the snow drives the rabbits from the hills: some of your land is 5,000ft. high?—5,600ft. is one height.

304. Rabbits can live there well enough in summer, I suppose?—Yes. There is nothing for them to eat in winter, and they come down on to the flats.

305. Will the snow kill them?—That I could not say.

TUESDAY, 1ST JUNE, 1886.

Mr. B. BAILEY, Superintending Inspector of Sheep, examined.

306. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You are Superintending Inspector under the Sheep and Rabbit Act?—Yes.

307. I suppose you travel about the various districts of the colony?—I do.

308. You have done so during the past year?—I have.

309. Have you been able to form an opinion as to whether the rabbit nuisance has increased or decreased since you were before a similar Committee to the present two years ago?—Until this year it had decidedly decreased. This year, I believe, in numbers it has not increased, but, owing to the dry summer, the efforts to stamp it out have not been so successful as they would otherwise have been. There are not more rabbits than there were, but they have not been reduced at the same rate as in previous years.

310. Do you think they have spread?—I do most decidedly; they are over a larger area.

311. And they still remain as numerous on the area they already occupy?—No, not quite; there has been a considerable reduction.

312. I suppose it varies?—In some places they are fewer, and in some they are more numerous.

313. How was it that the efforts to destroy the rabbits were not so efficacious this time? Do you mean that they would not take the poison?—They will not take the poison in the summer time. In the winter I believe we shall have equally as great success as previously.

314. Are you satisfied that proper steps are being taken generally to check the nuisance?—I am not. I do not think that we have ever grappled with this question as it should have been grappled with. I think we want something more than we have at the present time at our disposal. As far as our present means are concerned, taking the matter generally, things have been pretty well conducted; but we have not yet arrived at the solution of the difficulty.

315. You say you want something more. Do you mean on the part of private owners?—No. We want to discover some new disease, for instance, to stamp out the rabbits.

316. A different remedy?—Yes.

317. You mentioned before the Committee two years ago that the counties were districts under the Rabbit Act?—Yes.

318. Each county a separate district?—Yes.

319. Is that so now?—Still the same.

320. And what officers have you in each of these districts to carry out the provisions of the Act?—The number varies in each district. Some districts are more infested than others.

321. But what is the general machinery?—There is an Inspector for each district. He appoints agents as he requires them—generally two, sometimes one, and in one instance there are three.

322. What are the duties of these agents?—They are given a certain portion of the country to oversee, and they are supposed to report to the Inspector the state of the country that they go over. After receiving their report he visits the country himself, and gives notices if required.

323. What authority has the Inspector to give instructions where there are rabbits?—The agent has no authority. The Inspector would issue an order under the Act. If not complied with he would summon.

324. Does he describe the method of how the rabbits are to be dealt with?—No.

325. He leaves it to the owner to destroy the rabbits in the best way he thinks fit?—Yes.

326. Are you satisfied with the efficiency of these officers?—I am not satisfied, hearing as I have done of the increase. I am under the impression myself that the duty has not been carried out as it should have been done. I am speaking generally, from the increase of rabbits this year and the general complaints made. When I visited the south I saw in some places a good many rabbits and in other places fewer than in previous years, but generally I did not see that the same reduction had taken place as in former years.

327. Do you attribute this to the want of efficiency on the part of the Inspectors or officers?—I cannot say so. I do not know of a case of such a kind.

328. Have you had any complaints of want of energy on the part of Inspectors, or of inattention?—I have had one or two complaints of places, which I have forwarded at once to the Inspector in question. But that has been very lately—within the last three weeks.

329. What district?—It was at Fortrose, near Wyndham, in the Southland District.

330. Did both complaints come from there?—The other came from Lake Wakatipu District.

331. What steps did you take?—I forwarded these letters to the Inspector, desiring him to visit the ground, and let me have a special report as soon as possible. With reference to the second affair, that was sent to the Inspector for his explanation, and then forwarded to the Chief Inspector for further report.

332. And at present?—No reply has been received from either communication up to the present time.

333. These officers are entirely under your control?—They are to a certain extent.

334. Who appoints them?—They are appointed from the Colonial Secretary's Office by recommendation or otherwise.

335. You do not select them?—I do not; but the appointments generally come through my hands.

336. Are the names submitted to you for your approval or recommendation?—Not in every instance. For the last five months of last year I was scarcely in Wellington at all, and I knew little of what was going on. I had to undertake the work of cleaning the scab out of the Nelson and Marlborough Districts, and that took me pretty well five months, doing nothing else.

337. Then, in the case of these men about whom reports have been sent to you, those reports are sent on afterwards to the department—they do not rest with you?—No.

337A. And you do not really deal with these officers?—No.

338. You have not the control over the officers?—I have not the appointment of them.

339. Let me understand you. In the case of a complaint you are not at liberty to suspend or dismiss them on your own authority?—I might suspend them—but no further—if I saw any grave reason for it.

340. You get regular monthly reports from each Inspector?—Yes.

341. They send you their diaries?—Yes. They are now received in the office only once in three months. There was an alteration made last year at my suggestion, in order to allow me to get at liberty to look at the scab in Nelson.

342. Just state whether you have had any complaints from these Inspectors of landholders not complying readily with the demands for cleaning?—I have received none.

343. You think that the landholders are doing their best?—Well, it is a very hard question for me to answer distinctly directly. There are some, I believe, who do not; I believe there are others who are doing their very utmost.

344. Is it alike all over the country or in particular districts that you find a want of readiness?—It is in particular districts, on rough borders.

345. You mean down south?—Particularly down south.

346. Would those be holders of Government lands?—Practically so.

347. With unoccupied lands, probably, on their borders?—Yes; and in some cases even further inland, where there are simply summer runs.

348. Will you state the different means of destroying rabbits that you are aware of?—Phosphorized grain is our principal means. It is the only thing we have to depend upon, chiefly in the winter time. Many people trap, a few use dogs, others try poisoning with carrots, others fumigating by sulphide of carbon, and in some places they dig. Others use wire-netting fencing, and others again turn out natural enemies.

349. What do you recommend as the most efficacious?—Decidedly a thoroughly systematic poisoning in winter. That is undoubtedly the sheet-anchor of the whole thing. Where wire-netting can be resorted to that is the next best thing. Summer-poisoning is so uncertain. Occasionally you may do a little with it; but it wholly depends on the weather. In trapping you certainly kill a good many, but you destroy the natural enemy at the same time.

350. I suppose you have to adopt different methods according to the ground?—Yes.

351. You have had some experience in introducing both ferrets and stoats?—Ferrets, stoats, and weasels.

352. Which do you consider the best?—Well, I have one case in mind where the first weasels were turned out. It was on a peninsula on the Wanaka Lake, of eight thousand acres in extent. There were seventy-two turned out. It was all poisoned the first year with the exception of two spurs, on which they were liberated. Last year it was patch-poisoned, and that year I visited it myself. I saw very few rabbits on the patch I went over. This year it has not been poisoned at all, and I have a report saying that, with the exception of the far end, there are no rabbits.

353. That is the result of the weasels?—Yes.

354. Do you think the weasels have increased?—That we cannot tell.

355. You cannot form an opinion?—No. With regard to the country I have mentioned, the rabbits, of course, were confined to this peninsula.

356. And the experiment was a success?—Yes, so far as that place is concerned.

357. In regard to the stoats?—They were so few in number that I could not speak positively as to what the effect has been. At the same time, rabbits have been found, evidently killed by them. A good number of them have been found.

358. And what is your experience of the ferrets?—To do any good they require to be turned out in large numbers, and you require to have a supply always on hand to keep turning out. They are more delicate than the others.

359. You had several breeding-stations for ferrets?—Yes.

360. Where are they?—We have one now at Waimata.

361. Before turning the ferrets out do you try to acclimatize them?—We harden them, and they are generally sent to some place where rabbits are procurable, and where they are kept in an open yard, rabbits being turned among them.

362. So that they can get used to killing the rabbits?—Yes; and they are fed on nothing else for some time before being turned out.

363. Are you importing any animals at present?—None.

364. And you have only this one breeding-station?—That is all.

365. And you have only ferrets there?—That is all. That breeding-station was principally for the purpose of having ferrets to turn out on the Napier boundary. We had others, but they were dispensed with because it was found cheaper to buy the animals.

366. If that is the case, surely private individuals would give up breeding, and your supplies would cease?—No: there is an arrangement that all ferrets offered for sale are bought at a certain price.

367. Where do these ferrets come from?—They are bred under certain conditions, under the supervision of the Inspector.

368. They are not caught?—No.

369. I believe that ferrets have been caught and sold in that way?—Any number of them. Runholders down south have bought them at 4s. and 5s. a head, because they could get them at that figure; and consequently there was quite a trade springing up.

370. Do you think that the ferret, weasel, and stoat will flourish in different parts of the colony alike?—No.

371. State what your experience leads you to think on the subject?—In the southern portions of the colony, in the high, rough, cold portions of Otago, I believe weasels and stoats would undoubtedly be the animal there. The ferrets, no doubt, do good there, and have been increasing in a portion of Southland. In the warmer parts of the colony I think the ferret would do very well, and has done very well, especially if there is any water for it. If the country is too dry it does no good.

372. Are there any breeding establishments for weasels and stoats?—No; it is impossible to breed them.

373. Then you have made no provision for a supply of these weasels and stoats?—The only means is by importation.

374. And the Government are not importing them?—I hear that the shipping company refuse to bring any more.

375. Then the importing of them does not rest with you?—No.

376. And you have not had definite information that they will not bring out any more?

Hon. Mr. Buckley: It is a fact: they will not.

377. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Then I suppose we must rely upon ferrets?—Yes.

378. You say that the Government buy all the ferrets that are offered for sale. Can you state what number are purchased every year?—I cannot—my returns are not yet in; but I can give you that information in a few days.

379. What do you do with the ferrets the Government have bought?—We turn them out in different places on the waste lands of the Crown, and on Crown lands.

380. What is about the cost per head?—This year they have ranged from 7s. to 10s.; but a few have been bought lower.

381. Supposing a private individual wanted ferrets to turn out on his own land, he not having bred any, would the Government sell to him?—He is left to provide for himself. All private individuals will not or do not buy.

382. Is it, then, with the object of assisting those who are breeding, so that they may find a market for all that they may wish to sell?—That is so.

383. Then, if the private individuals do not buy, the Government will?—Yes.

384. Do you know whether many have been killed on Crown lands by rabbiters?—I have heard of it, but we have no proof of it; but that such is done I have not the slightest doubt.

385. You say phosphorus is the best poison?—There is no doubt of it.

386. What do you mix it with—oats or wheat?—Sometimes one and sometimes the other.

387. How are you guided?—If the rabbits do not take the oats freely, wheat is tried.

388. Is it according to different parts of the year?—No.

389. The Government imports its own phosphorus?—They have bought it in the colony hitherto.

390. Would it not be a good thing for the Government to procure phosphorus, so that private owners might obtain it at cost-price?—I think, as a rule, the private owners can get it quite as cheaply, if not cheaper, by getting it direct from Home than they could get it from the Government.

391. The Government could get it more cheaply in large quantities than in small quantities, and agents would require a profit on it?—A great many owners import it themselves.

392. But there are a large number of small owners?—To supply these we keep small dépôts.

393. At cost price?—I think it is at an advance of 3d. per lb., to pay for the expense of storage.

394. Would it not be better for the Government to import direct for itself?—I believe it would be the cheapest, certainly.

395. Can you state the proportion in which it is mixed?—From 1lb. to 1½lb. to every 100lb. of grain.

396. Do you use sugar or rhodium?—Very rarely. Salt is sometimes used with advantage; and the only time that sugar, or rhodium, or aniseed is used is in summer time.

397. How long will phosphorized corn remain on the ground without losing its strength?—It wholly depends on the season. In winter time it will stand for ten days; in summer it would not stand forty-eight hours.

398. What weakens it?—The hot weather. In frosty dry weather it stands longer. In wet weather it gets washed out.

399. Do you use much sulphide of carbon for fumigating?—Not much. It has been used down south. You can only use it where there is stiff soil.

400. But there is a danger of killing the natural enemies if you use that?—Yes.

401. Have you had any reports of sheep being killed by poisoned grain?—Very few.

402. With regard to the Crown lands, commonage, and reserves, there are still large quantities of land unoccupied?—Yes, a great quantity.

403. Where are those lands, chiefly?—Principally in the south, between the lakes and the West Coast, following right up to the Mackenzie country.

404. Do you consider it is the duty of the Government to keep down rabbits on unoccupied lands?—Certainly I do.

405. It is a matter of importance to the Government?—Yes; it should be done.

406. Have you been taking efficient steps to kill them?—We have taken what steps were available—we have had the ground poisoned, and turned out natural enemies; but there are millions of acres you have no access to.

407. It seems to me that the task of keeping down rabbits by poison and other means entirely depends on co-operation, and performing the work continuously and over a large area at the same time. Are you following out any definite plan in regard to these considerations?—During the last two years combined action has been taken as much as possible everywhere to get every one to start at once and poison at as near the same time as possible.

408. And have you been acting in regard to the unoccupied lands simultaneously with the holders of land adjoining?—That is more than I can tell you, but I believe it has been done as far as possible. But there are large tracts of unoccupied lands that have been thrown up, and are simply surrounded by waste lands again.

409. What do you do in a case like that?—We have to let a contract to poison this block in the best manner possible. We generally allow the property-owner so much for poisoning the Crown lands adjacent to his boundary. He, being interested, would do the work most satisfactorily.

410. How do you make these contracts?—They are generally advertised, and, as a rule, the lowest tender is accepted.

411. It is not done by giving a bonus?—Where the owner is alongside the Crown lands we give him so much.

412. Is not a bonus given on the rabbits?—No.

413. You have had some difficulty with regard to the commonages. Has that difficulty been overcome?—No: the matter is in just the same position.

414. There is a commonage, for instance, at Cromwell, and at one or two other places. Are they still vacant?—Yes. I think tenders are now in the office for the destruction of rabbits at Cromwell.

415. Would you recommend netting on a large scale?—Wherever available.

416. Have you thought where it would be of use?—Do you speak generally on the question, or simply as a departmental matter?

417. Generally. In the Waitaki District I am told the rabbits are getting along at the foot of the main range. Is there any part of that country where a fence would help to keep the rabbits back from the Canterbury Plains?—I do not think so, unless taken a considerable distance back into the Waitaki. I think the country is too rocky and rough and intersected by too many streams for a fence to be of any use. I believe they would get at the back.

418. You are not prepared to recommend that fencing should be carried out in any particular district?—No. There is one place where the rabbits are threatening where it might be carried out, and that is in the north part of the South Island, in the direction of Lake Tennyson.

419. Do you think that rabbits can be kept out by fencing?—The owner of ground that can be rabbit-fenced could destroy his rabbits at the fence, and could keep them from coming in from the other side. Rabbit-fencing should be included in the Rabbit Act.

420. But you do not know of any place where you would recommend it?—I do not.

421. You mean that it should be left to private owners?—Fences may be necessary to keep back an invasion of the rabbit.

422. Are you aware whether there are any rabbits on the Native lands in the North Island?—With the exception of one place in the Wairarapa I am not aware of any.

423. What did you do with that place?—I think we poisoned it.

424. Did you get rid of the rabbits?—There are rabbits there still, I believe,

425. Do you find any difficulty in dealing with Native lands where there are rabbits?—No.

426. You cannot compel the Natives to do the work?—No; but we do it ourselves.

427. Do you think that sufficient efforts have been made to let these unoccupied lands?—I do not.

428. Can you suggest a plan by which they can be more readily let?—I think if a great many of them were let at a lower rental, and in larger blocks, and for longer leases, it would induce occupation more than under the present conditions.

429. In the report made by the Committee two years ago there was a recommendation that, in the letting of these lands, care should be taken so that they were not left idle between the expiration of one lease and the entry of another tenant. Have any steps been taken in that direction?—I could not say for certain.

430. Have you any suggestion to make regarding these lands, for the purpose of getting rid of the rabbits?—You refer to reserves, and lands of that description?

431. I refer to lands that are not actually in the occupation of private owners?—I made a suggestion three years ago—which I do not think I could improve upon—that lands upon which proper steps were not being taken to clear off the rabbits should be declared abandoned lands, and the Government should step in, take possession, and let them to others, who would clear them of rabbits, and then, after a certain time, they might be returned to owner.

432. You recommend that, in the case of leased lands, the neglect to kill rabbits should be a cause of forfeiture?—I am speaking now of the reserves set aside for certain bodies, who do not exercise their ownership upon them.

433. That the Government should take possession of them?—Yes.

434. Has that been done in any case?—No. I am not certain; but I think one of the commonages was taken—a part of the Clyde Commonage.

435. With regard to the Act now in force, have you any suggestion to make?—None.

436. Does it supply sufficient authority to enable you to kill rabbits?—It gives quite enough power. In fact, there are many complaints made that it is too strict, and that the defendant in a case has no answer to the charge made against him.

437. Have you taken proceedings in many cases against landowners for not killing rabbits?—I cannot speak personally to that effect. The department has had a good many cases, notably down south.

438. And there is a Wairarapa case mentioned in this morning's paper?—Yes.

439. Is there any difficulty in obtaining convictions for breaches of the Act?—No. As a rule the fines are so small that it is very little use in bringing cases forward.

440. Would you recommend that the working of this Act should be placed in the hands of local bodies?—I certainly should not, from my experience of the time when it was in the hands of local bodies.

441. Please indicate why you think it would not work?—Members of local bodies, as a rule, are frequently friends or persons interested with the owners of the land where the Act is brought into force, and this generally tends to an abuse of the provisions of the Act, or to their not being carried out.

442. But your experience to that effect was surely at a time when the rabbits were not so numerous and the consequent loss to property not so great?—I believe myself that the rabbits were more numerous and the loss greater.

443. The loss, at the time you refer to, fell on the large owners?—And the small ones as well, in Otago and Southland.

444. The small owners have suffered more this year than ever before?—I have heard so.

445. Would it be desirable to hand over the working of the Act to trustees specially appointed for that purpose?—That course would decidedly be better than the other.

446. Do you in any case try to enlist the services of the local bodies in carrying out the Act?—Only in the winter season, when simultaneous poisoning is necessary, when we endeavour to get the parties interested to meet, in order to carry this out.

447. You do not depute any authority to the local body?—No.

448. What do you think of a proposal to cut up the country into districts, each district having its own Board of Trustees, with power to raise rates for the purpose of killing rabbits and putting up fencing, and so on?—If carried out in its integrity such a system might work.

449. If any one neglects to kill rabbits, who takes proceedings against him?—The Inspector.

450. Is the right to take proceedings confined to the Inspector?—Yes.

451. Supposing the Inspector is careless and neglects to do his duty, a private individual who feels aggrieved by the neglect of his neighbour cannot take proceedings?—No; but he can, I believe, demand that the Inspector should visit certain grounds to see if there are rabbits upon them.

452. And you are satisfied that your Inspectors are doing their work properly?—I have had no complaints lodged against them.

453. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] What steps have you taken towards cleaning the unoccupied lands in the Wakatipu District?—With the exception of one or two contracts let for some of those grounds, I know of nothing that has been done, beyond turning out the natural enemy.

454. And the Government have allowed the rabbits to increase there just as they please?—Most of the land that could have been poisoned would be found, I think, to be occupied. The rest of that land I think it would be impossible to get at. Nearly all the lands are in the occupation of owners. Those that are not are simply impracticable.

455. But a great mass of that land was unoccupied until recently? I suppose there was a million acres?—I do not think so. I was up there about two years ago; I know it was occupied then.

456. Similar land, surrounding the Wanaka and the Mount Beza, for example, has been dealt with. How was it that the Government failed to deal with the land in the Wakatipu District?—I know of no land there unoccupied, where rabbits were numerous at all, that has not been dealt with. I think all the available land is in the hands of owners.

457. But during the last twelve months rabbits have increased from the Wakatipu downwards towards Invercargill?—They have not been reduced, as I said before, in the same sense as in former years; but I do not think the numbers have increased. Down in Southland there are less this year than ever, notably in Wallace County, with the exception, perhaps, of the Waionui River.

458. Are you aware that rabbits are spreading very rapidly towards Lake Wakatipu?—I am not aware of that. I am aware that a few have been seen in that part.

459. Are they in the Hakateramea Valley yet?—There were more there years ago than there are now.

460. Are they spreading in the McKenzie country?—I was up there about six weeks ago and I think I saw four rabbits between Benbow station and the Hopkins, and the proprietor informed me that there had not been any rabbits seen for a long time before that.

461. Suppose you were told by a party who went over the country recently that he had found rabbits almost continuously from Malvern Hills towards Mount Cook as far as Tekapo, would you believe him?—I should certainly believe him as far as the head of the Ohao, keeping on the west side of it, as that has been an infested country for years; but not on the eastern side.

462. Are there many rabbits at Malvern Hills station?—There are.

463. And at Benmore?—Comparatively few, except on the western side of the lake.

464. And at Moa Flat?—I heard they are very much reduced there compared to what they were.

465. Then there is country that seems to be lost sight of—Mareroa and Te Auea?—I have reports of that country.

466. And have the owners been using diligence to keep the nuisance under?—I know of nothing to the contrary.

467. Are you of opinion that we should continue the importation of stoats and weasels?—I am, for the back-country.

468. Have you ever turned out any ferrets bought by the Government on lands occupied by private persons?—I have turned them out at the head of Lake Wanaka, and leased lands of the Crown—ferrets, stoats, and weasels.

469. What price do the Government pay for phosphorus?—I could not say from memory. About two years ago we were short of phosphorus, and there was none to be had in the colony; and there was a large shipment on board, so that the people could get it.

470. And what price did they pay for it?—4s. 6d.

471. [I may say, for the information of the Committee, that the place to import phosphorus from is Burgoyne, Burbridge, and Cyriax, 19, Coleman Street, London.] You have not given the Committee any idea of the amount of unoccupied Crown lands in the South Island—that is, land fit for agriculture or occupation as grazing land?—I certainly could not give you any idea. The Land Department could do that.

472. Are you in favour of a bonus on the exportation of skins?—No.

473. Are you in favour of Government purchasing skins at a fixed price?—No.

474. Why?—Because it would be an inducement to rabbit-farming. It would induce people to breed rabbits where now they destroy them.

475. Would it be an inducement to kill rabbits if a bonus were given for the skins of young ones?—In summer time a bonus might be given for skins not beyond a certain length.

476. Suppose a bonus of 2d. were given for rabbit-skins, would not this help to solve the unemployed difficulty?—I do not think so.

477. Many men could earn good wages at that?—It would have the effect of unsteady-ing a lot of men who have now settled down to other occupations.

478. Would it not be also desirable to give this bonus as a sort of compensation to settlers who are desirous of clearing their runs, the Government paying 2d. and the settler contributing another 2d.—Then, in the back, unoccupied Crown lands, which are being taken for sheep-grazing, an inducement would be offered to make more out of rabbits than anything else.

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

effect that the agent was not doing his duty in regard to a certain piece of country below Wyndham.

517. The complaint was against the agents?—Yes, that he was taking no notice of it.

518. You had reports from various parts of the country in respect to rabbits in September last?—I had.

519. What was the general tenor of the reports?—That the rabbits were largely reduced in numbers everywhere.

520. Reduced more than usual at the end of the winter?—Less than the previous winter.

521. By what means would you propose to keep the rabbits under in summer?—The natural enemy is supposed to keep them under if kept in sufficient numbers, backed up by energetic measures in winter.

522. Suppose the weasels you turned out on the peninsula had been turned out on country where they could wander about, would you urge the owners of land to trap and fumigate, and so forth?—I do not think I should compel him to trap or fumigate, if I saw him turning out the natural enemy in sufficient numbers, but I would urge him to shoot and take other means.

523. What other means?—I do not think you could possibly use any other means without destroying the natural enemy.

524. You have stated that more remedies are wanted. Is that in the direction of other poisons?—Yes, and not alone that, but to see if we could not get some scientist to introduce some disease in rabbits, so as to destroy them wholesale.

525. Do you see any difficulty in keeping the rabbits under chiefly by poisoning?—That could be done.

526. The difficulty of exterminating the rabbits applies rather to the high country?—Yes.

527. What do you consider the best remedy to deal with rabbits there?—I have seen millions of acres of country where there is no hope but the natural enemy.

528. And you think those that we have are the best?—I think so.

529. In selecting those natural enemies, do you take into consideration the possibility that by-and-by, when they have multiplied, and exterminated the rabbits, they may become as great a nuisance as the rabbits?—If they destroy the rabbits they must necessarily cease to exist themselves. You can destroy them in many ways not applicable to rabbits.

530. Would these natural enemies have any special value, so as to induce men to destroy them?—The stoat would.

531. Then, would it not be advisable to encourage those animals which would be an object of commerce after the rabbits are killed down?—Yes.

532. The stoat is one; the marten is another?—Yes.

533. Would there be any difficulty in getting them from California?—I do not know.

534. Is there any animal that might be imported which would be of value in destroying rabbits on high mountain country? Have you had any experience of the golden eagle in destroying mountain-hares?—I think there would be an objection to that; they would destroy the sheep.

535. *Mr. Lance.*] I understood you to say that, when an Inspector gives notice to an owner to destroy rabbits, he leaves it to the owner to select any means that he may please. Is that absolutely so?—It is, so far as my experience goes, and so far as the instructions issued by the department are concerned.

536. Have you any complaint, especially coming from Otago, that the Inspectors insist on rabbiters being employed in large numbers, and that, unless they are employed, they lay informations in the Magistrate's Court?—I have heard of one place in the South, but I have no evidence that such was the case. I do not think the Inspectors would attempt to do anything of the sort.

537. I have heard it has been a great source of complaint in Otago that they were compelled by the department to put on rabbiters, and that these destroy ferrets, and therefore it is no use to put on ferrets?—I have heard of it, but, unless there is a distinct complaint, it is impossible to lay down a decided course of action.

538. You are aware of the increase of rabbits in the Amuri District?—I am.

539. A witness stated yesterday that the Rabbit Act had been suspended in that part of the country?—That is the first time I have heard of it.

540. It is proposed that a fence shall be put there. Of course in Canterbury we have no rabbits at the present time, and are much afraid of being invaded. Do you think a wire-fence would be beneficial?—I certainly do think so, at that particular spot. You have a line there where you can put a fence.

541. You said that in the North Island rabbits only existed in the Wairarapa?—I hardly said that. I know they are in existence in the Waikato and Auckland, too. About Alexandra, I am informed, they are extending in great numbers from Te Awamutu and Kihikihi, and there is great danger of their spreading into the King country, unless immediate steps are taken. I heard of this about two years ago, and went over the land, and I saw it was confined to a very small area, and my own opinion is that they never can increase there to the extent that people anticipate. Cats are there by hundreds, and the population where the rabbits are now is so great that they ought to be exterminated at once. There is one place about Raglan that might be a little difficult to deal with.

542. Then, in regard to the Act, you think, on the whole, it works well, and you would not recommend local bodies or trustees?—I should not.

543. Do you think the system of trustees would work well in the Amuri District?—Where the interest in the question is confined to a very few, there, I believe, it would work; but where it is spread over a number of small owners I do not think it would work so well.

544. But you have heard no complaints from private owners about the working of the Act, and none from the Inspectors. How is it, then, that the department has not been able to cope with

this rabbit pest, if everything is right?—I do not say it is right. I simply said I had no complaints. I think a great deal is owing to the summer we had. Before that, I was in hopes we should have made great advances in keeping down the nuisance.

545. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] You object to local bodies dealing with this question. Do you allude to bodies like County Councils?—As a rule, I do not think such a system would be desirable.

546. Do you not think that local bodies elected by people interested in the rabbit question might do good?—In some places, but not in others.

547. *Mr. Dodson.*] When did you first know there were rabbits in any quantity in the Clarence Valley?—Last year.

548. Had you any personal knowledge of that?—I went through part of the country myself.

549. Frequently?—On two occasions.

550. We had it on evidence yesterday that a report was sent up by an officer in your department saying that at a given date there were no rabbits; and then a month afterwards the rabbits were there in alarming numbers?—My own knowledge of the matter is this: When I went through there were a good few rabbits on the Helen Creek, and a few more down towards the Tytler. They went in largely for breeding ferrets, and they reduced their numbers to such an extent that they had to go five miles for rabbits to feed the ferrets upon. I am told that the manager was so satisfied that he not only turned out the ferrets that he had, but broke up his breeding establishment. A dry summer came, and the pest again went ahead.

551. What was the condition of Flaxbourne?—They were pretty well cleared. There is another reason that can be given for their apparent increase. Owing to the high river the rabbits congregated about the cultivations, where they had not been so thick in former years. They gathered down to where the best grass was, and so the people have seen more.

552. *Mr. Cowan.*] You have expressed yourself satisfied with the conduct of the department. What is your opinion with regard to employing agents the whole year round?—In winter time, when simultaneous poisoning and active work requires to be done, they are absolutely essential; but I am certainly of opinion now that fewer agents might be done with in the summer time.

553. After many years' experience in the South Island, that is also the conclusion to which I have come. You agree with me, then, that in the summer time, if large powers were given to the Inspectors, the same good would be accomplished at a less cost?—I think so.

554. Do you think an inducement should be offered by the Government in summer for the taking of rabbit-skins?—If a bonus were offered it should be for the skins of suckers.

555. But in summer the commercial value of rabbit-skins is almost *nil*?—I am aware of that.

556. Would it not also be an assistance in reducing the pest if a bonus were offered for large ones as well?—I should confine myself to the small skins.

557. *Mr. Dodson.*] Some two years ago we had a witness before the Committee who complained that he had been interfered with, and that the Inspector insisted on his using one special means of destruction where he wished to use another. Did you inquire into that matter?—I did not. I had no opportunity of doing so. An Inspector is supposed not to interfere.

558. *Hon. the Chairman.*] In reference to the case in the Wairarapa, was not the plea urged by the runholder that he was taking all steps to kill the rabbits, but objected to the method directed by the Inspector?—I should not think so.

559. Do you not get reports of these cases?—Yes; but I do not recollect that being so.

560. If a complaint of that kind were sent you would inquire into it?—Decidedly.

561. *Captain Russell.*] Do the Sheep Inspectors report on rabbits?—Yes.

562. To whom?—To the head of the department.

563. And how often?—They send in their diaries every month.

564. And who is the responsible head of the department?—Mr. Cooper.

565. He is the practical head, the working head, of the department? There is, I suppose, some official in whom the thing centres?—I believe Mr. Cooper is the responsible head. I am Superintendent, but I have never regarded myself as head.

566. Who comes next to Mr. Cooper?—I do.

567. Have you thought of any scheme by which the spread of rabbits might be arrested?—I have thought of two—one to endeavour to secure the assistance of some scientist in Europe for the purpose I have indicated, and the other to seek for a summer poison. I do not see why that should not be done.

568. Have you submitted to the department any practical scheme which you think could be better than the present one?—I have not. The only suggestions I have made have been in my annual report.

569. Do you look upon the evil as an increasing one?—I think it is getting over a larger area.

570. Do you think it is necessary there should be some scheme devised?—Yes.

571. Have the Inspectors reported the large increase of rabbits in the Taieri?—No.

572. Or towards the Mackenzie Country?—Yes; in fact, I was up there myself.

573. Or in the Amuri District?—Yes.

574. And on the east coast of the North Island?—There has been no special report from there. We were aware of the increase, and were continually taking steps.

575. Or about the King country?—No.

576. Then, no steps have been taken by the department to abate the evil where it is known that the pest has increased?—I think, as far as lay in their power, the department have taken steps to stop.

577. What has been done in regard to the King country, for instance?—I am not aware that any steps have been taken, except that special men have been sent up to report on that country.

578. What has been done in regard to the east coast of the North Island?—Ferrets in large numbers have been turned out on the edge of the fence, and there is a man specially employed in watching the fence to prevent any of them getting over.

579. I have been asking these questions *apropos* to your answer just now, that you thought the matter should be left in the hands of the Government, and not to local administration. Do you not think there would be a great difference between a Board elected by ratepayers administering money raised from themselves and the old Boards of administration?—There should be.

580. Would they not take such an interest in the matter as would insure efficiency?—I should think so.

581. Then, it would be good to elect a Board if they administered locally-raised money?—As I have said before, it would apply in some places, but generally it would not.

582. Why?—Because there are so many small owners, and such diversity of interests.

583. Suppose you confined it to the lands of small owners?—Then it might work.

584. In regard to wire-fencing, would not fences be very valuable to work against for poisoning and using ferrets?—Yes.

585. Do you know anything about the fence from Waimate towards the Manawatu River?—I have seen a portion of it.

586. Do you know how that fence came to be erected?—By voluntary contributions.

587. Do you not consider that a remarkable illustration of the advantages of local administration as against Government administration?—There, undoubtedly, it has been a partial success; but, once the rabbits increase in large numbers, I am certain it will not be a permanent stoppage to them. It checks them at present in a great measure.

588. Do you know the number of rabbits that have been killed on the south side of the fence?—A few have been killed.

589. And on the north side?—A few.

590. The actual numbers are eight on the north side and one hundred and twenty recently on the south side. That will go to show that the fence has been an advantage?—Undoubtedly.

591. You think that local administration, if it worked well, would be better than Government administration has been?—That is hardly a fair question.

592. If there had been local administration, would rabbits have been there?—There would not.

593. Then local administration has been a success?—There it has, undoubtedly.

594. *Hon. Mr. Buckley.*] Is it not a fact that, immediately the rabbits in the Waikato country were reported to the department, you were instructed to get the best man in the service and send him up there?—That is Mr. Hargraves.

595. Is he not one of the best men in the country?—He is.

596. And he was sent up at once?—He was.

597. Have you had any report from him?—Not yet.

598. In regard to a portion of the country in the South Island, where it was said the rabbits were likely to come in from the Westland County, did you not get instructions to send a man there at once and create a new district?—Yes.

599. Is not that a good man?—A very good man.

600. And have you not sent instructions to the agents to use the most energetic measures for the destruction of rabbits throughout the country?—Yes.

601. And, as far as the department is concerned, everything has been done that could be done?—It has. In regard to the Waikato country, I was confusing Cambridge with Alexandra.

602. But you had no report up to that time about the spread of rabbits at all?—None.

603. I understand the most stringent rules have been enforced, so far as the Inspectors are concerned?—Yes.

604. You led the Committee to suppose that appointments had been made by the department without reference to you?—There have been one or two.

605. Who are they?—One is Mr. Reynolds.

606. Was his name not submitted to you before he was sent?—No.

607. Is not he a fit man?—Quite, for the appointment.

608. Is not the name of every applicant submitted to you, as to whether he is a suitable person or not?—Not in all cases.

609. Tell me one other?—Mr. Hargraves. I was ordered to send him there; though I grant that a better appointment could not have been made. I might mention another—Mr. Munro.

610. Was it not at your own suggestion that he was appointed?—No, it was not.

611. Is not he a very suitable person?—Yes; and doing well.

612. Were you not away five months, to clean your own district?—Most of the infected part was in the District of Nelson.

613. The whole of the rabbit agents and Sub-Inspectors are now under the control of the Chief Inspector of the district?—Yes.

614. Was not that at your suggestion?—Yes.

615. Is that working well or not?—I do not think there has been time to see whether that is the case or not.

616. Are there not several people breeding ferrets and selling them?—Yes; down at Southland.

617. Are you not aware that several gentlemen have brought ferrets into the country at their own expense, with Government facilities?—Stoats and weasels.

618. We provided the machinery, until the New Zealand Shipping Company refused to bring any more?—Yes.

619. What sort of machinery?—The Agent-General used the same means that were used for the Government importations, and the parties introducing them paid the expense.

620. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Are you aware that in Canada there is a disease amongst the rabbits which is said to be very fatal?—I am not. I have heard that there is in Germany.

621. Have you any reports from other Governments that would give information on this subject?—None.

622. *Hon. Mr. Buckley.*] In reference to the Inspector who was reported for interfering, was he not removed?—He was removed to another district.

623. Has it not come to your knowledge that these diaries are not to be relied upon?—I have never had a case of that sort.

624. Was it not on account of that the agents were placed under the Inspector for the district?—It was so that they could be under their supervision.

625. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have you lately had information of the rabbits in the Waikato?—I knew there were rabbits there three years ago; but it is only lately they have spread beyond the spot where they were.

626. They have been taking steps between Alexandra and Newcastle, and along Waipa, to destroy rabbits?—I do not know that country sufficiently well to place each locality; but I know that a lot of the country has been cleared there, and that the owners have been compelled to keep up to it.

627. Who built the first three miles of the Waimate fence?—The Government, I believe. It was before my time.

628. Do you know why it was built?—To stop scabby sheep from the Wairarapa.

629. Who put the netting on?—That I cannot say. I believe it was those who taxed themselves for it.

Mr. G. S. Cooper: The fence was taken by the Government, and when it was decided to make it rabbit-proof the Government imported a large quantity of wire-netting and put up three miles, and then the sheep-farmers interested in the expulsion of rabbits raised a voluntary rate among themselves, and appointed a committee, and the Government handed them over all the remainder of the wire-netting and other material, and they have carried it on since. A sum was also afterwards given as a subsidy.

Hon. the Chairman: If the Government thought it necessary to put up a rabbit fence, and commenced to do so, why did they not go on with it?

Mr. G. S. Cooper: I am not quite sure about that. It was in Sir John Hall's time, when he had Mr. Maunsell working with him.

630. *Hon. the Chairman* (to witness).] Do you think it desirable that some steps should be taken to import weasels?—I do, certainly; and intended suggesting, if I had an opportunity, that one or two islands which are a good distance from the mainland should be devoted to their breeding.

631. Do you think the difficulty of getting them out is insuperable?—I am not prepared to say. There are only three vessels that we can bring them out in—the “Ionic,” “Doric,” and “Coptic.” They have special accommodation for such purpose.

632. Have attempts been made to make arrangements with other boats?—No.

THURSDAY, 3RD JUNE, 1886.

Mr. BAYLY further examined.

633. *Mr. Lance.*] To sum up the whole matter, the position is this: We want to stamp out rabbits in the country, or as nearly as practicable. Can you suggest any means—I do not care what—which would be likely to tend more quickly to that result than the present one?—I think I have already made one suggestion which tends in that direction—to offer a large reward to see if some one could not discover some disease with which to inoculate the rabbits. I think we ought to have a detached department, where everything connected with the working of poisons and destroying rabbits could be carried out. If we could find a summer-poison it would go a great way towards the matter. When I was down south I made it my business to see Professor Ivey, at the Lincoln College; and I believe that experiments could be made there at a minimum cost, as they have all the appliances. The remedies, however, would have to be taken to the infested country, and tried there by practical men. Another means would be to get a shipment of stoats and weasels and put them on an island, to see if we could not breed them. As far as our present system is concerned, if carried out strictly, I know of no improvement.

634. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You think that the system at present adopted with regard to the Inspectors and agents, if properly carried out, is sufficient?—I do. I know of no improvement.

635. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] And yet the rabbits are not the least on the decrease?—They were till this summer.

635A. It does not speak much for the system, I think?—This summer was a very extraordinary one.

636. If this is a mild winter they will go on increasing just the same?—No; I do not think so. A complete sweep could be made if simultaneous action were taken. That is one thing, however, which is improving every year: the people are becoming more practical, and the system is being better carried out every winter.

637. *Mr. Dodson.*] The men you employed to bring out the stoats and weasels were experts?—Yes. They were very successful in bringing them out.

638. Have you had any difficulty in breeding them in this country?—I often conversed on that subject with the men who brought them out, and they said it was impossible. One of them said that on one occasion he reared by putting young weasels to a cat till they were six months old; and then they became as untamable as wild ones.

639. If they were isolated where they would not be disturbed, and where cairns and stones were thrown together for their shelter—which they like—and proper food supplied to them, how do you think that would answer?—They would do very well on an island. I am of opinion that, if we could get trappers, we could catch a few weasels on this lake peninsula, if we could find men similar to the men who brought them out.

640. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Supposing there were no rabbits to deal with at the present time, I imagine you would be able to reduce the staff in connection with the Sheep Act?—Decidedly.

641. If the control of the rabbit nuisance were handed to trustees who should have the power to levy rates for the purpose of carrying out the Act, there will be a great reduction in the rate for the Sheep Act if that Act were not actually handed over to the trustees to deal with?—There would be a great reduction in the staff required, especially now that the colony is almost, if not quite, free from scab.

642. But you would have to keep up a certain staff for the Sheep Act if the Rabbits Department were handed over to another department?—Yes; a certain number would be required, but nothing like the number now in existence.

643. You would then have two independent staffs?—Quite so.

644. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] How many Sheep Inspectors would it take for the whole of the two Islands? Not more than a dozen, I should think?—It would take more than that to protect flock-owners against lice alone. You would also require port inspectors.

645. It seems to me that the Inspectors have easy times of it nowadays?—We could certainly do with far less than there have been necessary to work both Acts.

GEORGE S. COOPER, Under-Secretary, examined.

646. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Has there been any change in the department since the former Committee, similar to the present, was held two years ago?—Not much. There has been a good deal of change of locality amongst the Inspectors—they have been shifted from one district to another; but there has been no material change of any other kind.

647. Mr. Bayly's position is the same?—It is precisely the same.

648. If I understand rightly, Mr. Bayly is not the person to whom matters are referred finally for decision?—No; the Minister is the final authority in every case.

649. Are there any matters over which he has the entire control, or is everything referred to the head of the department?—Everything comes through me in the first instance. I refer anything to Mr. Bayly on which the Minister is likely to require a report.

650. That applies to the appointment and dismissal of officers?—Yes; and authorizing expenditure.

651. Have you had many complaints forwarded of the way in which Inspectors have been carrying out their work?—Yes, several.

652. To what districts do they relate?—There were some complaints from the Waihemo District, in the north of Otago, and also from Lawrence, in the Tuapeka District. I do not think there have been any substantial complaints from any other place.

653. What was the nature of those complaints?—Chiefly of partiality on the part of the Inspectors in the carrying-out of the Act.

654. Partial action?—Yes. That is to say, that they enforced the Act stringently and severely in some cases, whilst in others they were not so strict; and, speaking generally, the charge was that they let off the large proprietors, and were "down" upon the small holders.

655. Did you make inquiries into those complaints?—I did into some of them which were referred to me for the purpose.

656. Was there good ground for them?—I think not. I made a report, which is now in type, and I can put it into the hands of the Committee this afternoon if desired.

657. You think, on the whole, they acted with impartiality?—I do. That is the conclusion I came to.

658. Were there complaints that the Inspectors were not sufficiently careful about compelling persons to kill rabbits on runs generally?—Yes.

659. From what part?—The same district—about Palmerston.

660. Was there any general expression of opinion that the Inspectors did not require persons to kill rabbits generally?—No, I do not understand that to be the case in a general way; it was in these two particular districts.

661. For instance, in the Marlborough District had you any complaints that the department was not taking proper steps on lands over which they had control, or were failing to request owners to kill?—No.

662. Was there no complaint in regard to the Clarence runs?—There have been complaints lately; but the increase of rabbits took place before the department took charge of them. Since then there has been a heavy expenditure going on in tackling the rabbits.

Hon. the Chairman: The complaint was that the department did not step in and undertake the destruction of rabbits as early as it should have done.

Hon. Mr. Buckley: Under the Sheep Act the department has power to enter upon a run for the purpose of curing scab; but we had no power to interfere with rabbits. We took possession of the sheep for the purpose of cleaning them. That is the difficulty we encountered there.

663. *Hon. the Chairman.*] But surely, if you knew there were rabbits on the land in large numbers, the department was authorized by the Act to undertake their destruction?

Hon. Mr. Buckley: No.

664. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Not if the occupier or owner neglects to do so?

Hon. Mr. Buckley: In this case we could not find the actual owner or occupier. That was the difficulty.

665. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you not think it is necessary that such power should be provided?

Hon. Mr. Buckley: Very likely we may ask for such provision this session.

666. *Hon. the Chairman* [to witness]. Scab is much reduced in the colony?—Yes, it is almost exterminated.

667. Have you still as great a staff of Inspectors under the Sheep Act as you had for sheep purposes?—Pretty nearly.

668. Do you think it is necessary to keep up that staff?—No; I think we shall soon be able to reduce it very considerably.

669. Of course the question then arises as to what you propose to do in reference to the rabbits. I understand that a Sheep Inspector at present is also a Rabbit Inspector?—Yes.

670. If, therefore, you abolish Sheep Inspectors, provision would have to be made for Rabbit Inspectors?—I may modify the answer I gave just now. In the South Island, on account of the rabbits, the staff will hardly be capable of reduction at all, and probably we may have to increase the department; but in the North Island I think reductions could be made.

671. How will you be able to diminish the sheep expenditure and, at the same time, carry on the destruction of rabbits?—In regard to rabbits, the expenditure must go on, and the officers must be paid so long as the present system continues.

672. Do you think the present system is the best that could be adopted?—I am not quite sure. I think there is something in a suggestion I have heard made to the effect that local Boards should be appointed to administer the Rabbit Act in certain districts in the Middle Island; but those Boards should not be elective, but nominated, because if members are elected they are sure to be partial, and the Act will not be enforced, whereas, if nominated, no man can threaten them with his vote or those of his neighbours, and they could properly carry out the provisions of the Act. It has been found in practice that the elected Boards were an absolute failure.

673. That is, in past years?—Yes.

674. By whom should they be nominated?—By the Government, I suppose. One would have to consider that question very carefully.

675. Do you mean that these districts should be what are termed subject to trustees, who should have the power of levying rates for the purpose of carrying out the Act?—Either that or give them the sheep-rate.

676. You would not expect that the district should raise another rate for the purpose of killing rabbits while paying heavily for sheep?—I should hand over the sheep-rate to the trustees, or abolish that, and let them levy a rabbit-rate.

677. You do not think it would answer to make use of the present local Boards, such as County Councils and Road Boards?—No; they would not be likely to administer the Act properly.

678. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] Do you not think it desirable that, whatever body may administer the Act, settlers should have the power of compelling that body to perform its duties and administer the Act without favour or affection?—No doubt.

679. At present it is not the case?—At present the settlers have no right to say anything.

680. And the Act is administered partially?—It is said so. I am not sure that it is so. I am not prepared to admit that.

681. *Captain Russell.*] Do you not think there might be smaller districts under direct Rabbit control, reporting to the central Board: for this reason—from the report that was read by the Chairman this morning apparently there was no notice taken of a large part of Otago where rabbits are said to exist?—The report which has just been read is the report of the Chief Inspector for the whole of the District of Otago. In a large district there are a considerable number of Inspectors who have each a district of their own. That report is only a digest of the reports of these officers.

682. And do they report?—They are supposed to report to the Chief Inspector of their district. They send monthly diaries always.

683. You think that administration by elected Boards has failed in the past. Those Boards, however, did not raise rates?—In some cases they did, but in many cases they did not do a thing.

683A. Do you happen to know whether in cases where they raised rates they administered efficiently?—I think they did in one or two cases—in Hawke's Bay, for instance.

684. Would it be different if you had local bodies elected for the express purpose of raising rates? Would they not see that the Act was carried out efficiently?—I think that it is probable that what did happen will happen again. That is to say, the people elected will in many instances be large holders of property, and they will not rate themselves. Speaking from memory, I believe there were only rates raised in the Counties of Vincent and Waipawa.

685. But is not the sheep-farming class much more alive to the danger of rabbits now than in those days?—They should be.

685A. And is it supposed that nominated bodies do their work and represent public opinion as thoroughly as elected bodies?—Probably not in some places, but in the administration of an Act like this I think they would.

686. Do you think it would be possible to create some separate official in the Colonial Secretary's department or other department in whom should centre all sheep and rabbit matters? In other words, are not your duties so multifarious that you cannot give undivided attention to this important branch?—You will understand that my work is only the correspondence. Mr. Bayly is the responsible head of the department for the carrying-out of the Act. He is over the heads of all the officers.

687. And you see no objection to all the correspondence remaining in your hands?—No: there are two separate clerks in the office performing the work of this branch under my general supervision.

688. Then you think it unnecessary to have a man in the Colonial Secretary's department whose time should be entirely devoted to sheep and agriculture?—There is now a separate Agricultural Department.

689. Would it not be well to establish a separate bureau, in which all these questions should be centred?—That may be. I do not know whether it would not be better to hand the whole stock question over to the Agricultural Department.

690. *Hon. Mr. Buckley.*] What do you mean in regard to the Act being administered partially?—I said that it had been administered impartially so far as I know.

691. Have not instructions been sent to the Inspectors to administer the Act without fear or favour?—Yes. The instruction has always been to administer the Act without fear, favour, affection, or malice.

692. And to strictly carry out the provisions of the Act?—Yes, certainly—impartially and strictly.

693. *Hon. Mr. Larnach.*] Do I understand from the tenor of your remarks that the districts as situated now are too large?—No. I think they are pretty large, but they would be inconvenient if too small.

694. There is a greater difficulty in keeping mountainous country clear of rabbits than level?—That is the difficulty.

695. You are aware that in the South the country is very mountainous?—Yes.

696. You think if the districts were reduced in size the difficulty would be got over better?—No doubt it would be desirable to cut them up into smaller districts, if it was the duty of the department to kill rabbits; but it is only the duty of the department to see that other people kill them.

697. Do you not think that Boards could more easily deal with smaller districts than with districts to the extent to which they now run?—Yes; in the country you speak of no doubt they would. I may mention that I am now getting out the expenditure at present incurred in destroying rabbits on unoccupied Crown lands; also, I can give you the expense of the department generally from last year.

698. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You do divide the expense between sheep and rabbits?—It is impossible to divide the salaries, because a man holding the double office receives only one salary; but the other expenditure is divided.

699. But in other departments you divide the salaries?—In some departments, but not in others. There would be no great object gained.

700. With regard to Mr. Bayly, has he power to dismiss any of his Inspectors if he is satisfied in his own mind that the officer is not carrying out the duties of his position satisfactorily?—No; he would refer the matter to the Minister.

701. You cannot say that his responsibility is unlimited unless he has entire control over his officers?—He has the power of issuing instructions to them, and he could suspend an officer on the spot if he saw reason to do so; but the dismissal or appointment must lie with the Minister in every case.

702. Has any recommendation of his to dismiss an officer ever been carried out?—He has never recommended a dismissal, I think. He has recommended changes in station and promotions and appointments of new men.

703. His recommendations have always been carried out?—Yes

704. Of course you will recognize that a person placed in that position might feel satisfied that a certain officer was not doing his duty, and yet there might be pressure brought to bear to retain him in his place?—Such a thing is possible in all human institutions, but I am not aware of its ever having been done.

705. In regard to the stoats and weasels, can you say whether it is the intention of the Government to continue their importation?—I think the Government would be willing to continue the importation if it were possible; but the owners of the only vessels that are qualified to bring them out have flatly refused to bring out any more.

706. I did not understand from evidence given the other morning that there was no prospect of any more being brought out. I understood it was simply left for persons to make arrangements, but that arrangements could be made?—Arrangements could be made for everything except the ship. The animals and their food and people to take care of them can easily be got.

707. It was mentioned that only three ships could bring them—the “Ionic,” “Doric,” and “Coptic;” but I did not understand that they positively refused to bring any more?—They positively have.

708. Have the Government taken any steps to move in the matter?—No; that was looked upon as conclusive. I am strongly of opinion that no ship whose chief profit arises from carrying passengers will bring out those animals.

709. And it is impossible to bring them out by sailing-vessels?—I should say it would be impossible. The quantity of pigeons that have to be put on board for the animals is something amazing.

710. Mr. Bayly says that a wire-netting fence is practicable, and would have a good result in North Canterbury. Is it intended by the Government to proceed with that?—There has been no decision formed upon it. The question has only been mooted; but I think it is possible that a subsidy may be given.

711. Have you ascertained how the fence at Waimata originated?—Yes; I can give some more information about that. In the first place, the Government erected three miles of sheep-proof fencing on the boundary between the Districts of Wellington and Hawke's Bay, on the Waimate Stream, which runs through land covered with bush nearly down to the sea. There is no great space between the sea and the edge of the bush. The Government ran a three-mile fence from high-water mark into the bush, enough to stop the sheep crossing the boundary. At that time it was not thought of stopping rabbits. The trustees under the Rabbit Act of 1876 had power to levy a rate up to $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per acre; and they did levy a rate, which produced £1,300. They resolved to erect three miles more of fencing, and import wire for the six miles; and they did order the wire, but

before it came out the trustees ceased to exist, and the Government inherited their assets and liabilities. The assets amounted to £2 Os. 6d., and the liabilities consisted chiefly of forty-four coils of wire-netting, ordered of Levin and Co., at £42. The Government paid for this, and used a portion of it for fencing a paddock at the boundary, and the remainder was afterwards handed over to the committee, who were also endowed with £300. The committee afterwards raised £2,500 by voluntary contributions, and the fence is now erected to the extent of eleven miles of completed fence, and two more in hand.

712. What district was rated for that fencing?—The Provincial District of Hawke's Bay generally.

713. The whole of it?—I think so, as far as I am informed.

714. It was simply to protect Hawke's Bay?—Yes; from the inroad of rabbits, with which the Wairarapa was infested.

715. And they were paying sheep-rates at the same time?—Yes.

716. Have they scab in that district?—No.

717. I believe the rate on the sheep far exceeds the expenses?—It exceeds it by some few hundreds of pounds.

718. Have you communicated with any other Governments to ascertain their experience in regard to the treatment of rabbits?—We did some years ago.

719. Not lately?—No.

720. Did you get any information then?—Not much.

721. Would it not be a good thing to communicate again?—I think it would.

722. I have heard it stated that in Canada they have also great difficulty in dealing with the rabbits; and, to a certain extent, they have been able to keep the pest down?—I have not heard of that. It would be very easy to make inquiries.

723. Western Australia, I believe, has also had some communication with Germany on the subject. Would the Government take steps to ascertain?—I think they would if they were applied to. I should like to say a few words with respect to the question asked of Mr. Bayly here, by the Hon. Mr. Menzies, on the subject of the introduction of the marten. That subject was mooted, and a suggestion was made to the Government that it might be a valuable thing to introduce, and letters were written to the Agent-General, in England, and also to Mr. Creighton, who acts in a sort of a way as Agent for the Government in San Francisco. The Agent-General wrote out to say that it might be possible to obtain a few of the marten-cat in Scotland, and they would cost £5 a piece there, exclusive of the expense of sending them out; and Mr. Creighton never answered the letter at all. The Agent-General promised further inquiries, and never wrote again.

Hon. Mr. Menzies: The marten is getting scarce in Scotland, but they are common in California.

Hon. Mr. Holmes: I think Mr. Creighton is away from San Francisco.

Witness: This was two years ago, and he was there then.

Hon. Mr. Menzies: I should think Mr. Creighton ought to have no difficulty in getting them.

724. *Hon. the Chairman.*] The American Government takes great pains to collect information of all descriptions, and they ought to be likely to have information on this subject?—I think so.

725. Would it not be a good thing to employ some one in New Zealand to experiment with rabbits to discover a poison which would be useful in summer, or some other means of destroying them?—It might if you could find a person able and willing to do it, but I am afraid there would be some difficulty about that.

726. There is a gentleman, I believe, in the Agricultural Department (Mr. Reeves), would it not be possible for him to superintend something of the kind?—I do not know what his qualifications may be for a scientific inquiry like that.

727. He may be presumed to be scientific, otherwise he would not be there?—It is a question I could not answer.

728. Did the Government try to bring out stoats and weasels by the "Elderslie," for instance?—No.

729. Have the vessels the same objection to bringing out acids, carbon, or phosphorus?—No; but they are carried on deck, and in bad weather they frequently find their way overboard.

730. The abandoned lands seem to be the chief cause of difficulty in dealing with the rabbit nuisance?—That is because they are the most difficult of access.

731. Then, there are the lands which have never been let, and the commonages?—The lands which have never been let are unfit for occupation, and those which have been abandoned are less unfit, but not good for occupation.

732. Could not a plan be devised in relation to these for working the rabbit?—There are lots of places that you cannot get at. You cannot get phosphorized grain up to the top of these precipitous mountains and crags, and the only way would be to lay a cordon of poisoned grain as far as you can take it.

733. That was recommended by the Committee that sat two years ago. Has it been carried out?—The officers have been instructed to do it, and as far as we know are doing it.

734. *Hon. Mr. Buckley.*] Would you explain about the importation of phosphorus?—At first, when the use of phosphorized grain began to be general, the Government thought it advisable to buy large quantities of phosphorus and keep it in stock, to be issued to the people at cost-price, in order to prevent the excuse that they could not get it. After the first two or three years the Government came to the conclusion that it was not necessary any longer to interfere with the ordinary course of trade. Some people imported it at a much less cost than the Government could have let them have it at, and others went to the trade in the colony. That was as soon as the thing became established. All the Government do now is to keep a stock for their own use in poisoning the Crown lands that they are forced to poison, and they occasionally allow private people to obtain a portion if they want it.

735. *Mr. Lance.*] It seems to me that the Colonial Secretary's Department has very little control over the lands, and that they are almost entirely under the control of the Minister of Lands?—The lands are entirely.

736. Would it tend to the more efficient working of the Act if the department were shifted?—Very likely it might. If it was connected with the Agricultural Department I dare say that it might enhance the efficiency.

737. If Boards were established, with or without rating powers, would it not be necessary to have some absolute head to compel them to work the Act?—Certainly.

738. *Hon. Mr. Larnach.*] What number of animals were brought out by each shipment?—About a hundred and twenty to a hundred and thirty.

739. What was the nature of the objection offered by the proprietors of the steamers?—The inconvenience caused to passengers by the stink.

740. Have you ever asked the company if they would consent to a smaller number being imported at a time?—No; we might do so.

741. Do you not think they would consent to a score at a time?—I think they might, but I have no means of forming a positive opinion.

742. *Mr. Dodson.*] You would want an experienced man to bring them out?—It would, of course, raise the cost per head on small shipments.

743. They are difficult to get?—They are not easy.

744. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you think the system of offering a certain price for the animals on landing would have the effect of assisting their introduction?—It might; but if the ships would take them we could bring them out ourselves much cheaper.

745. What price would they cost?—About £3 10s. per head for stoats and weasels.

746. What would they sell at?—Some sold at £5 per head.

747. *Mr. Dodson.*] Has the Government taken into consideration the possibility of breeding stoats and weasels in this country, and the probable cost?—No; they will not breed in confinement, I believe.

748. What provision was made for a constant supply of feed for them on the Wanaka Peninsula?—There was no provision made. The result would be that they would cross the isthmus and get on to the main land in search of more rabbits and birds, after killing all those on the peninsula.

749. Should not steps have been taken to feed those animals as soon as it was found that the rabbits were getting scarce?—The only way would be to drive the rabbits on again.

750. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Does the Land Department assist you in carrying out the Act; do you find any difficulty in the divided authority?—No; the difficulty is that there is no means of giving the land into the occupation of people for nothing, or at a nominal rent, on condition that they will kill the rabbits.

751. Have you recommended to the Government that provision of that description should be introduced?—It has been recommended over and over again by the Inspectors.

752. If the Rabbit and Sheep Department was handed over to the Agricultural Department, there would still be the same difficulty in regard to the Crown lands?—No; the Agricultural Department is under the Minister of Lands.

753. You are satisfied with the working of the department and the officers?—Yes, I think they work fairly well.

754. You are not prepared to make any recommendation as to a change in system?—No.

755. You do not even recommend the adoption of the proposal in regard to the trusts?—I have not considered it sufficiently. The suggestion that there should be nominated trustees was only made to me a short time ago.

756. Do you take steps to ascertain how the Act is working, or do you wait till complaint is made?—Mr. Bayly is looked upon as the responsible officer, and is supposed to know what every officer is doing, and to report if necessary.

757. And you are satisfied that he does report?—I think he does his work well. I do not say that every officer in the department is perfect. Some are smarter and more energetic than others.

758. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] We know that certain natural substances have a fascination for certain animals, such as valerian for cats, and aniseed and oil of rhodium for certain other animals. We do not know that there is any substance which possesses a fascination for rabbits. Do you think any practical good would arise by referring this matter to the Inspectors, and asking them to make experiments if they had opportunities of doing so?—I think it would be a good idea, but better still to consult a person of experience at Home. The great thing would be to hit upon something to induce rabbits to eat grain when there is an abundance of rich grass.

FRIDAY, 4TH JUNE, 1886.

Inspector FOSTER examined.

759. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You are the Inspector under the Sheep and Rabbit Acts in the Marlborough District?—In the North Canterbury District; and I am also in charge of the Amuri District and Kaikoura Subdivision of the Marlborough District. I am in the position of a Chief Inspector in the Amuri and Kaikoura Districts.

760. And you have under you?—Inspector Clifton at Kaikoura, and Inspector Cook at Amuri.

761. Would you state to the Committee whether, in your opinion, rabbits have increased or diminished during the last two years—since you were before a former Committee?—They have increased in the Amuri District—that is to say, they have come on to the Amuri District from the

Awatere Subdivision. The rabbits that were in the district before have not increased to any great extent. Means were taken to keep them down, except in one corner—the lower portion of the Clarence runs.

762. What in regard to them?—That was a portion of country that was unstocked. It was not till we had our wild-sheep musters on the country that we found the rabbits had increased to such an extent as they had. The silver-greys have crossed the Clarence and gone over the range into the Awatere, and have worked up. Those are what are threatening Canterbury.

763. Mr. Bullen's run has acted as a buffer, you think?—Yes. The rabbits first started from Mr. Kean's run. From there they spread on to Mr. Bullen's run to a very large extent. Mr. Bullen turned out a large number of ferrets, with the result that it has kept the rabbits completely down on the whole of his run; but the ferrets appear to have driven the rabbits over on to the sunny side of the Kaikoura Range—on to the Clarence runs; and from there from the sandy river-bed flats they have crossed the Clarence on to the Keckerangu Run, and spread up to the Elliot River, and over the high portion of the range into the head of the Awatere. Now I may say there is a line of thirty or forty miles where you would find more or less rabbit-signs every two hundred yards. They are not actually numerous, but they are in a line right across the country.

764. These are all silver-greys?—Yes.

765. The ordinary brown rabbit, which is at the mouth of the Awatere, apparently has not mixed with them?—They have not mixed at that end.

766. Do you think the silver-grey rabbits are the hardier and more active rabbits?—They are very similar in their habits. I think the Southland rabbits and Flaxbourne rabbits are the same. But there is another rabbit, supposed to be the tame rabbit gone wild, which is not nearly so bad.

767. There seems no reason to show why the ordinary rabbits should not spread as the silver-greys have done?—I attribute that to this: that the other rabbits are not so hardy, and do not go so high up the ranges. The rabbits have spread across the Conway in a few isolated patches south of Mr. Bullen's, but only in twos or threes. There is a great deal of manuka and fern on it, and I think they have bred before they were noticed by the shepherds. The rabbits will spread in front of ferrets for five or six miles.

768. Do you know why they have not spread in greater numbers?—I attribute that to Mr. Bullen's action in turning out the natural enemy in such abundant numbers.

769. And, again, that the rabbits would not live on the southern face of the range?—Yes; they do not like the damp, shady faces.

770. So that Mr. Bullen's run offered a material obstacle to their getting south?—Yes.

771. What suggestion are you offering now with regard to keeping these rabbits back. I see you mention in your report you consider it a serious matter, the rabbits coming into North Canterbury?—The only suggestion I have to make is in regard to wire-netting fencing. I look upon it as an absolute necessity. Although turning out ferrets, cats, stoats, and weasels, and laying down poison, may destroy the rabbits to a great extent, still it keeps spreading them; and I think the wire-fencing, if properly looked after—say a man placed to watch at intervals of eight or ten miles on the average, according to the country it goes through—would be useful, and assist the natural enemies very much.

772. And do you think it would have the effect of keeping the rabbits out?—I think so.

773. Would not rabbits be able to get over it?—I believe they would burrow under in places if not looked after. But I would have a man along the fence every day, also a man to watch the river flood-gates.

774. By what means do you propose that this fence should be raised?—I have no proposition to make in regard to that. As a Government officer I have nothing to do with the finance.

775. You say the rabbits have increased during the last two years in one particular part of the Clarence runs?—Yes. They are called the Warden and Tytler Runs. The department has possession of the runs now to clean the flocks of scab.

776. Who is now killing rabbits there?—The department.

777. When did you take that over?—On the 22nd February last.

778. Was there any delay on the part of the department from any cause in taking it over or seeing that the rabbits were being killed?—I should hardly say there was any delay. I reported the matter to the Government immediately; and the difficulty was to ascertain our position—whether the power to take possession to clean flocks constituted the department occupiers of the run within the meaning of the Rabbit Act.

779. When did you take it over under the Sheep Act?—I obtained an order on the 19th February, and we commenced work on the 22nd in regard to the sheep. The next day I reported the matter to the Colonial Secretary in regard to the rabbits, and asked the question respecting the point indicated. While the question was being considered in Wellington we were making arrangements with regard to purchasing grain, ferrets, and so on. Really I could hardly say there was a day lost.

780. How long would it take you to get your supplies over there?—It is a very difficult matter. We first had to cart the grain over from Kaikoura, eighteen miles, and pack it over a range at £7 per ton; and from there to where the rabbits are worst it is a day and a half's packing again. The contractors killed three or four horses on the work.

781. Whom have you in charge there now?—Inspector Clifton is the manager both for rabbits and sheep. He is a very good officer, and has a man named Adair to see that the poisoning is carried out. They commenced poisoning at the latter end of April.

782. What means have you used for destroying rabbits?—When the ground is suitable for poisoning, that is the main thing we use—that is to say, when the feed is sufficiently short. We found the silver-greys take the wheat better than the oats; but in the Awatere the brown rabbits take oats better than wheat. Then I advocate the turning-out of natural enemies in large numbers at proper seasons.

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.

813. His duty should simply be to see that the Boards were working efficiently?—Yes. There are so many different kinds of country to deal with in New Zealand that I do not see how, in a comprehensive system of wire-netting fencing, it could be properly controlled by one or two men. The local people should be the best judges of where the fences should be.

814. Have you had any experience of wire-netting?—Very little. I have only seen it at Starborough; and it seemed there to be effectual. They were successful in fencing in a paddock and eating down the country with sheep, and then poisoning it.

815. How is the fence formed?—I think they use 3ft. 6in. netting, sunk 6in. in the ground.

816. Is that the only description you have seen?—Yes.

817. Have you ever heard of rabbits going over it?—I cannot say that I have. I have heard of them going over a fence of 2ft. by jumping.

818. Is there a large portion of unoccupied Crown lands and reserves in your district?—The only unoccupied part is at the summit of the range—36,000 acres—and there is practically no grass on it, and there are no rabbits there. We have a number of small reserves about the township, and they are poisoned regularly.

819. Then there are no unoccupied lands in your district about which you have any difficulty in keeping down the pest?—No.

820. Have you to report any cases in the district where you have called upon the owners of land to kill the rabbits, and in which no attention has been paid to the order?—None, further than those I have regularly reported. The Magistrate's Court sits every three months, and for the last two or three Courts I have had about five or six cases; and in almost all cases the defendants have been fined £1 or £2.

821. You have no difficulty in obtaining proof of breaches of the Act?—Not as a rule. We have two or three cases pending now that were adjourned for different reasons.

822. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] Have you any rabbit in your district similar to the rabbit of Southland?—I think not.

823. Was the Act suspended in the case of the run held by the Bank of New Zealand for some time?—That would be the Clarence runs we have possession of now. There was an order to destroy rabbits, the same as in regard to other runs, and it is only recently we found we had to proceed further. In that instance the owners of the run during the last two or three years have turned out seven or eight hundred ferrets each year, and we considered it sufficient, as there was a marked diminution of rabbits until last season.

824. We had it in evidence that when the Bank of New Zealand held that run the Act was suspended?—It has never been suspended at all. In the case of that particular run the manager had an order to destroy rabbits, and an information was pending when the runs were abandoned.

825. Do you think the minimum fine for breaches of the Act should be increased?—£1 or £2 is quite sufficient for the small farmer to pay; whereas in the case of the Clarence Run, for instance, £50 would not, perhaps, be too much to pay.

826. Would you recommend that there should be a change in the Act, to regulate the amount of the fine in proportion to the size of the property?—I think that might be done; also according to the evidence brought forward.

827. Would you recommend the importation and breeding of stoats and weasels by the Government?—I would, certainly. I have a strong opinion that they are by far the best to be turned out.

828. Being natives of a very cold climate they would suit the colder districts of this country better than any enemies of the rabbits we could introduce?—I think so. But I do not think they would breed in confinement.

829. They could be placed on an island at liberty?—Possibly in that case they might.

830. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] You do not know of any instance where they have been bred in the colony?—No.

831. Are the rabbits in the Awatere of a different breed from those in the South?—I think they are the same.

832. Do you look forward to rabbits being exterminated in the colony?—That is a very large question; but I think it is to be done only by natural enemies and wire-fencing, and poisoning where it can be carried out.

833. You would rely principally on poisoning on accessible ground, and natural enemies where it is difficult of access?—Yes.

834. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Would you recommend the use of wire-netting only as a stop to rabbits spreading on to country not now infested by them?—I should cut up every infested district with wire-netting fences; but I look upon the wire-netting more as an aid to the natural enemy.

835. So as to confine the rabbits, and prevent the necessity of the natural enemy travelling over so much country?—Yes; and preventing their spreading backwards and forwards.

836. What would you do in regard to streams, some of which may be crossed by a dry shingle-bed, and others may be roaring torrents?—That would be the greatest difficulty to contend with. I should keep a man to watch, and also put the fence on the side where there were the fewest rabbits.

837. While it would be possible to do that where large objects are to be gained, do you not think this enormous expense would be an insuperable difficulty in attempting to divide the districts so minutely as you seem to think would be prudent?—I have little knowledge of the Otago District; but it appears to me that if you do not do this you are giving the country to the rabbits. Something must be done.

838. In the Wairarapa, where the rabbits are spreading all over the country, it is found that poisoning, followed up by the natural enemy, has thoroughly settled the question. Notwithstanding that, would you still advocate the enormous expense in subdividing such a country as that?—I would, because where they have been successful in clearing one district you will find that there is

an increased area to be dealt with next year all round. If it were found that the natural enemy in those particular districts had the effects you would not require wire-fencing.

839. I suppose you have read Mr. Bayly's report?—I have only glanced it through this morning.

840. He says, "I am satisfied no scheme has been propounded which will effectually deal with the question." Do you believe that?—I do not know what schemes have been propounded.

841. I would call your attention to the experience of Mr. Bullen's run?—Ferrets and poisoning have been decidedly successful there.

841A. In that case, then, you would not agree with such a dictum as laid down here?—It is simply a matter of degree as to the measures taken, for it has been abundantly proved that natural enemies and poisoning will effectually clear the country of rabbits.

842. You have heard of rabbits being turned into a ferret-box and the ferrets not touching them?—I was told by a thorough breeder of ferrets at Kaikoura that he had done it. I have no doubt it was a fact.

843. You did not inquire whether they were buck-ferrets or indiscriminately male and female?—No.

844. What would be the position of the Inspector if, after issuing an order to kill the rabbits, and from bad grain or other cause the rabbits were not killed?—He would say that the order had not been carried out efficiently.

845. *Mr. Fulton.*] How is the Act working among the small agricultural settlers in the Kaikoura?—Fairly well. We have given them orders to destroy rabbits ever since the Act was in force, but it is only recently that we have found it necessary to proceed further. The great point they make is regarding the wording of one of the clauses—"If in the opinion of the Inspector there shall still be rabbits;" and I believe Judge Richmond laid it down that the opinion of the Inspector cannot be upset.

846. Do they complain that the rabbits are driven on to their farms from the adjacent country?—Yes.

847. From the adjacent high country?—No; I do not think there is any complaint of that sort.

848. *Captain Russell.*] Why is it necessary to keep constantly turning out supplies of ferrets if they breed well?—Because they are delicate, and perish from the climate.

849. You think, therefore, they would never become a nuisance if the rabbits were killed out?—Yes.

850. There is no danger of their becoming a nuisance as the rabbits are now?—I do not think they would become a nuisance. In any case they would be very easily dealt with.

851. You spoke of cats being valuable natural enemies?—They do a great deal of destruction among young rabbits. Old cats will bring young rabbits to their kittens night after night. The best way to turn out cats is to get a she-cat that has just kittened, take her out to a colony of rabbits and feed her two or three times in a box, and the young ones grow up wild.

852. Have you thought out the principal lines where you would recommend putting the wire-netting fences?—I cannot say I have. It would be necessary for two or three practical men to go over the country with the owners.

853. It would be necessary for local Boards of Advice with powers of administration to decide where these fences should go?—I think so.

854. Do you find that the owners are taking more interest in the subject of rabbit administration than years ago?—Yes, from necessity.

855. Their pockets are being touched?—Yes.

856. Do you imagine that the elective Boards under present circumstances would be more efficient than formerly?—I had no experience of them under the 1881 Act. I have not thought out the matter of Boards minutely.

857. You think the desire would be to make the Act, however stringent, work well?—I think so.

858. Supposing the Board system to be adopted, would it be wise to exempt all the very small owners from rates, and allow the election to be made from owners, say, of above five hundred sheep?—I should certainly exempt the owners of flocks under five hundred from taxation.

859. Would it be regarded as a hardship by the small owners not to have a vote in the Boards?—I should think not.

860. Would it be possible for the Inspector to be *ex officio* chairman of a Board of Advice?—I have hardly thought that out.

861. *Mr. Lance.*] Am I right in supposing that you are of opinion that, if a really vigorous policy in regard to this rabbit question, combined with considerable expenditure, were carried out, the rabbits would be reduced to such a minimum that they would practically cease to be a pest to the country?—There is such a possibility, undoubtedly, and I believe it can be done.

862. It appears that the Colonial Secretary's department has no power to deal with reserves and unoccupied lands. Supposing the department was transferred to the Land Department, and these lands were put into occupation by somebody, would that be an assistance in putting the Act in force?—It would be an assistance to have the lands occupied, so that the Inspector could have somebody to go upon, undoubtedly; but it might be difficult to induce people to take up these lands.

WEDNESDAY, 9TH JUNE, 1886.

Inspector FOSTER further examined.

863. *Mr. Lance.*] I should like to ask the witness to tell the Committee in a few words what measures he would propose to adopt in order to keep rabbits substantially in check in the colony?—First of all I should encourage the breeding of natural enemies in every possible way, and devise a system of wire-netting fences, wherever practicable, for the assistance of the natural enemies. I think I have already stated in my evidence my opinion in regard to this subject.

864. Supposing local Rabbit Boards were created, how ought they to be worked in relation to the Inspectors?—The Boards should have control over all expenditure, and the Inspector should be instructed to carry out their instructions in that respect; but I do not think the Board should have any further control over the Inspectors in connection with carrying out the Act.

865. Do you think the Boards should have the right to levy rates, or should the levying be made compulsory by the Government?—I think a minimum rate should be compulsory; but the Board should have power to increase that amount up to a certain limit in case further funds are required.

866. And the rate should only be collected in country infested with rabbits?—I think it should be left to the Colonial Secretary's Department to decide what localities should be formed into rabbit districts. I should not leave it to the people themselves, because the scheme might fail as in the case of the Act of 1880, and Boards would not rate themselves in some cases.

867. How about the rate in the case of a district not infested with rabbits, but threatened with them?—There should be some power to rate those districts to pay one-half the cost of the fence, as it would be mainly for their protection.

868. Have you any idea what amount would be raised per annum in a district now infested, say at $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per sheep?—I think there are some 8,500 owners altogether. The latest returns I could get were for 1884, and these showed that of this number 5,500 owned under five hundred sheep; and, averaging those flocks at three hundred, it brings it to a little over a million and a half; that leaves thirteen million to be rated supposing the whole country was declared into rabbit districts. I believe it would be about ten million. I would suggest that the rating should be by acreage, not on the sheep; and I average roughly that in New Zealand, leaving out the small farms, it takes two acres to graze a sheep; therefore the rate would be equal to $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per sheep, and that would make about £20,000.

869. If that were subsidized pound for pound by the Government it would yield about £40,000. Is that sum anything like sufficient to start with for the first year, so as to deal out vigorous measures?—I am not able to judge very well, as I have not had the opportunity of seeing what would be required, but I should think it would not be sufficient. It would go a great way though. I should expect that a great deal of private expenditure, however, would be going on at the same time; but one-half of that private expenditure is at present thrown away, through not having simultaneous action, and want of knowledge as regards the natural enemy.

870. The construction of the two fences which you have so strongly advocated—from Lake Tennyson down the Clarence, and one or two in South Canterbury—would cost £20,000, I should think?—Probably.

871. So that there would only be £20,000 left for the rest of New Zealand, at the rate of $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per acre?—Exactly.

872. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] Why do you consider that owners of flocks under five hundred should not be rated?—Small farmers, as a rule, do not suffer much from the rabbits, except from infested hill-country adjacent to them. They also think that the present sheep-rate is enough for them to pay.

873. *Hon. Mr. Robinson.*] Which would be the fairest way to levy a rate—upon the value of the land per acre or the sheep in the district?—On the land, I think.

874. In that case, what would you do with regard to the land belonging to the Crown, and at present used for grazing sheep? Would you allow leasehold land to go scot-free?—I believe it is proposed that Government should subsidize at the rate of pound for pound, which would represent their liability for the rate on the leasehold land.

875. You would not propose to tax the sheep at all on Crown lands?—I think so.

876. How?—I should say that the holder of the lease of the land should also pay a rate, though a smaller one than on the freehold.

877. How are you going to get at that rate?—If you strike a certain rate on the freehold, then you might decide on a half or a quarter of that amount for the leasehold.

878. Then you would tax the leasehold lands?—Yes.

879. Do you think the officers who have been carrying out the Sheep Act are eligible as Rabbit Inspectors?—That is a question that I cannot answer, because I know so few of the officers of the department; but I know there are some among them who would be the very best men you could get for the position.

880. Do you think a wire-fence will keep the rabbits back?—I think so, if properly looked after.

881. What sort of a fence would you put up?—Judging from what I have read in the *Australian*, and from conversation with other people, I believe it should be a 3ft. 6in. fence, with 6in. sunk in the ground.

882. If wire-fencing is to be adopted, would it not be desirable to procure officers who possess a practical knowledge of such work?—It would be desirable to have men who had had such experience.

883. It is held that, if you put a fence down vertically underneath the ground, it would not stop a rabbit ten minutes, but if you sunk it a little, and then straightened out the wire at right angles to the fence, it would prove more efficacious?—I think rabbits generally do not burrow at a distance from an obstacle, but go straight to it.

884. Are the rabbits increasing in Amuri and Kaikoura?—They are spreading rather than increasing in numbers.

885. It is only lately you discovered rabbits in the Acheron?—Quite recently. We had no intimation from the owners of the runs in that country.

886. Do you consider that the eradication of scab and the extermination of the rabbit can be carried out efficiently by the same set of officers?—I should think so, because in a few months we shall have got rid of scab altogether, and then the work will be lighter.

887. Have you ever been in Flaxbourne?—Yes.

888. How are the fences put down there?—I have not been there for the last eighteen months, and I do not know.

889. You do not know that the rabbits are practically exterminated there?—I have heard that Mr. Vavasour has done excellent work there.

890. Is it not desirable that the Inspector should reside on the spot that he superintends?—Yes; the nearer to his work the better he could do it.

891. *Hon. the Chairman.*] It would be as well if you explained in what respect you found the Act insufficient for giving you power to take over the run that has been formerly mentioned at this Committee for the purpose of rabbit-killing?—The question I asked the Government was this: Whether the department being in possession of the run for the purpose of cleaning sheep constituted us occupiers of the land within the meaning of the Rabbit Act. The question was put to the Crown Law Officers, and it was decided that we were not occupiers of the land for that purpose; and, consequently, I then gave the requisite notices to all parties interested to at once kill the rabbits.

892. I was asking that question in reference to a complaint that the Government neglected to do anything for a whole month, and thus allowed the rabbits to increase to a greater extent than they would have done?—It is really not a fact. There was no delay. We at once began to make our arrangements, and could not possibly have acted more expeditiously if we had received our instructions immediately.

893. You say the Inspectors have no power to compel persons to poison simultaneously?—We can only give a person an order to take immediate steps to destroy rabbits.

894. Have you issued many notices in your district in reference to killing rabbits?—About eighty have been issued in the Kaikoura District; and every one who has rabbits in the Amuri District has been served within the last two months.

895. If you sent notices to certain owners to poison at a certain time, and not to those adjoining them who had no rabbits, you would take the latter off their guard, and would afford an opportunity for the rabbits to spread on to their land?—It would certainly be as well to put such owners on the alert; but we have no power under the Act to give them notice. I would like to suggest that a penalty of not less than £5 should be provided for not reporting the existence of rabbits on a property. That is a great difficulty we have to contend against in regard to back rough country in the vicinity of rabbit-infested country.

896. *Mr. Kerr.*] What would you do in cases where the owners themselves did not know there were rabbits?—We should have to adduce evidence in all cases that the owner does know.

897. You do not believe that rabbits are carried from one spot to another?—It is notorious in the Kaikoura District that such has been done; but these are cases in which you cannot trace the offenders. A man confessed to me that four or five years previously he had turned out rabbits.

898. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have you anything to suggest to prevent that sort of thing?—I would suggest imprisonment instead of a fine. I would like to add that I am also in favour of the prevention of trapping. It has the effect of destroying a great many ferrets.

FRIDAY, 11TH JUNE, 1886.

Mr. G. S. COOPER further examined.

Mr. Cooper: I should like to be able to explain that the Inspectors are instructed never to employ legal assistance without first applying for authority to do so. Secondly, they are never to apply for that authority unless they are aware that the other side is also employing legal assistance.

899. *Mr. Kerr.*] But, as a matter of fact, they do it?—Those are the instructions they have. I cannot say how they carry them out.

900. *Mr. Cowan.*] Is frequent application made to the department for leave to employ legal assistance?—Yes; it is frequently done.

901. *Mr. Kerr.*] You cannot tell what it has cost the other side?—No. I could ascertain what the Government expenses are, but not the defendants'. I may add that there has been a correspondence arising out of a complaint made by some people—I believe it was at Lawrence; and it was that which gave rise to the instructions I have mentioned. They complained that it was hard that the Inspector employed a solicitor even in undefended cases.

902. *Hon. the Chairman.*] If the Inspector wins the costs are paid by the defendant: therefore it may happen that you have no knowledge of what the cost actually is?—I have not the least idea. All I can tell is the cost to the colony. They are also instructed to send extracts of newspaper reports of all cases; and they do so.

903. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] Then you have only a record of the expenses of the Government?—I could pick out the amount in cases where the Government had to pay costs.

904. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you not think it would be desirable for the department to draw up a circular, to be sent round, explaining matters regarding legal assistance?—Yes. They have had that circular; but we can remind them of it on the ground that there is reason to believe they had disregarded the previous one.

905. Would it not also be wise to let the outside world know that there is such a rule in force?—It might be so.

906. Do you not think an Inspector should entirely set aside any personal feeling, and act impartially?—Yes.

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

are useless?—No; what they say is that the Inspectors are not doing their duty, and in some cases they are exceeding it.

940. You do not mean to say the settlers think the Inspectors ought to be done away with altogether?—Yes; many of them feel very strongly in that direction.

941. They feel they could manage better by themselves?—Yes.

942. And you think they would?—My opinion is that a nominated Board would be the best.

943. If the Inspectors were dismissed, would it be absolutely necessary to have a Board or some authority that would compel them to continue exterminating?—Certainly.

944. You would not leave them to do it themselves or not as they liked?—The Board should have the same powers as the Inspectors.

945. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] Are you of opinion that a nominated Board would be better than a Board elected from payers of a rabbit-rate?—I think a nominated Board would be best; they would not be liable to pressure.

946. Who is to have the nomination?—The Government.

947. How do you propose the bonus should be given—for the purchase of rabbit-skins or for a shipment?—Either would do. In some places you would have to pay more on account of the rabbits becoming scarcer, so that it would be better that the Board should pay the bonus.

948. What kind of natural enemies do you propose introducing?—Ferrets have been a success in a good many parts of the Tuapeka County—at Tapanui, for instance, they have been found to be very destructive.

949. Has not the mongoose been introduced?—Yes, on Cargill and Anderson's run.

950. Have weasels done any work?—I believe some have been liberated at Moa Flat Station, and I understand they have been a success.

951. Which do you consider the best?—I am not able to express an opinion as to their respective merits.

952. Is there not a good deal of mortality among the ferrets?—That I cannot say. I know several runholders are very anxious to procure ferrets.

953. Would you be in favour of the Government introducing stoats and weasels, that are known to stand the climate better than anything else, and to be more effective?—I think it would be desirable to have natural enemies of each kind as a test which was best.

954. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Would you leave private individuals to introduce natural enemies as they thought fit?—The Government should supply these natural enemies to any one who is desirous of obtaining them.

955. *Mr. Cowan.*] With regard to the proposed bonus, have you calculated what 3d. per skin would amount to?—I think it would amount to a very considerable sum; I could not now say exactly what it would be. The larger the better, I should say, for the time being.

956. Nine million skins at that rate would amount to £112,500?—It would be money well spent. The settlers in my district are willing to contribute.

957. What portion?—I should say a third.

958. I suppose you recollect the time when rabbits were not in Tuapeka County?—Yes.

959. Where do you think they originally came from?—From Clyde and Alexandra; they were at one time very numerous there. It is country rather favourable to the breeding of rabbits.

960. Have you formed an opinion as to the possibility of stamping out the pest at all under the present administration? Is it to be done?—Yes.

961. By the present administration of the Act?—No; I think it would require the alterations I have suggested, and the Boards should have full power to control, with the same powers as Inspectors have.

962. *Mr. Kerr.*] What is the best means of destroying rabbits?—You would have to adopt various means. You can only poison in certain seasons; but that is the most effective.

963. You would take the skins to pay for that?—It would be advisable, in my opinion, to apply every possible means to eradicate the pest.

964. *Hon. the Chairman.*] I gather that you think the Act itself is not sufficient in its power, even when properly enforced, to keep down the rabbit-nuisance?—I think the Act itself is very stringent, if applied alike to every one. In our district this is said not to be the case. In one part—Waitahuna—there has never been any attempt to enforce it, the settlers being able to control the pest.

965. You think, if the Act were impartially enforced, it would be sufficient to meet the difficulty?—It would meet it far more than it does at present.

966. Do you think it absolutely necessary that the amendments you spoke of should be adopted?—My opinion is that if after notice has been served on the holder, and nothing being done towards exterminating the rabbits, the Inspector should call at the settler's house and accompany him over the land. Evidence in Court is usually very conflicting as to whether rabbits in numbers are there or not. If the owner is not taking proper means, the Inspector should put on labour to destroy the rabbits, and charge the owner.

967. They can do that already?—But they do not. Another matter the settlers have to complain about is this: When the Inspector proceeds against them, he generally takes a number of cases at a time, and employs the best solicitor to prosecute, and at one time a large fee was charged each defendant, the solicitor making a good thing out of it.

968. Who engages the solicitor in these cases?—The Inspector.

969. On his own responsibility?—Yes.

970. So that, if he failed, he would have to pay for it, not the Government?—That I cannot say.

971. Do you think the suggestions you have made regarding the alteration of the Act and system would be likely to be effective in very high and mountainous country?—Yes; we have in our district a variety of country.

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.

997. Do you think it is possible to keep the rabbits down or exterminate them in your district?—If inducements were offered to kill the young as well as the old the evil would be reduced to a minimum very speedily. It is leaving the young alive that causes the trouble. In the case of very small rabbits they would not take the trouble to skin them: they could cut their heads off. It is not all money sunk: skins will fetch something in the market, but it will be money sunk that is given for young ones.

998. Have any ferrets been turned out in your district to any extent?—Yes, in the Wanaka district. I am told they are all dying from some mysterious disease, something very noisome.

999. It would not be from starvation?—No; it might be from too much food.

1000. Do you think natural enemies are beneficial?—I think their introduction was one of the most dangerous things ever attempted in this country.

1001. Why?—They are not particular what they kill so long as they get blood. I believe there are several instances indeed where they have attacked children. It is very certain they will attack a man. A well-armed man would be required to beat off half a dozen if they attacked him; and if he lay down to sleep they would destroy his life. They also destroy poultry and game.

1002. You do not know of any cases of that kind in your district?—They are quoted as having occurred in the Wairarapa.

1003. With regard to the Act as it stands now, if properly carried out, would it meet the rabbit difficulty?—As it stands now it will never have that effect.

1004. How?—Poisoning is ineffectual during a certain part of the year, while to fail to provide for the killing of young rabbits causes all the mischief.

1005. Under the Act the Inspectors have surely the power to give notice to kill rabbits at any time of the year?—Yes; but that would not compel the killing of the young ones. It is impossible that an Inspector could watch every rabbit, and see that a man does not put back the young when he catches a doe.

1006. Is wire-netting used in your district?—Yes; one very large owner—Mr. Clark, of Moa Flat—has fenced in a large portion of his property.

1007. Are you able to say whether it has proved effective or not?—It is a question really at issue; but the weight of opinion is that he has created a very nice warren, and that the rabbits cannot get out of it.

1008. But it would enable them to be killed better?—Yes.

1009. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] You know the district about Wakatipu, of course. Do you believe that if the rabbiters were paid a fixed price for the skins the rabbits could be exterminated, or, at any rate, greatly reduced in numbers?—No, I do not; the country is too rough.

1010. Do you think poisoning is the only course to adopt in rough and high country?—I can see nothing else.

1011. What would be charged to the Consolidated Fund if a bonus were given of 2d. per skin?—I have been trying to obtain figures as to the quantity of rabbit-skins exported, but I have not been able to do so. There would be very little loss on 2d. per skin.

1012. Supposing ten millions were exported, would it not be necessary to have a much larger export in order to reduce the rabbits materially?—Yes; if you could get rid of twenty millions there would be so many less next year.

1013. Do you think rabbiters would be likely to kill as many as they could in order to obtain a large bonus for a year or two, without looking to the possible diminution of their earnings by the reduction of numbers in subsequent years?—I do; on the same principle that a gold-miner gets all the gold he can out of a claim and lets the future look after itself.

1014. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] Are you aware of anybody who has made use of carrots steeped in arsenic?—I am not aware of any one in my district who has done so.

1015. Has any one tried the plan of wire-netting with large traps at the entrance?—I believe that is the way it has been done.

1016. By laying off a few acres sown with parsley and carrots, and putting a trap at the other side, that would be a good way of killing rabbits in summer time?—Yes; it would catch them all the year round. Whenever they see a green crop they wish to get at it. The experiment has been tried with success at Earnsclough by Mr. Fraser.

1017. *Mr. Cowan.*] You do not look forward to the pest being entirely eradicated?—No; they will always have a certain fixity of tenure in some parts of the country, where you cannot get at them so freely.

1018. Supposing all the energies of the Government were strained in the direction of giving a bonus, and the time arrived when it would not pay to kill rabbits on account of their scarcity, what would be the result if left alone?—In the first place, I do not think the time would ever arrive. If they were left alone for two years they would again devastate the country.

1019. Have you considered the point of giving the administration of the Act to County Councils?—Yes; I think they are the proper bodies to have it. It is impossible that officers living remote from the spot can exercise the same beneficial influence as a local body.

1020. Where the district generally is overrun with this pest, every owner is alive to the necessity of keeping the pest down?—I am positive of it.

1021. It has been shown to us that the cost of rabbit agents amounts to £13,000 a year—men employed under the Inspectors?—I have never heard of any rabbit agents in any district; I do not know them by that name. I have, however, seen men out with the Inspector, who were, I suppose, in his employ.

1022. *Mr. Kerr.*] Do you approve of County Councils being empowered to deal with the rabbit-question, or would you advocate a distinct and separate Board?—I am strongly in favour of handing it over to County Councils. This multiplicity of Boards is a very great nuisance, especially in country districts where the population is scattered. The County Councils are composed of men representing all classes of the community, and if they are not able to cope with the matter it is questionable where you will find a Board of better composition.

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

outside boiler must not be allowed to boil while the oats are in the cylinder. I think it is better to have fresh poison made every time rather than run the risk of laying poison which has been made for some time, as it sours.

1048. Can you make rabbits take poison in the summer?—We tried in 1882, and killed a large number of them. I think in very small quantities they will take it all the year round. I am afraid the only means of destruction in summer is to turn out natural enemies, and employ men to shoot.

1049. You have not tried the natural enemies to a large extent?—Only ferrets.

1050. What number have you turned out?—Several hundreds, and I have sold a great number of them to the settlers around. I sold about a hundred this year.

1051. Have you heard any complaint about the natural enemies?—No.

1052. Do you think there is any danger from them?—No.

1053. You are not afraid of their killing lambs?—No. We have never lost anything through them yet.

1054. Have you any unoccupied lands in your neighbourhood?—There is not much now. I think the land is pretty well all taken up. We have some Native lands.

1055. Are there complaints of rabbits not being killed on them?—I have heard complaints about it, and I think the Inspector is taking steps now.

1056. Do you think it is the duty of the Government to keep down rabbits on unoccupied Crown lands?—Most decidedly.

1057. You think it is a matter of importance?—Unless they do that, our efforts are upset at once.

1058. What would you suggest with regard to the occupiers of Crown lands who have short leases?—Of course short leases mean low rents. I do not think the Government can very well afford to help them; but I think Crown lands should be leased for a definite period, and, if they could not manage that, they could give to some person the right to run stock, on condition that they poisoned the land.

1059. Do you think people would take it up on those terms?—Yes; especially those who adjoin such lands, in order to get rid of the rabbits.

1060. From year to year?—Yes.

1061. Have you tried wire-netting?—No; but I think it ought to be made a legal fence—that is a defect in the Fencing Act—so as to enable you to call on your neighbour to contribute. As regards ourselves, if we had wire-netting we should have no trouble at all. Last winter it only cost about £40 for fencing twenty-four thousand acres.

1062. How do you think the wire-netting would assist you?—If a person had rabbits inside you could kill them.

1063. Do you think the fence would keep out the rabbits?—In a part of our land it would be very difficult to keep them out, but still it would be a great help.

1064. I suppose you have Inspectors in your district?—We have four or five, I think.

1065. Do any of them ever pay you a visit?—They have not had much occasion to do so, but I believe the Inspector passes sometimes. I should like to say I think it is a mistake to expect neighbours to call his attention to the state of a holding: it ought to be inspected by the Inspector.

1066. Are you referring now to vigilance committees?—Yes. If an Inspector were appointed at Dunedin to have the whole control over the Otago District it would be better.

1067. Have you any complaint to make against the Inspector?—No.

1068. You think he does his duty?—I think so.

1069. I notice in the South meetings are held before the end of autumn to arrange for simultaneous poisoning: do you follow that in your district?—They do. In Shag Valley they started poisoning six weeks ago, and we are about to start in our district now.

1070. Has the Inspector power to compel you to poison at any particular time?—He can give notice to start on a certain day.

1071. If they do not comply with that?—I suppose he would take steps against them.

1072. Has any case of that sort occurred in your district?—Not yet.

1073. It is asserted that the Act is so worded that the Magistrates are unwilling to convict, because the language used is so indefinite?—I think one or two cases have been lost through the wording of the Act in reference to the locality; the number of the section or particular gully, it was held, ought to be mentioned in the information, and the notice was held to be insufficient because it did not describe the land.

1074. Objection has also been raised in the Magistrates' Courts to the interpretation of the word "immediately" used in the clause requiring steps to be taken to kill rabbits?—In ten days steps ought to be taken.

1075. You are satisfied with the working of the Act?—So far as I know. A lot of people think it very stringent, and perhaps it is a great power for a man to be in a position to say that you have got rabbits on your land and you cannot say yea or nay.

1076. Do you think any change should be made in the administration of the Act by handing it over to County Councils or local bodies?—No.

1077. Not even to trustees to be appointed?—I think if we had a good Inspector in Dunedin for all Otago it would do away with the necessity for all that sort of thing. To hand the work over to County Councils, &c., would be to create too much local jealousy.

1078. I suppose you would also advocate a central Inspector in other provincial districts?—Yes. Inspectors often say they have telegraphed to Wellington and cannot get a definite answer, and this is a loophole for them. I think it is a hard thing that people should be allowed to grow gorse-hedges to harbour rabbits, and I do not think the clause in the Act is definite enough to prevent it. I have asked a member of the County Council to get these hedges cleared, but the majority of Councillors will not take any steps.

1079. You think there ought to be further legislation to compel County Councils to clear gorse from the hedges?—Yes.

1080. At the present time Road Boards and County Councils have the power to compel persons to destroy gorse on roads?—Yes; but it ought to be made compulsory.

1081. Have you any suggestion to make with regard to the Rabbit Act?—I would like to suggest that the Government should enable persons to get bi-sulphide of carbon at a cheaper rate than at present. It is fully 8d. per pound.

1082. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] Have the Inspectors performed their duties efficiently in your district?—So far as I know, lately, they have done so. I have never had cause to find fault with them.

1083. Would you recommend an increase in the minimum penalty of £1 provided in section 9 for holdings under five hundred acres?—Yes; I think a man would only be too glad to get off for £1 from month to month; £5 ought to be the minimum penalty.

1084. Would not a Board composed of persons immediately interested, and elected from payers of rates, be likely to act more efficiently than the Inspectors?—Yes, I think they would. I would not object so much to trustees so appointed, as to handing over the control to County Councils or similar bodies.

1085. Has the pasture been permanently injured by the rabbits in your district?—No; except where they have cleared the roots out of the land.

1086. Would you recommend that the Government should give a bonus on shipment of skins, without regard to size?—No, I am not in favour of a bonus. I am afraid it would lead to a large expenditure with very little permanent result.

1087. *Mr. McKenzie.*] When the rabbits became a nuisance you took steps to have them destroyed of your own accord?—Yes.

1088. You would have done the same if there was no Rabbit Act or department?—Yes.

1089. And, so far as the department is concerned, you never gave them any trouble?—No.

1090. And they have never given you so much as a notice or found fault with you?—I asked the Inspector to give me one notice in order that he might give a neighbour one at the same time. That is the only one.

1091. And your experience of nine years leads you to believe you can keep down rabbits by systematic work?—Yes.

1092. And if the department says it cannot you do not agree with it?—It is all a matter of expenditure.

1093. Have any of your neighbours bred ferrets?—Not to the same extent.

1094. Can you name any one in the county who has bred ferrets besides yourself?—Not in my district.

1095. Do you think if the other owners of property were doing the same work in the way of breeding ferrets there would be better results?—I think so.

1096. You know, as a fact, that your ferrets are all over the country?—Yes; they have spread very much.

1097. So that adjoining proprietors are getting the benefit of your work?—Yes; that is what I object to. I offered to supply them at cost price; and if I could keep the ferrets to ourselves I would only be too glad.

1098. Can you state how much you have improved the carrying capacity of your run by keeping down rabbits?—By keeping down rabbits and improving the ground, in 1882 we sheared 18,000 sheep; in 1883, 20,500; in 1884, 25,000; in 1885, 27,000; and at present we have about 31,000 or 32,000. We have improved the carrying capacity to the extent of 14,000, and our sheep are in a better condition. Last year we had 9,300 lambs.

1099. What percentage was that?—80 per cent.

1100. The property you manage is a freehold?—Yes.

1101. And most of the adjoining properties are Crown lands?—They are twenty-one years' leases.

1102. Suppose a man had a fourteen years' lease, with only two or three years to expire. At the time he took it rabbits were unknown. Do you think it would be a fair thing for the Government to assist him?—It is a very difficult question to answer. You are supposed to carry your lease through.

1102A. Would it not be an incentive to keep the rabbits down?—No doubt.

1103. Have you in some cases actually cleared your neighbours' land for your own benefit?—In some places I have. My neighbours are only too glad to see my men coming through their ground.

1104. Have you had occasion to draw the Inspector's attention to any country?—Yes; I have drawn his attention several times.

1105. And have they always attended to the matter?—Yes; but it is a mistake to expect a person to draw his attention to this sort of thing: it is a thing I do not like. It is the Inspector's province to see that a person is doing his duty.

1106. In regard to summer-poisoning, you have laid poison at this season?—Yes.

1107. And you believe that by keeping it up you do good?—Yes. I think they will take poison all the year round. In 1882, about December, we killed hundreds in one night. If the poison is well mixed they will pick it out of curiosity.

1108. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What state was the grass in?—There was plenty of feed; they will always pick it whether there is grass or not.

1109. *Mr. Dodson.*] Was the grass dry?—No, it was fairly fresh; we have always plenty of water about.

1110. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] Have you much of your land under cultivation?—About fifteen hundred or two thousand acres.

1111. Is that all that has been sown?—Yes.

1112. How lately?—We started about eleven years ago, and have been carrying it on every year with English grasses.

1113. Has the fact of your sowing it with English grasses been one of the successful elements in enabling you to carry on this work?—Most decidedly it has helped.
1114. What difference has it made?—We have doubled the number of sheep we shear.
1115. What is your usual export of rabbit-skins?—None at all. Since 1882 we have not gathered the skins.
1116. And before then?—One day nine men gathered eleven hundred skins, and on another occasion nine hundred. The skins, however, were a secondary consideration.
1117. Have you ever tried grain slightly malted?—No.
1118. You have heard of such a thing being used?—No, not in our district.
1119. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] Do you think the use of sugar and salt makes the grain more attractive?—In the summer it does. I would put rhodium in, too, at that time.
1120. How much do you call a heap?—Half a teaspoonful. We put it along the ridges and beaten tracks, where rabbits are likely to go at night.
1121. Does it require to be used as soon as made?—I think so; it gets sour after lying in a heap. It is a mistake to leave it lying too long.
1122. Have you ever found the sheep to eat it?—When we first started we lost a few sheep, but since then the loss has been a mere bagatelle.
1123. *Mr. Lance.*] You do not find the rabbiters interfere with the ferrets?—The man I have got is from Home. I would not allow Tom, Dick, and Harry to go out, because I believe they would do it.
1124. Have you heard of any Inspectors compelling runholders to put on rabbiters?—I believe some time ago some of them did so; but a person ought to be left to decide for himself the means he will adopt to exterminate the rabbits.
1125. Do you know for certain whether Inspectors in your district have taken that course?—I know they have called upon people to do it.
1126. *Hon. Mr. Robinson.*] How long has your land been occupied?—It is one of the earliest runs taken up in the Shag Valley.
1127. Does it border on the sea?—No, we are about three miles from the sea.
1128. Is it high country?—The highest top is about 1,800ft.
1129. Is much of the land cultivatable?—We have cultivated all we think it is good enough to do. There are about twenty-three thousand acres of freehold, while the reserves bring it up to twenty-four thousand acres.
1130. Were there rabbits when you first went there?—There were not many. They came on suddenly.
1131. And how many sheep?—About sixteen thousand.
1132. Do you think it is possible to get rid of the rabbits?—I am afraid not entirely.
1133. Do you think that united action would clear the country?—It would on the low ground, but in the high country it would be a very difficult matter.
1134. You never tried to fence in your property?—No; we have a fencing boundary along the Government run now, but it is only a temporary boundary; and this is the fence that has given us most bother. If I had had a proper boundary I should have gone in for that.
1135. Do you think a fence would stop the rabbits?—I think so.
1136. Have you ever seen a fence put up that has stopped the rabbits?—There is only one fence in our district, and I do not think it was intended to stop rabbits, because they put it on the wrong side of the fence, and left the gates open.
1137. Do you know how a fence is put up?—Yes; a person puts it up with a piece of the wire turned outwards, and buried in the ground about six inches.
1138. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Is your country very rough?—Yes; it is nearly all gullies.
1139. Is it a fair sample of the whole country throughout Otago where rabbits are such a great nuisance?—I think it is.
1140. Can you see any reason why the rest of the country could not be cleared in the same way that you have cleared yours?—I see no reason to the contrary. It is all a matter of expense.
1141. Is it the fault of the Inspectors or the Government in not keeping their own lands clear, or of the settlers?—It is all combined. In some cases the Inspectors are not exactly what they should be. We want better men. We have better men in our district than we used to have. It is also a mistake to allow land to be unoccupied.
1142. You consider, then, your district has been, on the whole, fortunate in its Inspectors as compared with those of other places?—As far as I see at present, our Inspectors are doing their duty. They have only been there a short time.
1143. Do you hear complaints as to the Inspectors in other districts?—Several say the Inspectors do not take energetic steps. I quite believe it.
1144. *Mr. Dodson.*] Have you snow in your district?—It is only in the back country.
1145. As a matter of fact, you can ride at any time in your country?—Yes, at any time.
1146. With regard to the preparation of phosphorized oats, you say you have a special appliance?—Yes. I boil the water, and when it comes to the boil I put the cylinder in with the phosphorus and oats, and keep it revolving for some time, after which you take it out.
1147. Is the cylinder half in and half out of the water?—Yes, about three or four inches.
1148. Then, you merely use the water for heating?—Yes.
1149. Does the grain swell considerably under that process?—Yes.
1150. You have never tried whether it sweetened the grain?—No; I know it makes very good poisoning.
1151. *Captain Russell.*] It is said you have been more successful than any others in your district in getting rid of the rabbits?—I have no reason to complain myself; I am content.
1152. You have not been compelled to do this by the Inspectors?—No.
1153. And your neighbours are pleased that you go on their ground to poison their rabbits?—I have never poisoned their ground; but the men go through with guns and ferrets.

1154. If the Inspectors had insisted on your neighbours being as zealous as yourself the nuisance would have been much less?—Yes; I do not suppose I should have had to poison at all.

1155. Then, you admit that the department has not been as successful as it might?—I would not like to say that. The ground behind us has been like Mahomet's coffin—between heaven and earth—and was only taken up the other day, and that is the difficulty I have had to contend with.

1156. But the smaller men who have not been so successful have not been compelled by the department to do anything?—I told the Inspector the other day that he must see they all do it carefully.

1157. Then, you thought it desirable in your individual capacity to urge the Inspector to do his duty?—Yes.

1158. Do you expect you will ever get Inspectors, who receive orders from a distance, to take as active steps as the people interested?—No.

1159. Do you not agree that if there was a local Board elected from men who actually pay the rates they would insist that the Act was carried out?—It would help; the only difficulty I see is from local jealousy.

1160. But would the local jealousy come in if the Board was elected from the actual sufferers, exempting holders under five hundred acres from a vote and from the rate?—I think that might be a good thing. I would be in favour of trustees elected in that manner, but still the fear of local jealousy comes in.

1161. Have you thought whether steps might be taken to prevent rabbits from spreading into districts which up to this time have not been infected?—Yes; districts should have power to spend their sheep-rate for that purpose.

1162. Do you believe it would be possible to stop their further spread for years by erecting fences?—I think so.

1163. Would not the local bodies be the best to take those steps?—Yes.

1164. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Are you aware that under the Act in force previously to the present one it was the duty of the County Councils to enforce the Act where necessary?—Yes.

1165. Do you know whether or not, in Otago, County Councils did take the necessary steps? Not so far as I am aware of.

1166. Do you know of any County Council that did?—I have not heard of one.

1167. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Are not small holdings chiefly freehold?—Yes.

1168. You think freeholders would keep rabbits down under the trustee system?—I think they might, better than now.

1169. Is it right that the rate by which the Inspectors are maintained for rabbit purposes should be confined to those who have sheep only?—Most of those affected by rabbits own sheep.

1170. That is simply an accident?—I know there are a good many who own no sheep at all and have got rabbits?—I think there should be a tax of so much per acre.

1171. Probably the crops are of very great value in these small holdings. Ought they to be exempted?—They get the benefit of the department, and free of any expenditure.

1172. Do you think that is right?—No; I think that all should contribute.

THURSDAY, 17TH JUNE, 1886.

Mr. McDONALD, Inspector under the Sheep and Rabbit Act, examined.

1173. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What district are you Inspector for?—For the Southland District, in the Southland County.

1174. Where are your head-quarters?—At Gore, in the centre of the district.

1174A. Have you had much experience with rabbits?—Six years' experience in the public service, and about ten years' previous to that as a settler.

1175. What does your experience lead you to think?—That they are decidedly on the decrease in my district. We have now not a fiftieth part of the rabbits we had in 1880 and 1881.

1176. Do you mean that they do not extend over a greater area?—They had extended over all the area previous to an enactment being passed for their suppression. I mean we have so reduced them in numbers that they are considerably less than what they were—certainly not a twentieth part.

1177. I suppose the carrying-capacity of your country has increased?—Yes; very materially increased year by year. Last year we showed an increase in stock of ninety-seven thousand, as compared with the previous year.

1178. What steps have you taken to keep the rabbits down so successfully?—Universal poisoning. That is the mainspring of our operations in the winter time, and keeping the settlers up to the mark in the summer time.

1179. You use phosphorized grain?—Chiefly oats.

1180. Oats are preferred?—They are more handy: lots of people have oats that have no wheat.

1181. Do you think oats are more efficacious than wheat?—Personally, I do not think there is much to choose between them. The rabbit is a curious little animal: he will sometimes take wheat when he will not take oats, and *vice versa*.

1182. Could you lay down a rule as to the particular time when they will take oats before wheat?—It is a mere matter of chance, I think.

1183. Your poison is phosphorus?—Yes.

1184. Have you tried any other poison—arsenic for instance?—I did not try it before I joined the public service; but when I did try it, it was not successful. It would kill everything but rabbits, but I did not find that they took it.

1185. You do not try phosphorized grain in summer?—We do, and we find it is taken in summer also; but I do not think it desirable to go into summer-poisoning extensively. The spots that could be poisoned are those infested with rabbits—small colonies here and there.

1186. It is stated that in the summer the grain loses its strength?—Doubtless that is true to a certain extent. Much will depend upon the weather. If it is very hot weather, the phosphorus will evaporate; but at that time of the year we make it a point to put it out late in the evenings.

1187. How long do you think it could remain on the ground in the summer without losing its effect?—If wet, moist weather, it would remain several days. That is the proper time to put it out.

1188. And in fine weather?—If hot sunny weather, I would not rely upon it after twenty-four hours.

1189. Is there any danger of its setting fire to grass in summer?—No; properly mixed, there is little, if any, danger.

1190. What would be the cause of its setting fire to grass—excessive phosphorus?—Not necessarily; but if found in a crude state amongst the oats it would ignite.

1191. Have you proper means of mixing the poison?—We have several appliances for the purpose—casks with heads knocked in; and iron cylinders have been patented in the South Island, and have been found to be very efficacious. With these there is no escape of the phosphorus by steam, and hence it is all mixed. It is not a proper way to mix phosphorus in an open vessel. That used to be done before we became expert in the business.

1192. Do you think the small landholders have proper means of mixing it?—No. That is one of our greatest difficulties. We have three centres in Southland in which the department mixes the stuff and sells it to the settlers at 2d. per pound, which just covers the cost of the oats, the poison, and the labour.

1193. Where are those places?—At Winton, Invercargill, and Wyndham.

1194. Some of the settlers, of course, live a long distance from these centres; therefore, in buying the grain from the Government they would have to carry it some distance before they could lay it. Does not the poison evaporate?—Not at all.

1195. Do you think that arrangement a good one?—Yes; and I intend this year to adopt the system more largely. The difficulty we have is to induce them to take sufficient to enable us to employ a man constantly in mixing—an expert.

1196. Do you find any difficulty in getting persons interested to poison?—Not now; but it took us three years to educate them and overcome their prejudice.

1197. I suppose you are an advocate for simultaneous poisoning?—Yes. We recognize that as a matter of very great importance, and we give them timely notice—a fortnight and three weeks, as the case may be—to prepare themselves.

1198. Do you adopt a plan that has been adopted in some districts, of calling a meeting to consider the best time to begin poisoning?—No; I have never done that, inasmuch as I would not hold myself bound to obey any resolution of a public meeting. I have never called any, and I have never attended one.

1199. But would you not think it advisable to consult the owners of a district? Would it not secure greater unanimity in the matter?—I do not think so. I notice that the majority of meetings are apt to run counter to the department, and procrastinate, and will not do anything.

1200. What time do you decide upon?—I insert a notice in the papers announcing that the department is about to commence poisoning, and asking the settlers to co-operate at the same time.

1201. What period of the year?—This year we started advertising on the 14th of this month, and continued to the 20th; and then agents go round and see that the work is being carried out.

1202. You give them a week's notice, then, to carry out the work?—We announce the thing three weeks beforehand, and give them a week in which to make their preparations. The agents go round and see that the work is carried on simultaneously, and they report to me from week to week.

1203. How often do these agents go round?—They are supposed to be always going round.

1204. Have you any means of knowing whether they do or not?—I have not, unless I follow them.

1205. Can you check their work?—I can check a reasonable day's work by their diaries, because I know their districts; but I have to take a good deal on trust.

1206. Do you think any holders of land would commence poisoning when they expected the agent to come round, and would knock off directly he was gone?—No. I do not think they would try to deceive us in that way. There was a very strong prejudice, as I have said; but that has all disappeared in Southland, and the people have got familiarized with the manipulation of the grain. At first they were afraid of the phosphorus; but now they have no longer any misgivings about it, and are alive to their interests in working the thing—also the penalties in failing to comply with the requirements of the Act.

1207. Have you had any complaints?—I have not heard any. In my district there are about three thousand holdings, and I do not know one that has not laid poison where rabbits were known to exist.

1208. And you have not had any complaints that certain settlers ceased to lay poison after the agent had gone?—Yes; we have had complaints frequently. Neighbours complain of one another. It is often attempted to make the Sheep and Rabbit Act a sort of vehicle to revenge one another. But we find there is very little in these complaints in the majority of cases when we come to look into them. They are chiefly the outcome of private pique and spite.

1209. Then you do not think they shirk their work?—No.

1210. Still, you might have your own private opinion as to whether they were doing so, whether there were complaints or not?—It is my private opinion that there is little shirking now.

1211. Do you travel yourself?—I am always travelling from one district to another.

1212. Have you any system that you carry out?—I am very much guided by circumstances. There is no cut-and-dried period for visiting different parts of the district. My time is taken up in the administration of the Act. One of the most important things is to have the Act well administered—that is, to insure people doing the work of eradicating the rabbits.

1213. You are also Inspector under the Sheep Act: does that take up much of your time?—It does at certain times of the year, such as sending out schedules and getting returns in. For about four or five months it gives us a great deal of work.

1214. Have you frequent applications for certificates for travelling sheep from one district to another?—No; our district being a clean district, certificates are not required.

1215. Then, if sheep travel from Southland to Otago?—They do not get a certificate. Sheep coming from Canterbury are inspected at the Waitaki.

1216. You have nothing to do with that, I suppose?—I have nothing whatever to do with it.

1217. How many agents have you in your district?—I have three agents under me.

1218. What is their duty?—To go round and see the state of the various holdings; and if they see rabbits are manifesting themselves in any numbers they report to me. Then I go there myself, in order that I may be able to prove it from the witness-box in Court, if necessary. Then notices are issued under the Act to clear the place.

1219. Who appoints these agents?—They were appointed by me, subject to the approval of the Government.

1220. You have authority to appoint whom you choose?—I ask for authority, and I have always obtained it.

1221. You have to submit the name first?—Yes, for the approval of the Government.

1222. If you were dissatisfied with an agent could you dismiss him at once?—I would; although I am aware, though it has not been so in my district, agents have been forced back after dismissal.

1223. In choosing an individual, how are you guided?—I select the man who is most suitable. He must be a sober man, and possess a knowledge of the country. Local knowledge is very essential.

1224. You have not turned out any natural enemies?—I turned out about three hundred and sixty ferrets. For the last two or three years we have turned them out on the Crown lands adjacent to large Crown forests.

1225. Why near the forests?—Because they are better protected there from the operations of rabbiters.

1226. I should have thought you would have turned them out where the rabbits were?—There are generally a good many about the edges of bushes. We turn the ferrets out where we are sure they can get their livelihood.

1227. Have you turned out any weasels or stoats?—Not any stoats.

1228. Have you had any experience of them?—I have not.

1229. You could not say whether they are likely to prove beneficial?—Only from common report. I think it is a speculation.

1230. Have the ferrets you turned out increased?—They are increasing very fast, and spreading over the country.

1231. And doing good?—We are not in a position to speak of the actual good they have done. Both the agents and myself are of opinion that the young rabbits were not quite so numerous last year where the ferrets were known to be plentiful, and we take it from that that they must do some good.

1232. Have you complaints about the ferrets?—They are not popular in my district—the people do not like them.

1233. I see there has been a meeting at Thornbury?—They have been very much opposed to them there always. But we do not turn them out amongst the settlers: it is only in the outlying country we liberate them.

1234. Have you many unoccupied lands in your district?—Yes; there are a great number of small reserves. There are no unoccupied runs in my district except one, at the present time.

1235. Do you deal with all these lands where there are rabbits?—The department takes charge of those lands under section 11 of the Rabbit Act.

1236. Have you done much in the way of killing rabbits upon them?—A great deal. We poison them thoroughly by contract and day-wages, and in the most economical way to the owners. We make a claim on the owners for all expenses. For harbour endowments we claim on the Harbour Boards, for Borough Council endowments we claim on Borough Councils, and so on. We have no difficulty. They prefer that the Inspectors should deal with these lands direct—we can do it so much more cheaply than they can, and probably more satisfactorily to them.

1237. There is no complaint in the district as to these reserves?—No direct complaint has come to my knowledge.

1238. Do you take any steps in the summer months for killing rabbits?—We do: wherever we find that rabbits are coming in from unoccupied Crown lands, or where they are likely to damage the adjoining settlers, we employ labour.

1239. In what way?—Chiefly by trapping and ferreting. There are a lot of expert trappers in the district, and we employ them by contract for a period. We let all our contracts for a length of time. It is important to do that. We never contract for one poisoning; we contract for three, six, and twelve months.

1240. Why is it better to make a long contract?—It keeps the people on the ground.

1241. If they poisoned out all the rabbits they would lose their billet?—Their work has got to be passed by the Inspector, and no work no pay.

1242. And how do you ascertain?—By inspection. I go myself at different times over the district.

1243. Do you find that the Act works well in your district?—It does; it has given great relief in the district.

1244. Have you had any occasion to summon?—Two years ago we had to summon, and the Magistrates fined pretty heavily; but during last year we did not lay many informations.

1245. Then, you have had no difficulty in any cases you may have had to take before the Courts?—None whatever.

1246. Have you had complaints as to the manner in which the Act has been put into force?—Never.

1247. Perhaps you would not hear that if there were?—I should be sure to hear, if not directly, then indirectly.

1248. Do you think it would be a good thing to offer a bonus for skins?—It would be an assistance to the Crown tenants—a bonus in the summer time. My objection to a bonus, if it were a high bonus, is, that I am persuaded, from my previous experience, that it would lead to rabbit-farming. A small bonus for summer skins would be an assistance.

1249. Would you not advocate a bonus all the year round?—No; I would give it from the 1st November to the 31st March.

1250. Do you not think the skins would be held over?—The bonus would be so small that nothing worth more than 1d. would be tendered; and I would advocate that it be given only for skins that are unsaleable. The great thing is to guard against fraud, and that is the only way it could be done.

1251. Would you limit the bonus to skins of full size or extend it to all skins?—To all skins during the months I have mentioned. Any skin that was worth more than 1d. would not, of course, become subject to the bonus at all, because they would sell in the open market.

1252. Then you think the Government should give 1d. per skin for all skins?—Yes; and destroy them on the spot.

1253. That would hardly be a bonus?—It would not be a bonus; it would be a relief.

1254. Do you think the Act would be carried out more effectually if placed in the hands of local Boards?—No. We had local Boards in my district many years ago, and they were a great failure. I wound some of them up, and I found they had existed in a very unsatisfactory state. They did no good at all. It is my opinion that if we had been three years longer under the operation of those Boards our country would not be now worth occupying.

1255. Have you any amendments to propose in the Act?—I have not. I am of opinion that the Act, in the hands of people of discretion, is a good Act. It does not work any hardship that I know of, and it has given great relief. I cannot see any particular in which the Act, if rationally put in force, can become a nuisance or intolerance to anybody.

1256. Have you in your district any country that you find it impossible to deal effectually with?—No; I am exempt from all that class of country to a very great extent. We have no country that we cannot enter upon with poison at some time of the year.

1257. And deal with effectually?—Yes.

1258. Do you think we may look forward to the rabbit nuisance being virtually exterminated?—I do not look for extermination. I think extermination is next to impossible. Like the sandflies, they appear sometimes where you least expect them.

1259. *Hon. Mr. Williamson.*] Rabbits that have taken poison, but not sufficient to kill them, become accustomed to it?—They are very chary of taking it again. You would not catch them that year with poison.

1260. Do you not think that, in contracting to kill the rabbits in a certain district, the wisest plan is to pay so much per skin?—No, I do not agree with that, because you might be paying for more than your own skins. That opens the door to fraud. Your estate may not be much infested with rabbits and you may have a neighbour whose estate is. You may give a greater inducement to get rid of the rabbits than your neighbours, and consequently their rabbiters will sell their skins to your rabbiters, and they will divide the profits.

1261. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] What are the conditions of the contract for killing?—It is a matter of agreement. There are so many thousand acres to clear, and we say to those who undertake the contract, "We will give you so much in addition to all the skins you may get."

1262. And what do they contract to do?—To clear these lands as far as practicable.

1263. Within a time?—Yes.

1264. Do you go to see they are laying poison?—Yes, or trapping—and that there is a sensible diminution of the rabbit plague when the time expires.

1265. What is the value of winter skins for export?—The very outside price this year will be about 1s. per pound—2d. per skin for the very best, and down to 4d. per pound.

1266. *Hon. Mr. Robinson.*] Did you ever see fencing resorted to in order to prevent rabbits spreading?—I have.

1267. Will a fence stop them?—Yes, if well looked after. But it has not been a success.

1268. Could you put up a fence to stop them for a day?—Yes.

1269. If kept in that order would it always stop them?—Yes.

1270. Positively?—Yes.

1271. In selecting your agents, do you previously ascertain whether they have had any experience in dealing with rabbits?—Yes.

1272. *Mr. Cowan.*] You think that you can deal effectually with all the country in your district?—Yes.

1273. By "effectually" do you mean this will be an annually-recurring operation?—It will always be so, in my opinion.

1274. You have been a long time in Southland?—Twenty-five years.

1275. How was the spread of rabbits accomplished in your district?—In a most amazing manner. They went over the country like a wave.

1276. How many years ago?—It was about 1871 they began to show themselves away from where they had been known to exist in large numbers. This was on the coast; and in 1880 and 1881 I think we were at no period of our history so much infested with rabbits.

1277. Can you indicate what distance of country they have traversed in that time—say, the mileage northwards, for instance?—They have extended from the western shores of Southland right up to the Lake country and Central Otago—practically two hundred miles.

1278. The whole County of Southland, of which you have charge, has now rabbits over it to a greater or less degree?—Yes.

1279. In your opinion, is it the fact that you have no difficulty in carrying out the Act due to the settlers recognizing that it is to their interests to keep the rabbits down?—Entirely that. Repressive legislation will not do it altogether.

1280. And it is a well-established fact in Southland that the owners feel that if they do not keep the rabbits down the latter will drive them out?—Precisely.

1281. Perhaps you can give some idea of the injury done to pastoral properties by the pest?—There were a great many runs abandoned in 1880 and 1881 entirely owing to that; and now we have only one small run, which was never of much account, which is unoccupied leasehold at the present time.

1282. Is it within your knowledge whether these lands were relet at a higher or lower value?—Very much higher.

1283. Can you explain how that came about?—I attribute it to the fact that the landholders saw their way to deal effectually with the rabbit nuisance, because the efficacy of phosphorus was by this time established.

1284. Are their anticipations being fulfilled?—Very much where they have worked vigorously. It is a question of expenditure after all. It is not to be overcome without expenditure.

1285. And it will not be done in a short time?—No; it will take some years, even with the application of capital.

1286. Have you come to any conclusion as to the time it is likely to take?—No; I have not taken it into consideration.

1287. It is generally expected that the value of skins in winter recoups the owner for the expense of taking them?—They have done so hitherto, but they would not recoup him for winter and summer work if he employs much labour during the summer time.

1288. Is it not a fact that this annually-recurring expenditure in winter is caused through insufficient measures not being taken in summer?—Entirely so. It is great folly to spend a large amount of money in winter time, and allow its effect to be nullified in summer. A large company down south spent £4,000 over and above all the skins returned, in poisoning their estate. In consequence of keeping up the expenditure in summer the manager informed me that their sheep clipped one and a half pounds more wool than for the previous six or seven years, and the condition of their stock was 2s. per head better.

1289. Would you recommend that a moderate bonus should be paid by the Government in summer for young rabbits as well as the skins of grown rabbits?—I think it would afford a certain amount of relief to Crown tenants in summer time, and give an incentive to summer killing; and, after all, the nesting-time is the most vital time to kill.

1290. Do you think that fencing would prevent the plague from spreading to districts that have hitherto been free?—I do not think it would, for this reason: You cannot erect a large line of fencing without crossing many rivers, roads, and ravines, and it would require careful surveillance to keep the rabbits from crossing. It would be an assistance, but would not be worth its cost as a barrier.

1291. Have you heard of rabbits jumping a 3ft. fence?—I have seen them do it when they have been chased by dogs.

1292. Seeing that this question is of such national importance, do you think that a reward should be offered by Government to scientists to introduce a disease to kill the rabbits?—I think it would be a very great boon if it was a disease not likely to communicate itself to anything else. I am not sanguine about that. Even with a disease there would be sufficient left alive to propagate the species.

1293. Do you think that natural enemies are capable of coping with the plague?—No; not for the next fifty years, of their own force. It would require them to be almost as plentiful as the rabbits. It is well to encourage them: they do their work when we do not see them.

1294. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] You know what amount of destruction a pair of golden eagles will do in a district?—Yes.

1295. Do you not think golden eagles would be effective in a high country, where there is difficulty in approaching it?—There is not the least doubt about it. I think they would be the most effectual that could be introduced; but that has never occurred to me before. I know they are very scarce, and there would be a difficulty in getting them in numbers.

1296. Would they be equally effective in destroying another pest in the high country, the kea?—Yes.

1297. The kea can only be dealt with effectually by some other bird that prefers living at high elevations. Do you know of any other bird that would be likely to cope with the kea?—No. He is a clumsy bird, and would be very easily dealt with by the golden eagle, if introduced. The common hawk here is not to be found in the same regions as the kea unless he is attracted there by dead rabbits or carrion.

1298. But the eagle would?—Yes.

1299. Are there counterbalancing disadvantages to the proposal to introduce the eagle?—I do not know of any. I do not think they would be likely to injure the young lambs.

1300. So long as they found rabbits and keas in high country, would they be likely to descend to the lower to attack sheep?—I do not think so.

1301. *Mr. Dodson.*] What effect would poisoned rabbit have on the eagles?—I am afraid it would destroy the eagles; but there are very few hawks that are killed by eating poisoned rabbits, because they do not eat the intestines.

1302. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] That is, phosphorus poison?—Yes.

1303. Strychnine would go through everything?—Yes.

1304. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you think it would be a good thing to make a wire-netting fence a legal fence, so that contributions towards it could be levied upon adjoining owners?—I do not think it would have the desired effect. Where there was a large area enclosed by wire-netting there would be a failure to destroy them inside that area in the first instance, and I do not think it would be worth the cost.

1305. Not in the case of small holdings?—A private owner can certainly protect himself against rabbits by wire-netting and proper and continuous surveillance.

1306. But you think he should do that at his own expense?—That is my opinion. In my district there is a large firm who put up about thirty-five miles of wire-netting with a view of destroying their own rabbits inside and keeping back their neighbours'; but it was found that floods and fires and so forth damaged it, and they very soon abandoned the fence. It was so much money lost to them.

1307. It seems to me that the persons who put up this fence did so unadvisedly. Is "Castle Rock" in your district?—No; it adjoins.

1308. Can you state what has been done there in fencing?—They have done a large amount; and another property adjoining them has been encircled very successfully—that of Rowley and Hamilton—and they may be said to have solved the difficulty so far as the wire-netting is concerned and the subjugation of the rabbits. They have brought up the carrying-capacity of their country from seven thousand to about eighteen thousand, which was the stock it was carrying before the rabbits became a nuisance. I know wire-netting can be made a success within certain limits.

1309. The question arises, if wire-netting would be efficacious, should not assistance be given to small holders for the purpose of erecting it?—In the agricultural centres of Southland I do not believe that two hundred pounds' worth of cropping was damaged last year, the rabbits had been so well kept down.

Addendum.

The rabbit agents should be, in my opinion, entirely under the control of the Inspector, with power to dismiss without reference to Government. This is reasonable when it is considered that an Inspector is so dependent on the integrity of an agent, both as regards the agent's relations to the public and his being faithful to his Inspector. Upon the correctness and the promptitude of his reports much of the successful working of the Rabbit Act will depend. On the contrary, if the agent is found to be acting in a manner against the Inspector, or doing his duty in a perfunctory manner, he is, in that case, worse than useless—often shielding himself behind the Inspector and sympathizing with the wrongdoers. I have not personally experienced these drawbacks, but have heard of them in other districts.—A. A. M.

Mr. BRYDONE examined.

1310. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have you had much experience in the matter of rabbits?—Yes.

1311. In what part of the colony?—In the Waitaki District.

1312. Not all in one block?—No; we have got runs and freeholds extending over most of Otago.

1313. What quantity of freehold and what quantity of leasehold?—I superintend something like two hundred thousand acres of leasehold, and about one hundred and fifty thousand acres of freehold.

1314. And you have rabbits over all?—No; on some of the freeholds there are no rabbits.

1315. Would you speak more particularly about the properties on which you have rabbits?—We have a freehold property in Southland, which now extends to about fifty thousand acres, on which we have had the rabbits for the last eight or ten years.

1316. And have you rabbits on the whole of the leaseholds?—Yes.

1317. Are the rabbits very bad in any part of it?—There are three places where they are very bad—one, in the Queenstown District, of about a hundred thousand acres.

1318. Is that along the bank of the lake?—It is opposite Cromwell. We have another one between Shag Valley and the Taieri River of about forty-four thousand acres, on which there are rabbits; and one on the Waitaki of about forty thousand acres.

1319. Is that high up?—No. It is a place called Kowrow, just at the extremity of the railway.

1320. The rabbits are a great nuisance on all these places?—Yes. On the Queenstown run during the last two years we have spent about £7,000; and we collected skins there the year before last to the number of 244,000, and this year to 283,000.

1321. Then the rabbits have increased?—I would not like to say they have increased; but we got some new country there very rabbit, and we did not get them thoroughly killed the first year. I think it was because we were more successful last year than the previous one; and we have been killing all last summer, which has been adding to the number. The rabbits trapped and shot are

all got, whereas of those poisoned in the winter probably not more than a half or a third are got. That has increased the number of skins. It does not exactly indicate that the rabbits have increased.

1322. What system of killing do you adopt?—Poisoning with phosphorized oats in winter, and last summer we practised trapping and shooting. We have some fifty or sixty men on that run, and we think we have got the rabbits very much under hand just now; but it has cost us a great deal of money to do so. The skins we get in the summer are perfectly valueless.

1323. What proportion of the expense do you think the skins would return, taking the year all round?—Now I do not expect we get half of what the skins cost us, particularly with so many summer skins coming in.

1324. Less than 50 per cent.?—Yes, at present prices. The price has come down very much.

1325. Do you poison at all in summer?—No; it has been tried, but found to be no use.

1326. Do you turn out any natural enemies?—We have turned out ferrets on nearly all our places.

1327. In what quantities?—We have turned out probably a hundred and fifty on that particular run at Queenstown.

1328. Have you seen any results?—Yes; we believe they are increasing and doing some good. Of course they require to be in larger numbers on a big tract of country to see very decided results.

1329. But you are satisfied it is a desirable thing?—Yes.

1330. What does it cost for ferrets?—We breed some and buy some. I have been paying 10s. each for them lately.

1331. You think it desirable to go to that expense?—Yes. Of course it has been more experimental than anything else so far. We have not turned them out in sufficient quantities to keep the rabbits under.

1332. Do you find they die to any considerable extent owing to the climate?—I have not had it so reported.

1333. Have you ascertained that they breed?—Yes, we get young ones in the traps occasionally.

1334. You allow trapping?—Yes.

1335. Does it not follow that you kill ferrets by that?—It very seldom happens. I do not know how it is. They may be a little hurt, but they are not killed, and do not receive permanent injury as a rule; so we let them go again. Sometimes, when they are badly hurt, they are taken to the home station and attended to until they are all right again.

1336. You have not tried stoats and weasels?—No.

1337. Have you turned out any cats?—No.

1338. They are spoken of as being effective?—I do not think they would do well in rough, high country.

1339. Why?—It would be too cold for them. Ferrets, of course, can go into holes and keep themselves warm, but there is no shelter for the cats.

1340. Do rabbits, in winter, remain up amongst the snow?—They partly remain. They go into the warmer gullies and stop there. They do come down, of course, to a certain extent.

1341. Do you buy ferrets from the Government?—No; from men who breed them. There are a number of rabbiters in the country who breed them, feeding them with the rabbits that they kill. We have also imported them from Home, but those have not bred nearly so well as those purchased in the colony.

1342. Can you account for that?—No.

1343. Which kind was it?—They were mixed—grey, and white, and brown.

1344. The brown is said to be the strongest?—Yes; we like them the best.

1345. Are persons in the neighbourhood you speak of taking an interest in this question of killing rabbits?—Some of them are; others are very lax. We have had trouble with some of our neighbours in that respect in connection with that particular run. One neighbour who has not killed down the rabbits sufficiently—our manager wrote to me the other day to say it cost us £600 or £700 a year extra on account of this.

1346. You have an Inspector, I suppose?—Yes.

1347. Does he not compel them to kill?—We have complained to the Inspector several times about it.

1348. Has he not taken any steps in reference to the matter?—Whatever he has done has not had the desired result.

1349. Does the Inspector ever go round to these places?—He is supposed to go all over the country. I do not know how often he goes, I am sure. It is quite convenient, I believe, to where he lives. I believe he lives at Cromwell, and this place is within a few miles of that township.

1350. You do not know, yourself, whether he does go?—I cannot speak personally as to whether he goes or how often.

1351. Do you know that his duties are so onerous that he has not time to attend to that district?—I do not know. There are plenty of Inspectors, I think, for the country they have to go over. In my opinion, there are too many Inspectors.

1352. Are they inefficient men, or is it that they are indolent?—A great many of them are men who have been of no use elsewhere, and have not been able to make their living, and have been loafers to a great extent. I know a good many of them of that description.

1353. You are speaking now of Inspectors, not of agents?—I mean both agents and Inspectors. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the one from the other.

1354. You know that the practice is for the Inspectors to appoint rabbit-agents to go round and examine the country. Do you think that is a satisfactory way of doing it?—No; because I think

many of the Inspectors themselves are insufficient supervision to see that they are doing their duty. It appears to me that many of them, as soon as they are appointed Inspectors, think that nobody whatever has anything to do with them, and they can do just as they like, and work or not just as it pleases them. I observe that in many cases the men do very little indeed for the money they get, and I consider they require more supervision. I understand that these Inspectors are appointed in Wellington, and they consider themselves to be responsible in a great measure to the Government here. It would be better, I think, if there was a head Inspector in each district, who should have the power to employ those whom he considered to be efficient men, and discharge them without reference to the Government at all. It would put the men much more under his control, and they would be much more likely to do their work properly.

1355. You would establish a central office in Dunedin for Otago, for instance?—Yes—have a head man there to go round the district and see that the Inspectors were doing their duty. Either that, or the supervision of rabbits should be under some local authority, such as County Councils.

1356. You think some form of local Board should be adopted?—Yes.

1357. Do you mean to place the whole administration of the Act in the hands of a Board?—Yes—take it entirely out of the hands of the General Government.

1358. Do you think, by that means you would be able to secure sufficient unanimity of action?—The Boards would require to be pretty extensive, and take in a large tract of country.

1359. Do you think they would work so that settlers would be induced to poison simultaneously?—I think so. The settlers now see that it is to their interest to kill down the rabbits, and, as a rule, they endeavour to work into one another's hands, so as to gain the desired object, much better now than years ago.

1360. Have you thought out sufficiently what form of local Board you would recommend?—I have given it a great deal of consideration, but it is a difficult matter to come to a decision about. I have come to the conclusion that it is highly necessary to make some alteration in the present system, because it seems to be very expensive, and not at all sufficient, to my mind. I have been accustomed for a great many years to have management of properties, and I have had a good deal of experience of what men are.

1361. It has been suggested that trustees should be elected, with power to levy a rate. Would you recommend that form?—I would not like to give a definite opinion on that point.

1362. The opinion seems to be that County Councils and Road Boards would not administer the Act sufficiently stringently—that some of the members might be inclined to show favouritism?—Such might be the case, but I do not think there would be much of that so far as my experience goes of County Councils. I have been a member of a County Council ever since the system was adopted, and I always found Councillors very fair in matters of that kind.

1363. Have you treated your freehold and leasehold lands alike?—Pretty nearly.

1364. What term have the leaseholds to run?—The large leasehold that has been referred to just now—a part of it has got seventeen or eighteen years to run.

1365. On that would you carry on rabbit-killing just as on a freehold?—We make no difference even if our lease expired next year. I may tell you that when the rabbits first showed themselves on our place, and I saw they required to be stringently treated, I told our managers that, if they did not keep them sufficiently under control and got fined by the Inspectors, they would there and then lose their billets. And ever since the rabbits have come we have never been summoned.

1366. Have your sheep diminished on account of the pest?—Slightly, but not to any great extent. Of course our increase has diminished very considerably. From an average increase of about 70 per cent. on the Kawarau Run we now average about 45.

1366A. And in regard to wool?—We clip about $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. less wool per sheep than we did formerly, and it is not of as good quality.

1367. *Mr. Fulton.* And how about deaths?—The death-rate formerly averaged $3\frac{1}{2}$, and since the rabbits came it has become $10\frac{1}{2}$. There is another run we have—Deepdell—where the death-rate formerly was 6 per cent., and for the last few years it has averaged $13\frac{1}{2}$; while the increase was formerly 67, and is now 45.

1368. *Hon. the Chairman.* And you attribute that to the rabbits?—Not exactly, at Deepdell, entirely. There we have lost a great deal of winter country, and that has had the effect of reducing the increase.

1369. Have you unoccupied Crown lands adjoining your lands?—Not adjoining our Crown lands, but we have adjoining our freehold lands.

1370. And what has been done upon them?—Last year the Inspector of the district neglected to poison a block which was pretty badly infested with rabbits, which did us a great deal of harm.

1371. How did that neglect come about?—I do not know, I am sure. It was the fault of the Inspector, I suppose. I think he called for tenders for poisoning it, and thought the tenders were too high, or something of that sort. Anyhow, there was no tender accepted, and no proper poisoning done.

1372. Has inquiry ever been made of you as to whether you would undertake the poisoning?—We offered to poison it. We had poisoned it for two years previously.

1373. But they thought you asked too much for it?—I suppose so. Last year it was less money than we got for it before. The work was put up for tender, and we tendered along with others.

1374. What is the usual amount for poisoning in that way?—They generally offer a certain block of ten or twelve thousand acres, and take a lump sum.

1375. Would it differ very much as to the country?—Yes.

1376. What would be the price for ten thousand acres?—I think it was about £100 or £120.

1377. Would that include poisoning in winter and killing in summer?—Only poisoning in winter to the satisfaction of the Inspector.

1378. Does anything take place in summer?—No; the rabbits will increase, of course, during the summer, and then they require to be poisoned again next winter.

1379. Have they turned out any ferrets?—I do not think so.

1380. Then you are speaking of Crown lands?—Yes.

1381. Are there any commonages or reserves?—I think they are called “hundreds” in that particular place.

1382. Is there any difficulty about them?—No; there are cleared gullies all through the country, and rabbiters can go up through those gullies.

1383. Who kills the rabbits?—The hundreds are under the control of the Government Inspectors. They are unoccupied entirely; there is no stock running on them.

1384. Have they retaken possession of them?—The Government always had possession.

1384A. Neighbouring settlers, I suppose, could turn out stock?—It is too dangerous for that; stock would go into the bush. We fenced it out and kept all our stock inside.

1385. Have the Crown lands just referred to been offered for lease or sale?—They would not lease. I see that Mr. J. C. Brown has been moving to get them opened on some deferred-payment system of settlement.

1386. Do you mean that they would not lease at the price asked?—They would not lease at any price.

1387. Have you tried any wire-netting?—Not on a large scale—only on plantations, and so forth.

1388. Do you think it would be beneficial in keeping rabbits out?—Not with us, because the whole country is infested; and I do not think it would be of any service. Of course, if there is a clean district and an infested one, wire-netting, if properly cared for, would be the means of stopping the encroachment of rabbits; but where the whole country is infested it would be of no service.

1389. But would it not be a good basis in killing rabbits off?—It would be rather expensive, I think.

1390. Setting that aside, wire-netting would be an advantage?—Yes.

1391. In your district would lines of fences assist in protecting a large tract of country?—I do not think so, because the country is broken with streams, and creeks, and gullies, and it would be difficult to keep a fence in such order as to prevent the rabbits getting through it. The floods would break holes in the netting, and the rabbits would get through unless very great care and trouble were taken. They would also cross at the rivers. I have seen them swim through a pretty strong current. Of course, when they are hunted they will take to the water, and will swim a considerable distance.

1392. Do you think the rabbits can be actually exterminated?—I am very doubtful. I do not think so. Unless some new system is discovered for killing them out, I am afraid we shall not be able to kill the last rabbit.

1393. Do you think we could keep them down satisfactorily?—Yes—at a very considerable expense. It is going to cost us more money every year than we anticipated. Of course, the price of skins having gone down so much makes it all the harder. Two or three years ago we were getting pretty nearly as much for the skins as covered the expense of killing.

1394. On the level lands I suppose you can fairly kill them?—Yes; the broken country is the worst, where there are under-runners and suchlike.

1395. And you know of no method by which you can poison rabbits in summer?—No.

1396. Summer killing can only be done by trapping, ferreting, and fumigating?—We have done a little fumigation, but that can only be done in certain parts of the country. Where there are rocks and heaps of stones rabbits have shelter, and are not much in burrows.

1397. *Mr. Buchanan.*] A couple of years ago a Committee that sat on this question reported that they were strongly of opinion that the most frequent cause of the failure to destroy rabbits, and the consequent public dissatisfaction, was the evident unfitness of many of the officers, and whose previous history furnished a record of failure in other walks of life. Are you of opinion that that applies to the state of affairs as they stand now in your district?—Yes, decidedly. I know men employed as agents that I would not give tucker to. I would not have them about our place.

1398. When the previous Rabbit Act was in force the County Councils had power to take action in regard to rabbits. Was there any case in the South where rabbits were bad, in which the Council did take any action?—I am not aware of any Council taking action in regard to rabbits.

1399. It was stated that the reason for not taking action was that the Councillors themselves were the greatest delinquents?—I do not think that is correct, then.

1400. In the event of big districts being placed under Boards as matters stand now, do you think that the members whose properties are badly infested with rabbits would take sufficiently stringent action?—I do not think there would be much of what you hint at. There might be a little, but I do not think it would be a dangerous thing.

1401. With regard to the unoccupied Crown lands, if the Government were to offer some extended tenure under lease at a peppercorn rental, or even, where there is no chance of that, to give a bonus not exceeding the cost of killing the rabbits, do you think it would be taken up?—The country I refer to is not worth occupying even at no rent, and is not fit for putting stock on at all; so that it would not be necessary for the Government to pay for keeping down the rabbits unless they could get the country settled.

1402. As to rabbit-netting, how would that act in the case of snow?—The rabbits are not much up in the snow, as a rule. I do not think wire-netting would be suitable in high country. It could not be kept tight.

1403. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] What do you consider the great difficulty in the way of eradicating rabbits?—The rapidity with which they breed, and the quantity there is of them.

1404. You have said you could keep the numbers down?—We can keep them down better than we could at one time. We can keep them under control.

1405. In the low country. But in the high country?—This Kawarau Run that I have been speaking of runs up to 10,000ft. or 12,000ft. We have the Remarkable Mountains in it. It is very expensive killing them up there. We kill them right away up to the top.

1406. In what way?—Poisoning in winter, and shooting in summer. We have men employed there shooting all the year round.

1407. There must be a difficulty in getting there in winter?—Men get accustomed to it. It is surprising where they do go.

1408. Do you think you are as able to keep the rabbits down on such ranges as the Remarkables as on low country?—It is only a matter of expense and perseverance.

1409. What is your opinion of the probable success of natural enemies?—I am in favour of natural enemies being turned out.

1410. Which kind?—I have no doubt that weasels will be the best; but they cannot be obtained in such quantities as will make much effect for many years. Ferrets seem to be the most serviceable in most places.

1411. Do you find they go up to the high mountains?—They go pretty high up.

1412. To the snow?—I would not like to say they are much in the snow, but they are found very high up in the mountains.

1413. You know something of the habits of stoats?—I have not had much experience of them, except that I have seen them at Home. In the winter time they do not seem to care much for the snow. I mean, it does not affect them a bit.

1414. They are hardier than ferrets?—Yes.

1415. Could they not be bred here?—I fancy they are too shy in their nature.

1416. But if a park were enclosed so that they could not escape?—Something of that sort, if tried, might be a success.

1417. Do you think the Act is a satisfactory one?—It might be right enough if properly carried out; but, as I have said before, I do not think it is carried out properly.

1418. You do not see the direction in which it could be improved by alterations?—If the Inspectors were under local control I think it would be much better.

1419. That is to say, you would have the colony divided into districts, and give the Inspector for each district larger discretionary powers?—Yes—let him have full control of the men employed under him.

1420. It has been suggested that it would be better to supersede the present system by giving a bonus for the skins than by continuing the system of Inspectors?—I think the money would be better spent.

1421. Would you give a bonus for all the year round, or only for a particular period?—I think it would be better all the year round. The more killing in the summer the better.

1422. Do you think a bonus should be given for rabbit-skins of all sizes?—Yes; the more young ones we take the better.

1423. What price should be given?—A penny would be sufficient inducement all the year round, for big and small.

1424. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] Supposing a change were made from the present system to that of trustees elected by parties immediately interested—that is, owners of sheep only—would you consider it a change for the better?—I should think it would be, because a Board of that description would know the localities and their requirements, and would be likely to employ a better class of men than a great many of the present staff. I do not condemn them as a whole: there are good men among them, but a great many useless ones.

1425. Would the fact that they are better acquainted with the circumstances of the district, and being themselves immediately interested in the keeping-down of rabbits, be a reason for performing their duties in an efficient manner?—I think so, decidedly.

1426. Is not the penalty of £1 for breaches of the Act too small for parties holding five hundred acres?—I think so.

1427. Are there not persons occasionally who prefer to pay the £1 to dealing with the pest?—I believe there are such people.

1428. What should be the lowest penalty for persons holding from five hundred acres up to ten thousand?—Probably £10.

1429. And from ten thousand to one hundred thousand?—It should be higher in proportion, of course.

1430. Do you not think that in the better classes of country the erection of wire-netting fences would tend to prevent the rabbits from straying from place to place?—There might be certain localities where wire-netting could be used with advantage, but I do not think it could be generally used in the settled districts.

1431. In the settled districts would you be inclined to advocate that a wire-netting fence should be constituted a legal fence as between neighbours?—Yes—along with wire, of course.

1432. We have heard that at present the expense of killing rabbits is met by capitalists, merchants, and others, and not by the present holders, in many cases?—That is so.

1433. Supposing these capitalists declined to go on making advances, and the country is thrown extensively on the hands of the Government, what would be the consequence, looking at it from a rabbit point of view?—It would be an expensive matter for the Government to keep the rabbits in such a state as to make the land of value for grazing purposes if it fell back into their hands.

1434. *Captain Russell.*] You have had very heavy losses. Have you any parasitical disease among the stock?—No.

1435. No lung-worm?—No, not on the runs; we have some on the leaseholds occasionally, but it does not affect us to any extent.

1436. And do not the sheep suffer from intestinal parasite?—No.

1437. Do you find fencing off the plantation successful?—They get in occasionally, but if it is attended to it is right enough.

1438. Then the erection of wire-fencing and the stopping of the rabbits is a question of expense, and only of expense?—Yes; but the fences would want a good deal of attention—after the floods especially.

1439. Supposing the country was bare of feed, would the rabbits take poison in summer?—I think they would; but it would be a bad job for the sheep if things got so bad as that.

1440. Supposing you erected wire-netting fencing across different parts, and ate a portion of the country bare, and then laid down poison?—It would not be a success. The sheep would be suffering if it were eaten down as bare as that. It would be an expensive matter to work it like that.

1441. Would it not rather go to show that the country is too large for the capital employed upon it?—I do not think so. It is winter and summer country together, and unless the country was worked pretty well as a whole it could not be worked to advantage. The sheep in summer are put out on summer country, and in winter are brought low.

1442. Is there any reason why certain blocks should be used while others are being spared?—It would require more capital. It would not enable us to kill the rabbits in summer.

1443. If you were to eat a piece of country thoroughly bare and spread poison the rabbits would not take it?—Last summer the country was very bare, but, notwithstanding that, the rabbits would not take the poison, although the experiment was tried and the sheep were nearly starving.

1444. It would help, would it not?—Yes.

1445. And is not summer the most important time for poisoning?—Yes.

1446. And would it not be worth while to try such a scheme as that?—I think it would not be a success.

1447. Do you think the increase of rabbits can be stopped?—I think so. It is stopped now with us.

1448. Do you think any spread of rabbits is due to faulty administration?—Yes, and carelessness. Nobody thought the pest was going to be so dangerous. We did not know of phosphorus-poisoning at all; and but for that I suppose the whole country would have been devastated by this time.

1449. People are much more alive now to the danger of rabbits than they were?—Yes, and know how to treat them better.

1450. And you think, therefore, that locally-elected bodies would be more likely to do their duty than formerly?—Yes.

1451. Do you think the Inspectors do all they can to stop the spread?—Not all of them.

1452. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have you lost many sheep from poison?—Very few.

1453. Has the carrying-capacity of the district in which you are interested been diminished much?—Yes; in the high country it has been very much diminished. On some runs there is not half the stock there was before the rabbits came.

1454. Is that due to rabbits or to any other cause?—Rabbits entirely.

1455. To keas?—Not in our country.

1456. Is the pasture where the rabbits have been numerous permanently injured?—It seems to be. In a great many places the finer grasses have been eaten down by the rabbits, but they might come back again in time; but the grass now has not the same feeding-quality that it had before the rabbits.

TUESDAY, 22ND JUNE, 1886.

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

1457. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Your district is the Maniototo?—Yes.

1458. Are there large numbers of rabbits there?—Yes, very many. It is a dry, warm country.

1459. I believe you were very successful last year in killing the rabbits?—I was.

1460. Would you state to the Committee your method of killing?—My method is that of poisoning. You do more at all seasons of the year by poison, even if you only kill a few in summer. There is a machine which ought to be in very general use throughout the colony for mixing the poison. It is patented in Otago.

1461. Do you lay very great stress on the method of mixing the poison?—I do. This particular machine is air-tight, and the fumes of the phosphorus are forced through every part of the grain.

1462. Do you mix your phosphorus with water?—Yes; we melt it first in a small quantity of boiling water. The directions sent with the machine are the best to follow.

1463. Some witnesses have represented that the best plan is to break the phosphorus on to the oats, and not to dissolve it in water first?—I do not think it makes the slightest difference how it is put in, so long as none of it is lost. If it is fired it is lost. It all goes off into fumes at a certain temperature. My method is to take the sticks of phosphorus and throw them into the cylinder before the oats are put in.

1464. How long do you find that poisoned oats will lie without losing their strength?—On that point I am in a position to adduce evidence as against all the theory that has been propounded. In the hot weather of last summer I was poisoning in the Maniototo, and for five days that the grain lay on the ground it was taking fire every day, so that there must have been a great deal of phosphoric strength to set fire to the grass for five consecutive days. This was in January last.

1465. Did you find that the rabbits took the poison in summer?—I never saw them take it more freely at any season of the year.

1466. Not even in winter?—Not even in winter. There was abundance of grass, but it was very dry.

1467. Do you mix anything else with the oats besides phosphorus?—No. I have used all the ordinary mixtures, but I have never found them make any difference. Sugar we generally put in, but I do not know that it is necessary.

1468. And no salt?—No.

1469. Do you lay this on bare patches?—On the barest patches you can find; but where there is abundance of grass in the summer time, you cannot find places that are quite bare.

1470. Do you sow it?—We put it in little heaps, about forty grains to every little patch.

1471. And you are satisfied that poisoning in summer does answer?—When the grass is dry—not necessarily burned, but when there is not much young growth in it. I have been in the habit of doing this on the coast for some years.

1472. Do you think proper steps are being taken in your district to keep down the rabbit nuisance?—No, I do not. I think the question of killing rabbits in winter is altogether too lightly treated. In the beginning of winter—about May or the end of April—the Inspector sends round notices to destroy rabbits. There is an attempt to do so. When the Inspector comes round the rabbits do not seem numerous, and he is satisfied that the people are killing, and nothing more is done. The plan should be to keep killing rabbits all along.

1473. You are now speaking of your own district?—My experience extends over a good many districts.

1474. And your experience is that in the winter months the Inspectors call upon the persons to poison only once?—Unless complaints are made, my experience is that no further steps are taken.

1475. How often do you think country should be poisoned?—There is an opinion among a great many people that rabbits will not take poison if once poisoned; but I cannot say I have noticed that. I should have poison laid in quantities so long as there are signs of rabbits scratching about.

1476. I suppose it is on account of the expense of laying poison that this remedy is not resorted to more frequently than is the case?—I think it is to be attributed to the ignorance of the people. They do not know their own interests, and the matter is not forced upon them.

1477. Are you satisfied with the provisions of the Act?—I do not think the results are at all commensurate with the tremendous expense. The Rabbit Inspectors do not keep the settlers up to the mark in the winter, when the rabbits should be so easily killed.

1478. What would you suggest?—I think there must be a very much larger number of Rabbit Agents and Inspectors than there is any necessity for. The number is surprising. I believe the men try to do their duty. I have no complaint to make against them: they are good men, as a rule. I am sure they do not realize themselves the necessity for killing rabbits in winter: they are quite oblivious of it. They are generally put in motion by complaints being made to them. With regard to poisoning, if the rabbits are scattered in the summer there is a greater expense in putting poison down.

1479. Do you think the rabbits collect again?—They collect in batches if left alone at all seasons of the year. They collect at the most favourite spots when they are thin; when they are thick the necessity for searching for food scatters them.

1480. But you are poisoning in the summer?—Yes; but I would not allow a continual disturbance by dogs. I am a thorough advocate of poisoning. Dogging, and shooting, and trapping during the summer months send them off. More actual good can be done by poisoning than any other method.

1481. Do you think the Act could be carried out more efficiently if the administration were placed in the hands of local bodies?—I am afraid not. I am afraid that local influence would be too great altogether for the fair working of the Act. I think, however, that the centre of management should be much nearer to the different districts—say at Dunedin for Otago, and so on. That would be an improvement, in my opinion.

1482. And would you leave all power in the hands of the officers in charge of the central dépôts?—Very large powers—much larger than they have.

1483. Have you tried natural enemies?—I have done so largely.

1484. Are you in favour of them?—Yes; but they do not thrive in every place. When the stoats become more numerous they will be very useful—they are so hardy. The ferrets are not thriving in Maniototo. I do not think they are increasing.

1485. How is that?—I suppose the cold of winter affects them.

1486. Is the cold alone sufficient to kill them?—We have turned out a great many hundreds of ferrets on my ground and the adjoining ground, and they are not increasing.

1487. Where can you obtain the machine for mixing the poison to which you have referred?—It is Donald's patent, of Palmerston. I do not think you could place too much stress on the use of such a machine. It is rather expensively made, the boiler-plate riveted in the same way as ordinarily, so as to withstand the great pressure of steam.

1488. What would you say to Boards of local trustees, elected by payers of the sheep rate, to have the administration of the Act?—I had not thought of that at all. That suggestion was never made to me. At first glance it looks well. I should not like to venture a very strong opinion until I had thought it over; but, at the same time, I should say that those most deeply interested in this subject would be likely to see to the proper carrying-out of the Act.

1489. Do you recommend the introduction of stoats and weasels in large numbers, and the Government providing a proper breeding-establishment for them?—I do not think stoats and weasels could be bred in confinement.

1490. But suppose they were put on an island and allowed to run at large?—I was the first to

introduce a stoat into New Zealand. They can be bought in any number at Home for 5s. each, and brought out more cheaply than ferrets. I had an offer to supply me with as many as I chose at 5s. in England.

1491. And what is the expense of bringing them out?—In quantities, I imagine they could be brought out for 10s. each.

1492. Have you any objection to name the agent who would supply you at Home with the animals at that figure?—He was the gamekeeper of the Earl of Yarborough's estate, in Lincolnshire. The Earl does not allow trapping for foxes—he is a sportsman; and consequently there are a great many stoats there. I had the offer through the man in London who sent me out the particular stoats for which I paid 5s. each.

1493. Do you not think that these animals, being the natives of a cold climate, would be much better adapted for New Zealand, especially for the high country, than the ferret, which is the native of a warmer climate?—The ferret is a domestic animal. The nearest animal to it is the polecat. I am decidedly of opinion that in Otago the ferret is not going to be a useful animal for breeding and increasing naturally. The stoat and weasel, however, will do so.

1494. Do you approve of wire-netting for boundary fences?—All my experience of wire-netting shows me that where it has been put up on rough country it has been abandoned. On farms it is an excellent remedy. I have seen it tried and abandoned generally on runs.

1495. In settled districts would you advocate its being made a legal fence, with ordinary wire?—I should like to see it done, but I am afraid it would be very oppressive in the case of small, struggling farmers. It would, no doubt, serve a good purpose.

1496. Are you of opinion that, in order to encourage the destruction of rabbits, the Government should give a bonus of, say, 1d. on shipments of skins?—I am in a very awkward position in reference to that question. My desire to obtain the bonus is in opposition to the question of what is a right principle. I should have no objection to take the 1d. per skin, but I am afraid that another department might grow up.

1497. At present the loss is all with the settler?—I should not object to the bonus myself, but I question whether it would be a wise thing.

1498. *Hon. Mr. Williamson.*] Do you not think that if stoats were introduced they would afterwards become a nuisance in the country themselves?—No. It is against natural law that such animals should live on sheep. I speak with a great deal of confidence about the matter. If the rabbits diminished in number the others would. We read of people stating that in England or Scotland stoats in their wild state have been killing sheep; but I believe there is no authentic case.

1499. Are there any instances of ferrets attacking children?—Frequently of tame ferrets, but not wild ones. The ferret is a dangerous animal. I do not think any one acquainted with them, however, would fear that they would become a nuisance. They might take a few fowls. They live in colonies—they do not roam all over the country. Stoats never kill lambs; but, even supposing they did, how many lambs are killed every year by rabbits! The lambing on some stations that I could mention was reduced from 55 and 75 per cent. to 15 per cent. during the first year that the rabbits came, and I say the rabbits destroyed about 40 per cent. of the lambs. As a matter of fact, I am not afraid of stoats touching the lambs.

1500. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Evidence has been given that if the poison is properly mixed there would be no danger from fire?—I think if properly prepared it would lessen the risk; but I am afraid there would always be a little risk. The summer of last year would try it very much. The heat was extreme in Maniototo. My experience is that you would do more by summer poisoning than any other process. The young rabbits will always take poison.

1501. That will hold good even if the grass is green and plentiful?—Let it be ever so plentiful, so long as there is not too much growth in it. I do not say poison is as effectual as in winter; but it is more effectual than hunting with dogs, shooting, and so on. Arsenic sprinkled on mangel-wurzel and carrots I have not tried; but I am told it is used with great success.

1502. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] With regard to the importation of stoats, a letter has been read to this Committee offering to import any number at a far higher rate than that mentioned by you?—The man who brought them out for me is named Allbones, and he is now in the employ of the Government, I believe.

Mr. G. S. Cooper: He is not in the employ of the Government now: he is, I believe, employed by a private individual to bring these animals out.

1503. *Mr. Dodson.*] Would it not be a good plan in laying the poison to chip a piece of ground?—An excellent plan. Rabbits always come to fresh-turned earth. If the rabbits were really thoroughly poisoned in winter, and until the end of winter, all the rabbits left over would be very few, and these could be easily dealt with in summer.

1504. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Have you seen in the papers a description of a plough that has been adapted for laying poison on the ground? It turns up the ground and deposits little heaps at intervals?—I have seen something about it, but I fancy it would score the ground a good deal, and would be useless on high ground. It would spoil grass-land.

1505. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You said you thought if wire-netting were made a legal fence it would act hardly on small farmers. But supposing the contribution that could be called for would be simply the interest on the first outlay?—It would be very heavy on the man who put up the fence.

1506. But would it assist in the matter?—Wire-netting on good country is a very great aid in stopping rabbits from spreading. They take poison up against the fence a great deal better.

1507. But that is your only objection to make it a legal fence?—I am afraid that many would oppose a fence that could only be used in a very limited way.

1508. Your remarks about stoats apply to weasels as well?—Yes.

1509. There is an objection to bring them out on the passenger-ships on account of the smell?—They complained very much of the smell of the polecats that were imported for me; but, very fortunately, they went overboard. If a few were established they would ruin all our trout-streams. The polecat is a fisher. It is almost indistinguishable from a large dark-coloured ferret; and these ought to be carefully examined, and if any polecats are found amongst them they should be destroyed. They make up their homes on the banks of streams, and live on fish, with a variety of other food.

1510. Could not the difficulty with the vessels be got over?—Yes, I should think so. It is a pity to stop stoats and weasels. There are a great many other animals—the hedgehog, for example—that are not objected to, which could be imported. The hedgehog eats up young rabbits, and the different kinds of owls would relieve us of the small-birds nuisance, and kill many young rabbits. We want all sorts of animals. I would also recommend the destruction of rabbit-burrows wherever found. Rabbits will always come back again, no matter whether you fumigate or poison.

FRIDAY, 18TH JUNE, 1886.

Mr. ORBELL, Inspector under the Sheep and Rabbit Act for Wairarapa South and part of Wairarapa North, examined.

1511. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have the rabbits been a great nuisance in your district?—Yes.

1512. Since you have been there have they increased or diminished?—They have diminished. There are three portions of my district now in which they are practically reduced to a minimum.

1513. When did you take charge of this district?—Three years ago.

1514. The rabbits were very bad when you arrived?—Yes.

1515. And you cannot say what the original carrying-capacity of the district was?—No. Around us the grazing-capability a few years ago upon a run was six thousand, and it has increased to seventeen thousand.

1516. Therefore the rabbits must be reduced so as not to be a nuisance?—In about two-thirds of the district the rabbits have practically been reduced to a minimum.

1517. What means have been used in the district for getting rid of them?—Poisoning with phosphorized grain, turning out the natural enemy, fumigating with bisulphide of carbon, and trapping and dogging, and destroying burrows and warrens.

1518. Is poisoning carried on all the year round?—In some places; but some settlers do not care so much about summer poisoning as they do about winter poisoning; but last summer people have been successful by turning over a furrow with a plough and laying poison, also turning the sod.

1519. Does the turning-up of the sod or ploughing have any other effect than that of attracting the rabbits?—That is all. They come to any ground which is freshly turned up.

1520. And from your experience, when ground is so turned the rabbits will take poison in the summer?—Yes.

1521. Was there the same result in poisoning in the summer where the ground was not so turned up?—No; and they will not take it so readily in summer as they will in winter.

1522. Is there much trapping and hunting with dogs?—Yes, in places.

1523. Is that at the wish of the owner or by direction of the Inspector?—At the wish of the owner.

1524. Do you call upon the owner to adopt any particular method of eradicating the rabbits?—No; he chooses his own mode.

1525. Do you call upon them to poison at particular times of the year?—We go round and urge them to poison during the winter months. We do not direct them to do so.

1526. You do not send them notices to commence poisoning?—No.

1527. Do you not think simultaneous poisoning is very necessary?—Yes.

1528. Do you not think, therefore, it is necessary to send notices to all owners to poison simultaneously?—We go round, and in conversation we advise them to poison, and suggest that they should do it simultaneously.

1529. Have you authority to give them notice to begin at a certain time?—We have power to serve notices on them to destroy, but not to tell them any direct mode.

1530. Have you any authority under the Act to call upon them to kill rabbits at a certain time, so that all are simultaneously killing?—We ask them to do so.

1531. Is that because you find them all so perfectly willing to do it?—Yes; they are quite willing to lay poison during the winter.

1532. Do you find that, notwithstanding your request, some of them do not do it?—During spring and summer months some of them do not care about taking efficient steps.

1533. But your experience is that you have no necessity to send peremptory notices?—We send the notices at first to destroy the rabbits, but not to adopt any particular means. It has never come under my notice that they have objected to poison.

1534. Then you have never instructed them to put on rabbiters with dogs?—No.

1535. What animals have been turned out in the Wairarapa?—Ferrets, stoats, weasels, and cats.

1536. Which do you consider to be the best?—Stoats and weasels. Mr. Riddiford has turned out a good number of stoats and weasels.

1537. Can you say whether these latter are fairly acclimatized and are breeding?—I believe

they are breeding. You do not generally see them. You see the rabbits they have killed. It is very difficult to see the stoats and weasels.

1538. Have the trappers ever caught any stoats and weasels?—I have never heard of their doing so; but they catch ferrets, which are easily caught.

1539. Have you been obliged to take steps against any one for not killing the rabbits?—Yes.

1540. What was the ground of your complaint in that instance?—For not taking efficient steps.

1541. What time of the year was that?—In the spring and summer months.

1542. And you obtained a conviction?—Yes.

1543. Do you think the Act works well in your district?—I think it works satisfactorily.

1544. You have no difficulty in getting a conviction for a breach of the Act?—No.

1545. Have you any unoccupied Crown lands or reserves in your district?—Yes; a few.

1546. Are they badly infested with rabbits?—No.

1547. Do you take steps to prevent rabbits becoming numerous upon them?—Yes; we let contracts for poisoning.

1548. With regard to Native lands unoccupied by Europeans, can you compel Maoris to keep the rabbits down?—Yes; but on lands for which no Crown grant, certificate of title, or memorial of ownership has been issued the Government takes the necessary steps to destroy.

1549. As Inspector, if there were lands of that description in your district would you send men on to eradicate the rabbits?—Yes.

1550. Who would pay the expense?—The Government.

1551. Do they charge it against the Maoris?—That does not come within my knowledge.

1552. How many agents have you under you?—Two.

1553. What are their duties?—To ride round and examine the country, and report to me on the state of the rabbits.

1554. Who appoints and discharges them?—The Inspector.

1555. What means have you of checking their work—simply riding round yourself?—Yes.

1556. Are you satisfied?—I have no cause to suspect that they do not do their duty, nor do I hear complaints made from the landowners.

1557. You would hear such complaints, in all probability, if made?—I think so.

1558. Do you recommend giving a bonus for skins?—That is a difficult question. To do so might act as an inducement to farm rabbits.

1559. *Hon. Mr. Robinson.*] How long have you been in this district?—Three years.

1560. Were the rabbits over the whole district when you first went there?—Yes.

1561. There were none in the Whareama when you went to that district?—There were some; but this is not my district.

1562. Are the rabbits over a greater area now?—Much less.

1563. Is any of the country perfectly clean?—Not perfectly, but they are reduced to a minimum. You may now ride miles and miles and not see a rabbit during the day.

1564. They are over the whole country, but not so thick?—Yes.

1565. As Inspector for the district, what do you do—you live on one spot?—Yes; when I am not travelling.

1566. How far have the rabbits spread from where you live? How far have you to go to see the rabbits?—They are close by—within a mile.

1567. What is the extent of the whole country you are looking over?—I could not say how many miles.

1568. Fifty miles?—I should say so.

1569. Do you ever go that distance?—I generally take a turn every month—not visiting every station, but I keep constantly on the move.

1570. More than once a year?—Yes.

1571. Do you think the system of Inspectors is a good one?—Yes.

1572. How many men have owners on twenty thousand acres?—Nine or ten on the worst part.

1573. Do they all go together?—No.

1574. Is any of your country fenced in with rabbit-proof fence?—Yes.

1575. Does it stop the rabbits?—It stops them from migrating, if looked after. I have known places, however, where they burrow under, and cross by water-courses.

1576. How do you put up the fence?—Netting is put on a post-and-wire fence, and let into the ground.

1577. How?—Straight down, six inches into the ground. In some places I believe it has been bent under.

1578. Do you consider it necessary that the Inspectors, independent of the reports by the agents, should go over the country and see it for themselves?—Most decidedly.

1579. And frequently?—Yes.

1580. You do not know of wire-netting having been bent under the ground of your own knowledge?—No; in my district it is generally put straight down into the ground, rabbits being on both sides of the fence.

1581. And you think a fence can be put up, and, with proper care, keep the country free from rabbits on one side of it?—It would have to be looked after, especially in watercourses and other similar places. It would undoubtedly be a great help in stopping them.

1582. You do not think it would stop them even if kept in good order?—It would to a certain extent, but there might be an odd one that would get through.

1583. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Have the rabbits increased in the Wairarapa during the last summer?—They increased during the dry season, but by ploughing a furrow, and turning a sod, and putting down poison they were reduced.

1584. You believe in summer poisoning where the rabbits are numerous?—Yes; but, as I have said, they will not take the poison so readily in summer as in winter.
1585. Have you had any occasion to proceed against stockowners who did not poison the rabbits during the summer in the Wairarapa?—Yes.
1586. In many cases?—I think I took proceedings against fifteen.
1587. *Mr. Dodson.*] Did you sow grain not poisoned on the furrow before putting down the poisoned grain, so as to accustom them to it?—No.
1588. *Captain Russell.*] Had you any experience of rabbits before you went to the Wairarapa?—Yes.
1589. In this country?—Yes.
1590. Does your district go to the Seventy-Mile Bush?—Yes.
1591. As far as Eketahuna?—That is now lately in Mr. Drummond's district.
1592. The rabbits have diminished there, have they not?—Yes.
1593. How has that been brought about?—Chiefly by poisoning.
1594. How far north have rabbits been killed in numbers during the last year?—At Alfredtown, but not many, being the north of my district.
1595. How far up the Seventy-Mile Bush Road?—I may say that part is free of rabbits.
1596. They used to be there in considerable numbers?—No.
1597. They were up that road?—Up at Dorset's, but never thick in that part.
1598. Were they supposed to travel much in the bush?—No; not in the dense bush.
1599. Are you quite sure of that?—They will go up the creeks and banks of the rivers, and where there are clearings in the bush they will go.
1600. Then, you think it necessary to guard against rabbits spreading into the bush on clearing it?—Yes.
1601. With regard to summer poisoning, do you not think, if one-half of a piece of country were eaten down bare, you might succeed in poisoning?—I think so.
1602. Do you think it is mainly or entirely owing to the dry season that they took the poison this year?—I could not say; but they did take it better this year.
1603. How many miles of wire-netting fencing could a man keep in perfect repair in ordinary country?—He could ride along a great number of miles—about twenty miles, I should think. It greatly depends upon the nature of the country and its accessibility.
1604. You know nothing of the fence between Hawke's Bay and the Wairarapa District?—No.
1605. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] How have the ferrets answered in your district?—Very well; but they are so liable to distemper. The numbers require to be kept up, or else the rabbits will rise again.
1606. Do you think the Government would be justified in introducing stoats and weasels, and providing a breeding-establishment?—Yes; it would be a great benefit to the country.
1607. Especially for the high country?—Yes.
1608. Do you think it would be desirable for the Government to grant a bonus of 1d. per skin as an inducement for those who are suffering from the pest to kill the rabbits down?—I could not say. We had a bonus down in Southland of a halfpenny per skin.
1609. Do you consider the present minimum penalty of £1 under the Act sufficient?—No, decidedly not.
1610. For holders of from five thousand to twenty thousand acres you would think a ten-pound penalty little enough?—Yes, for first conviction.
1611. And of a hundred thousand acres, more than that even?—Yes.
1612. *Hon. Mr. Robinson.*] Do you think there is any prospect of getting rid of rabbits in this country?—No, not to exterminate them entirely; but they could be kept down to a minimum by the settlers working with a will and determination. The difficulty is to get them to work simultaneously during the summer months.
1613. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] You are in favour of a wire-netting fence?—Not as a legal fence in my district; but in a badly-infested district I believe it would be proper to have it fenced in.
1614. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] Do you know Mr. Hawkins's property in the Wairarapa?—Yes.
1615. Has he not used wire-netting fencing largely?—Yes.
1616. Has it succeeded in his case?—That is out of my district. Mr. Drummond will be able to answer that question.
1617. *Captain Russell.*] Are not owners of land more alive to their interests in respect to the rabbit pest than they were a few years ago?—There is a great deal more difficulty with the occupiers of Native leaseholds. With the owners of land I have no difficulty at all to speak of.
1618. Do you think a Board elected by payers of sheep-rates would strengthen your hands?—In my district I think the Act is working satisfactorily.
1619. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What sort of leaseholds are they to which you have just referred?—Lands leased from Natives by Europeans.
1620. Do you make any difference between those and freeholds in requiring the occupiers to kill?—No; but these lands have not been through the Court. All infested land of such description should be put through the Court, and there would be less difficulty in keeping the rabbits down. In reference to the Rabbit Act, I would like to suggest that, in the 9th clause, the word "and" in the phrase "and, having so commenced," &c., should be altered to "or, having commenced, did not continue such action," &c.
1621. *Mr. Dodson.*] Have you found any difficulty in regard to that?—Yes, it came out in two or three cases on the last occasion. Then, also, the local Boards should be compelled to destroy rabbits on the unformed portion of roads. The roads are supposed to be one chain wide; but only a portion, or track, is made, and the other portion is abandoned to grass and the rabbits. The roads I refer to are fenced off with rabbit-proof fences on both sides by owners.

THURSDAY, 24TH JUNE, 1886.

STATEMENT by the Hon. J. B. A. ACLAND, M.L.C.

Hon. Mr. Acland: Mr. Chairman, I should like to make a statement showing how the rabbits are spreading over the unoccupied Crown lands. Last year I was informed that some shepherds who had crossed from the Mackenzie country to Mesopotamia, which is situate in the upper part of the Rangitata Valley, had seen some rabbits on the high land situate between the two above-named places. This country was not included in any run. I wrote up to the Government stating this, and requesting that measures might be taken to ascertain if there were rabbits there; and, if so, that they might be destroyed. In consequence of these representations, orders were sent to the Inspector to visit the place, and he went up there and found there were rabbits. He sent up men to destroy them, and also turned out a number of stoats and weasels. The rabbits had congregated in a warm, sheltered corner, where there was a quantity of small scrub and large snowgrass tussocks, amongst which, although covered with snow in winter, they were quite comfortable. The men killed fourteen hundred, and their presence had been utterly unsuspected. If not discovered and destroyed they would have overflowed all over the Rangitata country. I may add that I have received the following letter from a gentleman living in the Mackenzie country: "Glenmore, Tekapo, 14th June, 1886.—Dear Sir,—At Mr. Hope's request for information *re* Otago rabbits, I beg to inform you the Otago rabbits, all colours, are already on the western shores of Lake Pukaki, right along to the foot of Mount Cook. How long the Tasman River will stop them from coming north is not easy to decide. They will naturally enough get on to the islands in this river-bed, and a fresh might leave them on the northern bank at any time. There are myriads of them in the Ohau Gorge, and, as there is only the dividing-range between there and Pukaki between us and the pest, we may any fine morning get up and see the country alive. This is the route the rabbits already have come over. The range, of course, keeps them back in winter, but is no boundary in summer, when clear of snow. I think we have got our own rabbits fairly under if only proper vigilance is used to keep them so.—I have, &c., J. MCGREGOR."

STATEMENT by the Hon. M. HOLMES, M.L.C.

Hon. Mr. Holmes: Mr. Chairman, I should like to state that one of the most efficient men in the Rabbit Department (Mr. Sutton) made it his business to ride over part of the Mackenzie country and the dividing-range; and he said he found rabbits all the way from the interior of the district, where we know the country is badly infested, to Lake Tekapo, and on to the foot of Mount Cook. He found more or less rabbits the whole of the way, and there is no doubt that the Provincial District of Canterbury is now in for a dose of rabbits, like every other part of the colony.

Inspector DOUGLAS, of the Wallace District, examined.

1622. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Is your district much infested with rabbits?—Yes. It has been much more than it is now. Southland was the first district that the rabbit got a footing in. I have only known it there for nine years personally, but the rabbits have been bad there for the past twelve or thirteen years. Now they are not nearly so bad as they were. I attribute this state of things to the poisoned grain, and the steps taken generally to destroy the rabbit.

1623. Would you state to the Committee what steps have been taken in your district?—Poisoned grain during the winter, while after September various steps are adopted, such as dogs, trapping, fumigating, and ferrets.

1624. What do you think is the most effectual method of killing?—Phosphorized grain is the main thing.

1625. Are you an advocate of dogs and rabbiters?—To a very limited extent. On certain country I believe a few dogs would be useful in the spring of the year.

1626. Describe your method of destroying rabbits?—The first week in June, directly the frost sets in, we start the poison and get it on the ground as quickly as possible. The quicker the ground is poisoned the better the effect. Then I like to leave it for six weeks. What rabbits are left congregate into little colonies, and these are dealt with by a second poisoning in August or September. I would like to see a little fresh poison laid every three weeks at the edge of bushes, because there are always rabbits coming out of the bush. Generally speaking, I think the country should be poisoned twice.

1627. Would you continue poisoning in the summer months?—On a limited scale, by picking a wet afternoon or evening. I think where the poison is exposed to a hot sun it does more harm than good.

1628. You have had considerable experience in the use of phosphorus?—Yes; I have been using it since it first started, and seen it used in every way.

1629. Would you describe how you recommend poisoned grain to be mixed?—I use 1lb. of phosphorus to 80lb. of dry oats.

1630. How do you mix it?—You soak the oats first in boiling water for a short time, or you can boil the oats—it does not matter, so long as you get the oats thoroughly heated. Ten minutes' soaking would be sufficient. Then, just mix the phosphorus in a little "billy" in boiling water. It does equally well, I think, to put the sticks in as they are.

1631. One witness says the phosphorus should not be melted in water above 120° or 125°; otherwise it leads to a deposit of crystals, which have the effect of causing fires when the grain is laid?—I have nothing to say on that point. I put this into a cask or churn, and revolve it for a few minutes; then leave it—giving it a few turns now and again—and let it cool, after which you can take it out. There is no necessity to leave it soaking. I have seen poisoned oats given to fowls after having been mixed for some days and laid in the sun, without killing them.

1632. Are oats better than wheat?—They are more generally used. I think rabbits take oats in preference to wheat; but I generally mix a little wheat for second poisoning.

1633. You recognize that a great deal depends on the mixing?—Everything depends on the mixing. In my opinion, the cause of the formation of the crystals is due to the wheat not being sufficiently heated before the phosphorus is put in.

1634. If the country is properly poisoned in winter, do you think rabbits will be kept down to such an extent that there will be little difficulty in checking them in the summer months?—Not without some special means. I am a strong advocate for natural enemies.

1635. Have you turned out many?—Over twelve hundred during the last three years; but most of them have been turned out at the edge of bushes, and it is very difficult to say what they are doing, because they have spread about so much.

1636. Have you turned out any other animals?—Eleven weasels, which were imported by the Government. Only one of these has been seen since.

1637. Do you think the ferrets are increasing?—Yes, they breed and thrive.

1638. Is this on high country?—Everywhere I think the ferrets will do good. I do not know that they have gone on the high mountains; but they will go up to an elevation of 2,000ft. and 2,500ft. and thrive, and there is not the slightest doubt that where the ground has been carefully poisoned in winter they will keep the rabbits down, if numerous enough.

1639. I suppose there is no hope of exterminating rabbits?—Not thoroughly. You can, however, keep them down so as not to be a nuisance on accessible ground.

1640. Do you find any difficulty in regard to occupiers of land being unwilling to take steps to destroy rabbits?—I have got on very well with all the people in my district. One or two required a little pressing, and I have had to prosecute three or four in each year.

1641. Do you call the landholders together and intimate your proposals?—I do not call any meeting. I see them all personally beforehand, and consult with them, and get the adjoining landholders to arrange when to start on the boundaries.

1642. Do you think that is one reason why you get them to work unanimously?—I think so. I know the people who are ready to assist me and those who are backward.

1643. Do you find that the provisions of the Act are sufficient to enable you to do all that is necessary in keeping the rabbits down?—I think so. There is a little delay in having to serve notices first. If the Act was to be altered at all I think it should be in that direction. It is hardly necessary to give notice. Any Inspector would always warn a man before putting the Act into force. If you give notice a man may do something towards appearing to carry out your instructions to kill the rabbits, and when the Inspector comes round a second time he will find that something has been done; but directly his back is turned the man ceases, and he has to be served with a fresh notice.

1644. Have you to serve with fresh notice in each case?—The Act is not very clear on that point.

1645. Is that the only point in which you have found any difficulty?—That is the only one.

1646. It has been suggested that the minimum penalty of £1 should be increased in the case of the larger holdings?—I do not see that it makes any difference what the minimum penalty is; I think the maximum penalty should be larger. In some cases it would pay a man to be fined £20 every month rather than take steps.

1647. Do you think it would be advantageous to refer the administration of the Act to County Councils or Road Boards?—I do not think it would work so well. We have had that experience.

1648. Do you not think the circumstances are somewhat changed? Nowadays people are beginning to recognize that the rabbit pest is a more serious thing than they had at first imagined?—Perhaps so; but in my district the pest was recognized, and I had a good Board of Trustees; but it was found awkward to get matters carried out efficiently. I think, if the Inspector was depended upon to carry out the terms of the Act strictly it would be better.

1649. Do you find any difficulty in consequence of the delay in having to refer any question to the head office at Wellington?—I have found only very slight difficulty.

1650. Supposing, instead of having to refer to Wellington, you had only to refer to Dunedin?—I do not think it would make much difference in the working of the Act, but quicker action might be taken.

1651. How many agents have you?—Two.

1652. Do you appoint or dismiss them as you think fit?—I recommended them for appointment, and they were sanctioned.

1653. Have you power to dismiss them if they do not perform their duty?—Mr. Bayly instructed me that I could dismiss them. I have heard it questioned since, but I have not had occasion to test it.

1654. There is a large extent of unoccupied lands in your district?—Close on nine hundred thousand acres in the Wallace County alone. Stewart Island is also in my district, and Fiord County.

1655. Has any of this ever been in occupation?—A small portion.

1656. What steps do you take to kill rabbits on unoccupied Crown lands?—These nine hundred thousand acres are mostly inaccessible. It is all bush except at the tops.

1657. And are there rabbits?—All round the lower edges; and there are rabbits on the tops in summer time. I have turned out ferrets there. There are places of fifty acres or so round Manipouri Lake, and wherever I have found rabbits I have turned out ferrets, in the hope that they will follow them through the bush to the top.

1658. Is there any of this land such as would be occupied for pasturage if the rent were sufficiently low?—No. Some of it has been offered at £5 per annum for large blocks. One or two were taken up, but nothing was done.

1659. And you cannot suggest any method by which you could get them occupied by persons

who would be responsible for killing the rabbits?—No; it is only by natural enemies that rabbits can be killed on this country. I may mention that wherever a run is bounded by waste lands the adjoining owner has been given a subsidy on account of the extra expense put to in killing the rabbits.

1660. Do you think it would be advisable for the Government to offer a bonus for rabbit-skins?—Certainly not.

1661. Or to purchase skins at a fixed price?—No. As long as any value was attached to the skins the rabbits would be preserved to a more or less extent. It would be an encouragement to farm rabbits, and would put a stop to poisoning at once.

1662. Can you state anything with regard to the carrying-capacity of your district?—That has greatly improved.

1663. Have the rabbits permanently injured the feed?—I think they have killed out a good many fattening herbs. I do not think the grasses have the same fattening qualities as they had before the rabbits came; but, no doubt, some of these herbs will show up in the course of time again. They are showing up already in several places in my district.

1664. Would you recommend any assistance to tenants of the Crown with short leases?—If the rabbits are coming on from adjoining unoccupied ground he receives some compensation on account of the extra expense. Four years ago £1,000 was divided amongst those landholders who were put to extra expense. This year it came down to £125. Each year it has been getting less; and as ferrets are turned out it will cease.

1665. Would you recommend the Government to give a rebate upon the rents in such cases?—I think that would be far preferable to giving a bonus on the skins. I would either give them a longer lease or reduce the rent.

1666. You think they are entitled to that?—I do.

1667. Is it hard upon the tenants with short leases?—It is very hard on them, especially where high rents are being charged for the runs.

1668. Have you had any experience of wire-netting?—I have seen a considerable quantity of it used.

1669. What is your opinion of it?—It acts as a great check, but it is very apt to cause false security if people trust entirely to the wire-netting. It wants a man to go round two or three times a week to inspect it. In broken country it is always apt to be swept away by floods, and falling trees, and wild cattle. It will not keep out rabbits altogether.

1670. Then you would be cautious in recommending it in particular cases?—Yes; the rabbits will get across in spite of whatever care is used. I have seen a rabbit myself crawl up a wire-netting.

1671. What height?—About the height of a table.

1672. Was it pursued by dogs?—I chased it on foot, and it ran up the netting with its feet.

1673. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] Would you recommend the importation of stoats and weasels by the Government for the purpose of breeding for distribution?—If they can be got at a reasonable price they would be preferable to ferrets for high and cold country.

1674. Is it not a fact that in imposing fines the Magistrates have always inflicted the minimum penalty of £1?—That was the penalty in the first three or four cases I had; but I have got the full penalty of £20 in two cases.

1675. Should not the penalty be regulated by the size of the holding?—As long as the maximum penalty is made higher, I would leave it to the Magistrate to fix the amount.

1676. Suppose a settler refused to take proper means to kill the rabbits, and was the holder of four hundred thousand acres, would £100 be too much?—Certainly not. We have always the power, if we see a man is determined not to kill, to put men on at his expense.

1677. It has been said that the increase of rabbits is largely due to the unoccupied lands not being attended to. Is that the case in your district?—Certainly not.

1678. Will the rabbits increase in birch-forest?—They will travel through it from one open part to another; but they will not live in it entirely.

1679. *Hon. Mr. Williamson.*] Do you think that occupiers of land are not sufficiently alive to their own interests to kill the rabbits without Government supervision?—Many of them are not.

1680. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] In regard to mixing the oats, you said that the oats should be properly heated and the phosphorus added. If poured in at the top of the cask will it go right through?—Yes. It is put into a cylinder, and you revolve it.

1681. *Mr. Buchanan.*] This circumstance of a rabbit climbing over wire-netting is quite a new thing to me, although we have plenty of wire-netting in our district?—This was the only case I have seen. I saw it with my own eyes. I was running the rabbit. I got off my horse to do so. If one will do it there is no doubt that others will do it.

1682. Have you heard from others anything that would lead you to suppose that this was done to any extent?—No.

1683. Going across the grass rabbits follow the same track continually, and if the rabbits made a practice of going over wire-netting in this way, do you not think they would make runs to particular places, and the tracks would appear on one side of the fence and would be continued on the other?—Yes; they would show in that case. A great deal depends, I should say, on the height of the wire-fencing. Two feet three inches was the height above ground in the present case.

1684. You know that rabbits habitually travel on the same runs—that is, they take to a run and stick to it; and if they were in the habit of going across wire-netting in this way the appearances would be certain to show?—If they came from a certain gully or warren they would go in runs; but I do not think they have any particular runs, as a rule, when going across a plain. Of course, where the rabbits are very thick it is a regular pad all over.

1685. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] You know that hares are in the habit of having regular runs, even in countries where they are scarce?—Yes; but I have seen very little of hares for the last twenty-five years.

1686. *Mr. Cowan.*] Describe to the Committee the manner in which the rabbits first spread into your district?—They started from the sandhills near Riverton; but I cannot help thinking there were a few odd ones taken up into different parts of the country with the idea of having a little sport, the people having no suspicion they would increase to such an extent as they have done.

1687. But it is a fact that the bulk of the rabbits spread from Riverton and Invercargill in a very few years?—Yes.

1688. Could you state in what number of years that plague scattered over the district?—I never travelled over that district till nine years ago, but it must be twelve or thirteen years since they commenced to spread, and in the first two years they spread wonderfully. On Mr. Holmes's station I gave exemption-tickets for five hundred dogs, and still they were spreading.

1689. Then is it your opinion from past experience that the portions of New Zealand which are not now infested are more than likely to become so in a few years?—I think so. I think they will keep spreading.

1690. Do you not think some further inducement should be offered by the Government to reduce the pest than the means now adopted?—I am a strong advocate for natural enemies.

1691. Then you think it should go more in the way of increasing the number of natural enemies than in offering a bonus for the skins?—I think so.

1692. Do you not think that a landholder should be allowed to bring evidence as against that of the Inspector as to what he has been doing to reduce the rabbits?—I think the Magistrate would always take that into consideration.

1693. Does the Magistrate listen to evidence adduced by the other side?—In all cases I have had he has done so, and inflicted a penalty according to the evidence.

1694. You have not heard that a Resident Magistrate stated in Southland that evidence adduced on the other side is of no value, because the Act states that the statement of an Inspector is sufficient?—He is not bound as to the amount of the penalty.

1695. Is it your opinion that the destruction of rabbits in summer should be more stringently carried out than hitherto?—Yes, early-summer work is most important.

1696. Do you not think a small bonus might be offered by the Government for young rabbits?—I am afraid that would lead to not killing the does till they had got the nest.

1697. You are an advocate of working in summer in addition to winter poisoning?—I enforce that in my district. I do not press them in the autumn, when the harvest is on, but I insist on as much work as possible during the early part of the summer.

1698. What principle have you adopted in paying the subsidy to tenants adjoining unoccupied Crown lands?—Four years ago I requested the tenants to send in an offer to poison the country where bounded by bush; and their offers were considered and accepted. Each year since I have acted on my own judgment. On patches of reserves of about fifty acres or so, in the lower portion of the district, I have kept two men at work all the year round, shifting from one patch to another.

1699. Are they paid weekly wages?—Yes.

1700. Are they allowed to keep the skins?—No.

1701. *Hon. Mr. Williamson.*] You are aware that there are tailless cats in this country; might you not have been mistaken as to this rabbit which climbed over the netting?—I was so situated that I could not be mistaken.

1702. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you agree to this: that rabbits should be entirely let alone between the two winter poisonings, in order that they might collect in colonies and thus be poisoned with more effect?—Yes, it would be far better to leave them alone for a bit.

1703. Do you advocate hunting with dogs at all?—Only at the end of September or October, after the poisoning is over. In my district there is a great deal of bush-land, and I am certain the does go into this in the winter time. In the beginning of September you would not start five rabbits all along the Aparima River. Then you will see them coming out of the bush to collect on the river-flats to breed; and that is the time to catch them—before they have thrown out a nest of young ones.

1704. Are the rabbits a serious pest in the parts of your district occupied by small settlers?—Taking acre for acre, I believe there are more rabbits amongst the small settlers than there are on the large runs.

1705. Would there be great difficulty in keeping them in check?—If the settlers exert themselves they could keep them down.

1706. Are they at the present time a serious pest to the settlers?—No.

1707. How should poisoned oats be laid—broadcast or in heaps?—A man should take a bag and let a little run through his fingers. On shingle places you can scatter it the same as for sowing oats.

1708. Have you ever tried grain slightly malted?—No.

1709. Do you use sugar or rhodium?—I have used a little rhodium; I do not think it makes much difference. I use a little salt. If the grain is properly mixed three grains will kill a rabbit. I think the salt keeps the oats moist.

1710. Do you think it desirable that the Government should take steps to provide a breeding-establishment for stoats and weasels?—I think it would be a very good thing indeed.

1711. You think the experiment is worth trying?—Yes.

1712. Can you suggest any steps that might be taken with a view of materially exterminating the rabbits?—Nothing beyond what I have already suggested. A few ferrets are useless: you want them in large numbers.

WEDNESDAY, 16TH JUNE, 1886.

Mr. ROBERTS examined.

1713. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Have you had large experience in connection with rabbits?—I have had experience to this extent: that one season we killed fifty thousand skins off thirty-five thousand acres.

1714. What method of killing have you adopted?—We have adopted the usual methods. With regard to fumigation, I only tried bisulphide of carbon four or five years ago, when the remedy was first started; but we found it was difficult to apply, and the results were not equal to the expenditure.

1715. I suppose it could only be carried out in certain parts of the country?—Where there are burrows.

1716. Have you tried ferrets?—I have turned out a great many ferrets; and in one place of five thousand acres in Southland we found that in trapping we caught almost as many ferrets as rabbits, so we gave it up.

1717. If you catch a ferret in a trap, it is done for?—He is, as a rule.

1718. Have you any proof that they increase in numbers?—There is no doubt they increase.

1719. That climate suits them?—Yes.

1720. Is it high country?—Not more than 150ft. above the sea-level.

1721. Have you attempted poisoning in summer?—No, never.

1722. Is that because you are under the impression that rabbits will not take it?—It has been tried, I believe, but found not to succeed in most cases.

1723. Is there any difficulty in your neighbourhood in regard to other owners of property not taking measures to kill the rabbits?—I have had great complaints to make on that score.

1724. Do not the Inspectors take steps to see that the work is being carried out?—They do; but a good deal of dust is thrown in their eyes. If the Inspector is known to be coming, men are sent out to poison.

1725. Can you suggest any plan by which such a neglect can be brought to justice?—Very frequent visits is the only way that could be effected. Inspectors, however, have not time to pay frequent visits to all parts.

1726. If they went over the land, they would see if it had been poisoned or not?—Yes; but they have not time.

1727. Have the Inspectors performed their duty satisfactorily in your district?—On the whole, I think they have.

1728. Do you find that the Act works well?—The Act, I think, works very well, and there are few suggestions I could make to amend it. If properly carried out it is about all that is required.

1729. From what you have seen and heard do you think Inspectors are capable men, and do their best?—On the whole, in my district. I hear of complaints in other districts.

1730. But you have no complaint to make?—I had a complaint to make last year—that one of my neighbours had not poisoned his country thoroughly—which means, that I am overrun with his rabbits the following year; and I complained that if he was not kept at his work, and made to poison continually during the season, I should make a formal complaint. I think the Inspector did his best to keep him at it, but it is a very difficult thing.

1731. Are there any unoccupied Crown lands or reserves in your district?—All these are leased usually free of rent, and the tenant is required to keep the rabbits under. The Government have entered into arrangements in connection with nearly all the reserves.

1732. That is a satisfactory arrangement?—It seems to work very well. The Inspector says all the tenants up to the present time have been poisoning their country and keeping it clear of rabbits.

1733. Have rabbits diminished in your neighbourhood?—My own experience is that they have diminished. In the year ending June, 1884, we killed about fifty thousand on thirty-five thousand acres, the net result being a profit on the value of the skins of £191 9s. 5d. During the shearing previous to that—in November, 1883—I found that the clip fell 11lb. per fleece as compared with that of the previous year; but since the rabbits have been kept down the wool has recovered its weight, and the country is carrying now quite as many sheep as it ever did. During the year ending June, 1885, the net charge for rabbits was £402, crediting the value of the skins.

1734. That was a loss?—Yes; and I expect the loss this year will be about £500.

1735. And that is the result of your exertions to kill rabbits?—Yes.

1736. In the other parts of the district have they succeeded as well as yourself?—No: on the adjoining run I think their wool has fallen off a good deal, and their stock too.

1737. Is that through neglect, or other cause?—I think it is through neglect.

1738. And you think rabbits can be kept down?—I am quite satisfied if proper care is taken they can be kept down to such an extent that they will not affect the wool nor carrying-capacity, though they may affect the lambing. The shorter and finer grasses are taken by the rabbits, and the ewes do not get the same amount of milk in the early spring that they otherwise would.

1739. Does this apply to high land?—In the district I am located in the high lands are quite unfit for lambing.

1740. But do you think it is possible for the rabbits to be kept down on the high lands?—I think so, on country running up to an altitude of 4,000ft. or 5,000ft. Above that it might be more difficult to handle. There is a large quantity of high and broken country to the westward, and if the rabbits cannot be kept down there and stopped from invading other country, the prospect is a bad one.

1741. Do you think it is possible to do that?—I should imagine it was a very difficult question indeed, unless you have got a fairly-smooth country to work on.

1742. Do you expect the rabbits from this country would swarm on to the lower country?—I should quite expect they would.

1743. It is, then, highly necessary that steps should be taken to keep them back?—Certainly.

1744. Can you suggest any plan for that purpose?—Rabbit-netting would keep them back; but it is almost impossible to put a fence across the face of a high mountain—it would be carried away, or get broken by the snow.

1745. Would it not be possible to lay the netting below the snow-line?—It would be quite possible, but an enormous expense.

1746. Would there be a justification for such an expense?—That is a question. In some places it could not be applied.

1747. But there might be districts where a fence could be comparatively easily erected, and the amount of country protected might justify the expenditure?—There might be some way of fencing the higher rough lake-country, which has to all intents and purposes been abandoned to rabbits; but I do not think it would be the slightest use to try and eradicate rabbits from that entirely.

1748. The only plan will be, then, for adjoining owners to protect themselves?—Yes.

1749. Would you recommend assisting them in any way, seeing that the lands are Crown lands?—They will have to be assisted, or let them have the lands rent-free.

1750. If rabbits became so serious a matter these leasehold lands would almost all be abandoned, and presently the outside boundary would be freehold land?—It is a very big question; and, not having had practical experience, I am really at a loss to make any recommendation at all on the subject. Messrs. Brydon and Fraser, who are more intimately acquainted with this special kind of country, would be able to give you more information than I could.

1751. Do you think the administration of the Act should be placed in the hands of local Boards?—I am prepared to say that I consider that County Councils are, on the whole, unfit to deal with anything of the sort. I have had to do with the Taieri County Council ever since its initiation, and have no hesitation in saying that, so far as we are concerned, we consider ourselves unfit to deal with it. I think there would be an improvement by having a head man in each of the large centres to act on his own responsibility, without reference to Wellington. It would require a man of judgment and sense, and one who could be left to see the Act fairly carried out without reference to Wellington. I look upon members of County Councils as being in just the same position as members of the House. Elected representatives feel great difficulty in seeing justice done in their own district: they could not do it without irritating the feelings of a great many of their constituents, and influence would be brought to bear against them at the elections.

1752. Do you think a Board of Trustees, elected by payers of rates for the purpose of carrying out the Act, would work?—I do not think any elective Board would work where the pest is bad. There is always a war going on between large and small holders, and the great difficulty to be encountered is the apathy shown by a large number of the small holders.

1753. Suppose owners of less than five hundred acres were exempt from the rate, and were without power to vote for the election of the trustees, would that suit?—I do not think it would. I know that some of the large owners even do not think it to their interest to kill the rabbits. My neighbour is doing no more than he can help without incurring penalties. Personally, I feel there ought to be no elected Boards in any shape or form. It ought to be left to a person who was not at the beck and call of any elector to administer the Act fairly and properly.

1754. It is suggested that the Act should be repealed, and that the Government should offer a bonus for the skins, as being the more effectual course?—I do not think that would answer. The present Act, if properly administered, is good enough in all respects.

1755. Are you in favour of offering a bonus for skins?—I think it will be a necessity. I do not think the holders of land affected by rabbits are fairly dealt with. They took no part in introducing them. It is a scourge that has come upon them, and I imagine that the country as a whole ought to assist them.

1756. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] Would you recommend a bonus all the year round?—If you do not give it all the year round it is only a matter of keeping the skins back till winter.

1757. Would you give a bonus for old and young alike?—There are a great many rabbit-skins that are not fit to be exported at all, and you could pay half-price for the suckers.

1758. What would be a fair bonus?—About 1d. per skin.

1759. Are you aware of any cases in which Inspectors buy skins for merchants and others?—Not in my district.

1760. Elsewhere?—No.

1761. *Mr. Lance.*] You seem to be very strong against the elective system of local management?—Yes; I feel very strongly that it would not work. In some districts where they have no rabbits at present, but where their invasion is threatened, it is evidently to the interests of those people to keep them off by any possible means; and I should think there an elective Board would work well. I understood the Chairman's remarks to apply to Otago. If you ask a question as to whether a Board of Trustees would work well in a place like Hawke's Bay, I should say that it would. I believe, indeed, it would be necessary to have some legislation to provide for such a Board, with rating-powers to compel all the property-holders to contribute.

1762. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Would you make it permissive?—Yes, in the matter of forming the district, but not in the matter of contributing towards the rates.

1763. *Mr. Lance.*] Supposing any legislative action is taken in this matter, do you think it would be wise to fix the minimum rate that should be struck, leaving it at the option of the Board to increase that?—Would it be necessary to fix any minimum at all? Why should not the Board have power to strike any rate they might think desirable?

1764. In the election of such Boards, would it not be wise to exempt from the rate small holders—of, say, under five hundred sheep?—Yes, I would prefer fixing a limit in that way. It

would certainly relieve the larger owners from the risk of being swamped at elections, which is one of the principal things that should be provided for.

1765. *Captain Russell.*] Is the property in Southland clay-land?—Mostly.

1766. Do rabbits avoid clay-land, or have you as much difficulty with them there as elsewhere?—I had experience of a property at Balclutha which is the heaviest and coldest clay-land I ever saw, and I think that was nearly as rabbitry as any country I ever saw.

1767. Can you speak in reference to the fence at Waimata?—There has not been a rabbit seen in the country since.

1768. If there had not been a fence there would have been rabbits?—I feel sure there would.

1769. That fence was put up by an elective Board?—Yes. I have given my evidence regarding elective Boards from an Otago point of view. In different localities there should be different administration.

THURSDAY, 17TH JUNE, 1886.

Mr. FRASER examined.

1770. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Are you suffering from rabbits in your district?—Yes, and have been for years past.

1771. How long have they been with you?—For eight or nine years as a nuisance. They have been there for the last ten or twelve years altogether.

1772. Since then have they increased or diminished?—The diminution has been of late years only.

1773. In consequence of the steps you have taken?—Yes.

1774. What steps have you taken?—Poisoning with phosphorized grain in winter and trapping in summer.

1775. Have you natural enemies?—Not to any great extent. I have over a hundred ferrets at present. I breed them and then turn them out in spring time. I turned out some last year, also the year before last.

1776. Do you think they are of use?—Yes, they are of use in keeping down the young rabbits.

1777. Do you think it is of use to go to any great expense?—From my own experience I would not be inclined to do so. I would not do anything of the kind as a leaseholder; it would be absurd with bad tenure and short leases.

1778. What is the character of your country?—It is dry, hilly country, at an elevation of from 600ft. to 5,000ft.

1779. Is it impracticable?—It is accessible for a horseman all over it.

1780. Have you any complaint to make about persons in your district not killing rabbits in the proper way?—No.

1781. Do they all work simultaneously in poisoning?—In the winter time the poisoning is done simultaneously, in accordance with the arrangements entered into with the Inspector.

1782. You do not try poisoning in summer?—Sometimes, and sometimes it is very successful.

1783. Have you been able to come to any conclusion as to why you were successful at one time and not at another?—It depends on the state of the feed and the weather.

1784. When there is plenty of feed they will not take it?—Not so well. There is a danger in using that method in the autumn, because it is a well-established fact that if you lay poison and the rabbits do not take it well you have very great difficulty with them in the winter to get them to take it. We often delay poisoning for two or three months rather than run the risk of making a failure of it.

1785. How do you account for it?—I attribute it to the want of moisture. When the grain is dry they will not take it, but if a shower of rain were to come it would freshen it up.

1786. That would be strong proof against the efficacy of poisoned grain in summer?—It loses its strength more quickly in summer than in winter; but even in summer it will keep its strength if properly mixed.

1787. How long would it retain its strength?—So long as it did not get on fire, it might keep a fortnight or ten days.

1788. You heard Mr. McDonald explain the mode of preparing the grain?—My method is as follows: I put the grain into boiling water, and let the whole simmer for about a quarter of an hour, till the grain has absorbed as much water as it can without bursting. Having previously placed in a can of cold water the necessary quantity of stick-phosphorus broken into small pieces, I proceed to shovel the steeped grain into a barrel, placing these pieces of phosphorus on alternate layers of hot grain. When the barrel is about two-thirds full the top is screwed on, and the barrel is rolled forwards and backwards on skids, slowly, and with a jerky motion. I do not dissolve the phosphorus—the heat of the grain in the barrel suffices to do that—and, the top being air-tight, there is no loss. The mixture should remain in the barrel for thirty hours at least.

1789. Is there no danger in handling the phosphorus in that way?—If you break it outside the water it will burn your hand, but not if you break it under the water. My rabbiters say that the poison mixed by my plan is the deadliest they have ever used.

1790. In your district have public meetings been held in order to arrange beforehand for simultaneous poisoning?—It was so formerly, but not this year. We carried out the same arrangement that was come to last year, when a certain day was fixed to begin upon. This year it was supposed to be advisable to put off the operations till a later date.

1791. Do you think it right that such meetings should be held to get the settlers to agree?—I think it is better. I do not think the meetings should be held to direct the Inspector as to when the poisoning should begin, but by way of co-operating with the Inspector. The Inspector should have the ultimate voice in deciding whether that date was suitable or not.

Witness handed in certain resolutions. (See Appendix.)

1792. Have you large areas of unoccupied land in your district?—There are considerable areas—commonages, and so on—and every one of these is more or less a rabbit-warren. The Government have tried to keep the rabbits down, but I do not think their modes are efficacious.

1793. Can you suggest any improvement on them?—It is difficult. At present they call for tenders, at so much per acre, to poison a reserve or commonage; and the lowest tenderer, whoever he may be, gets it. This amounts to a lump sum, and the skins are the contractor's own property. Some skins are valueless. It is a source of complaint amongst the leaseholders and freeholders adjoining these reserves that, through the department adopting this plan, their own rabbiters buy from the Government contractor these valueless skins, and thus virtually make them pay for clearing these reserves. Many private holders adopt the contract-system also. They study the most economical way of keeping the rabbits down, but not what is the most effectual method; and there is no doubt in my mind that the contract-system is not the most effectual.

1794. Why?—Because the men who have got a contract do not do the work satisfactorily. They do not lay the poison over every portion of the ground, whether there are rabbits there or not. You may lay poison where you see no rabbits, and kill more rabbits there than by laying it where you do see them. Rabbits travel very much. If it were the practice to put men on partly by wages and partly by payment for skins at a low price, the Government contractor could not afford to sell his skins, at a price to make a profit out of it, to adjoining owners' employés. The plan I have adopted is to give from 15s. to 17s. per week and 1d. per skin to rabbiters, and they find themselves in rations, &c. There is nothing to induce them to be idle. The more skins they get the more money they earn.

1795. And it will not pay them to buy these small skins in order to resell?—My men cannot afford to buy skins and sell them to me at 1d. Besides, each gang of eight or ten men has a man placed in charge over it.

1796. Have you any suggestions to make about the Act itself?—A great deal has been said about the administration of the Act; and I am perfectly convinced that a great deal of the criticism on the working of the Act has been inspired by or has emanated from those who have come into conflict with the Inspectors. I have always found that that sort of thing has come into prominence after a few actions have been brought against people.

1797. Has the Act been carried out satisfactorily in your district?—I think fairly well. There is no doubt that the Act is not enforced to the extent to which it might be; but I have no hesitation in saying that if you were to enforce the Rabbit Act to the fullest extent you would have the whole of the pastoral lands thrown on your hands in twelve months.

1798. At the same time you think that pastoral tenants are working fairly?—Yes: most of them are doing good work, and are losing very heavily through it. I have always found it cheaper and more effectual to put on a large number of men and do the work in a short time. At present I have thirty-six men employed, and in summer I keep on men trapping and so on.

1799. You have no suggestion to make in regard to the present Act?—I think there is a want of proper control and supervision over the Inspectors.

1800. In what way?—I think a district like Otago and Southland should be under the control of one officer, who should travel about frequently and see that the Inspectors are doing their work. He should have the power of appointment and dismissal of Inspectors without reference to Wellington; and the Inspectors should equally have the power of appointment and dismissal of their agents or subordinates.

1801. Is not that the case at the present time?—They may suggest the appointment of a certain person; but in some cases they are not asked for a suggestion—a man is sent up to them.

1802. Are you referring to agents?—Yes. When the Act was started the Inspector had the control and appointment of agents.

1803. Is not that so now?—No.

1804. You heard what Mr. McDonald said?—He said that virtually they had the control of the appointment, because they had the recommendation; but I know for a fact districts where it is not so, and where men have been appointed without reference to the Inspector at all. As a matter of fact, agents are appointed and removed in Wellington through the head office.

1805. Do the Inspectors in your district see that the agents carry out their work properly?—Yes, so far as I know. We have a good Inspector there.

1806. You have not any fault to find?—No. I have heard of complaints from some people of harsh conduct on the part of the Inspector; but I do not know whether they were well-founded or not. I may mention that I wrote a letter to the Minister of Justice regarding convictions being necessarily obtained on the evidence of the Inspector, and the arbitrary power held by the Inspector. It is a subject of complaint that it is useless for a man to offer any evidence in his own defence, because the Magistrate has to accept as binding the statement of the Inspector. I recommended that the Magistrate should be instructed to take down the whole of the evidence in the cases that come before him, as a check on the Inspector.

1807. *Mr. Cowan.*] Had you any reply to that letter?—None.

1808. *Hon. the Chairman.*] It was sent up to the Committee as soon as it was appointed. Are you of opinion that the Act would be better administered by local Boards?—I am strongly of opinion that it would lead to most evil results. A local Board is not the body to administer a penal Act. The officer appointed to administer the Act should not, moreover, be at the call of those who are probably the greatest sinners, and ought to be punished most. I think, too, that the Government, as landlords, ought to bear some of the burden of the cost—a very serious one—that is at present thrown upon the tenants. If the Act is enforced, tenants will be compelled to go to great expense in order to improve their properties for the benefit of the Government. It means that the Government will put in force a law to compel them to improve the Government property.

1809. What do you suggest?—That the Government should bear a portion of the expense. Let them give a bonus.

1810. What do you recommend?—1d. per skin. I heard Mr. McDonald's evidence, and he suggested the Government should give 1d. per skin for five months in the year. It would mean ½d. per skin all the year round. It is not a bonus at all.

1811. Would you give 1d. for all exported?—For everything. But his suggestion was that nothing should be given for any exported, but only that the Government should buy for 1d. such skins as were valueless, or not worth 1d.; and I am confident that would not meet the difficulty at all. It would be infinitesimal. In the other case, it would mean that the Government would be sharing the loss incurred.

1812. *Mr. Lance.*] Can you conceive of local bodies or trustees elected for the purpose of keeping out rabbits in country where they have not rabbits at present?—Yes. That is another thing altogether.

1813. Is it not a fact that Inspectors appoint their agents at present without reference to Wellington?—I do not think so. I cannot speak confidently, but I have known of one agent who was dismissed, and put back again against the Inspector's desire. I did ask an Inspector once "Are you ever consulted as to an appointment?" and he said "No." I think if fewer agents were appointed, and the Inspectors were given more travelling allowance, it would be better.

1814. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] I am not sure that I understand the difference between your recommendation and Mr. McDonald's?—Mr. McDonald recommended that a bonus should be given between the 31st November and the 31st March. The difference between us is this McDonald's recommendation is not a bonus at all; it is a recommendation that the Government should purchase all summer skins for 1d. that occupiers of property choose to sell. My recommendation is not that the Government should purchase the skins at all, but that Government should pay, as they paid some years ago, upon all skins exported—pay to the exporter; and, as for such skins as are caught in summer months, that are valueless to export, let these be counted by the Inspector, and a little kerosene poured over them, and let them be burned, and a certificate given of the numbers.

1815. You recommend that a bonus of 1d. should be given on all skins delivered within the year?—Yes.

1816. In other words, skins worth more than 1d. would not be so delivered?—No. There would be no question of delivery except where skins are destroyed.

1817. *Mr. Cowan.*] There were 9,666,000 skins exported last year. That tots up to £40,000, at 1d. In addition to this, one-half more, possibly, of skins throughout the country would be got which would not be worth anything?—No—not a twentieth.

1818. The cost of the department is £37,000 per year. Do you not think these sums together would be an excessive amount for the Government to go to?—If it were to be annually-recurring no Government could bear it.

1819. From your experience would it not be annually-recurring?—I do not think it would. I should like to add to my evidence that in the resolutions that have been handed in there was a condition attached that the Act ought to be strictly enforced if a bonus is given. The Inspectors recognize that if they were to enforce the Act stringently they would ruin everybody. What is being done is that rabbits are being kept down so as not to injure the grass. It would be better for everybody to throw his country up if the Act is to be enforced stringently and no adequate assistance given.

STATEMENT by Mr. G. S. COOPER.

Mr. Cooper: What happened in reference to the case mentioned by Mr. Fraser was this: It is perfectly true that a man was dismissed, on reduction, and reinstated. This was about eighteen months ago. Since then the present system has been started, which is, that the Chief Inspector, who resides at Dunedin, and has charge of the whole Provincial District of Otago, has sole control of the appointment and dismissal of these agents. He appoints them on the recommendation of the local Inspectors. All the interference the Government have is to say that in one district there may be three rabbit agents, and in another there shall be two, and so on. The rate of pay ranges from 10s. to 15s. per day. They begin at 10s.; if they work successfully, after the first year it is raised to 12s.; and in another year it is 15s. More than that the Government do not interfere, and have not for nearly a year.

Mr. Fraser: I think that bears out what I said—that the local Inspectors had not the appointments.

Hon. the Chairman: The Chief Inspector, who resides in Dunedin, has control over the Inspectors?

Mr. Cooper: Of course, the District Inspectors would have to send their recommendations to the Chief Inspector, and there would be no necessity to send them further.

WEDNESDAY, 23RD JUNE, 1886.

STATEMENT by Mr. J. MCKENZIE, M.H.R.

Mr. McKenzie: I wish to state to the Committee that I have had considerable experience in reference to the rabbit question. A portion of the district I live in and represent suffers very badly with rabbits, in the Waihemo County especially, and has done for a good many years back. The settlers have endeavoured to keep down the pest, and have endeavoured to get rid of the rabbits in every possible way. In 1882, before the present Act became law, the settlers in that district, or, rather, a portion of it, formed themselves into a Vigilance Committee, their object being to assist the officers of the department in keeping down the rabbits, and to urge those who were negligent in the matter to do their duty. I may state that the experience of this committee was that the greatest opponents they had to contend with were the officers of the department themselves. The department threw every obstacle in the way of the committee carrying out their intentions, and

the committee afterwards found it necessary to disband. The committee was persecuted by the department in every way. When they made any complaint to the department in Wellington—and there were complaints made by the score by myself on their behalf—no notice was taken of them. I had many complaints to prefer myself as a settler, but I could get nothing done in regard to them until Mr. Dick happened to come to Dunedin at the time he was in charge of the department. A deputation of settlers waited on him in Dunedin and asked him to do something in the matter; and the result of that was that Mr. Dick, after making inquiry, sent Mr. Miller and Mr. Dorris to do duty there. Mr. Miller was appointed as Inspector; and Mr. Dick made application to Superintendent Weldon, of Dunedin, to get him the best man he could find to act as agent; and Mr. Dorris was selected for that purpose. Both these men were giving great satisfaction to the bulk of the small settlers in the execution of their duty; but in carrying out their work they gave offence to some of the large owners, who never gave them a moment's peace until they were successful in getting them removed. Mr. Bayly came to the district in 1835, and immediately afterwards recommended that Miller should be removed to Queenstown; and on Miller leaving the district Dorris was dismissed. Some time afterwards, however, he was reinstated, but not in that district. This gave great offence to the settlers in the district, because they looked upon it that it was done by the department to please one or two of the large owners. The settlers waited on me, as the member for the district, to request that an inquiry should be made into the circumstances. I sent the requisition up to Wellington. The settlers felt it very much that just at the poisoning season two new men who were ignorant of the boundaries should be sent to the district. Whether rightly or wrongly, they certainly blamed the Superintending Inspector for the change that had taken place. Complaints were made against Mr. Bayly himself of such a nature that I thought it advisable to send them up to Wellington, to the Government. I made a direct charge against Mr. Bayly for neglecting his duty in the district when he was sent up there to inspect it. The nature of that complaint was that he passed through the district without looking either to the right or the left, riding along the main road; and, notwithstanding he did not see for himself the state of the country, he took upon himself the responsibility of removing one officer and dismissing another, giving great dissatisfaction to the settlers. To that communication I could never get an answer from the department. In October last two settlers were summoned before the Magistrates in Palmerston for having rabbits on their lands; and these cases failed through the Inspector not having served proper notice. They were of a similar description to the notices I have shown the Committee to-day. Some time after the Premier came down to Dunedin, and a deputation of settlers waited on him and asked that some change should be made in respect to the matter. The Premier promised that an inspection of the district should be made, and he sent down to the district a Mr. Sutton, to make inquiries and report. Mr. Sutton, I understand, was then a dismissed officer from the Wairarapa, and certainly showed from the way he went about his business that he was not a competent person for the duties he had been asked to perform. He came there more to protect the department than to give relief to the settlers. I say this from the way he set about his business. I brought the matter before the Premier again, and the result was that he sent down to the district the chief of the department, Mr. Cooper, who was to override Mr. Sutton in the inquiry to be held. A large amount of evidence was taken before Mr. Cooper, and you will find that the report which he made bears out all the complaints of the settlers. The report states:—

“I found the complaints to come mainly from the holders of comparatively small properties, who allege that, do what they will to reduce the pest on their respective holdings, the rabbits come down in swarms from the large runs and overrun them, devouring their grass and growing crops. This is undoubtedly the fact and, in the nature of things, must remain so in spite of every effort that can be made to check it by the officers of the department, by the smaller property-holders, and by the runholders and other large proprietors themselves. The small holdings are composed of the best soil and the least broken country; whilst the runs comprise the poorer and more rugged hill-tops—difficult and often impossible of access; and among whose rocky summits and precipitous gullies the rabbits breed, almost undisturbed, in tens of thousands; whence they issue in hordes in search of food, and descend upon the cultivated grounds below.”

Therefore, after hearing all the evidence on the subject, he confirmed the general complaint of the settlers that the pest was not being kept down in the district. At this inquiry it was quite plain to any unbiassed person who was present that the large owners in the district had constituted themselves at the inquiry the protectors of the officers of the department; and their attitude certainly made a very bad impression on the minds of the settlers. But up to the present we have had no remedy whatsoever to our grievances; and I may say that the settlers in my district have been so much annoyed with rabbits for years past that they have lost all faith in the department. They have no hope whatever of getting anything done by the department managed from Wellington. I believe, if one-half of the money spent by the Government through the department in the County of Waihemo had been handed to the local body there, there would have been far more work done for the money and far more satisfaction given to the settlers, who would have thus had better control in keeping down the pest than could possibly be the case with a department managed from Wellington.

1820. *Hon. the Chairman.*] No doubt Mr. Cooper says in his report that the rabbits are swarming off the hills. I gather from his report that efforts are not made to kill the rabbits on the high country?—That is all that the settlers have been complaining of.

Mr. BAYLY further examined.

1821. *Mr. McKenzie.*] It is part of your duty to make an inspection of various districts in the colony in regard to the rabbit pest?—It is.

1822. You paid a visit to Shag Valley, in the County of Waihemo, in 1884?—In each year.

1823. Do you remember making a visit at the latter end of 1884 or at the beginning of 1885?—I should think it would be about January or February, 1885.
1824. Who was the Inspector for the district at that time?—Inspector Miller.
1825. And who was his agent?—A man called Dorris, another agent called Harvey, and another Reynolds. There were three agents in the district.
1826. How long did you remain in the district at that time?—Only about forty-eight hours.
1827. And did you make an inspection of the district under Mr. Miller's supervision?—I did not on that occasion.
1828. You only passed through?—That is all.
1829. And after visiting this district did you recommend a change in the district?—I recommended that Mr. Miller should be sent to Queenstown.
1830. Did you make any recommendation in regard to Dorris?—I did not.
1831. Did you not recommend that he should be discharged?—I do not recollect. I do not think I did.
1832. I want you to be careful in your answer?—I think I may safely say that I did not.
1833. If Miller says you recommended his dismissal will you still deny it?—I do not think I could have done so, because I made a point of never interfering between an Inspector and his agent.
1834. Did you hear any complaints against agent Dorris?—I did—to this effect: that the Inspector and he did not agree. I did not hear of any special complaint against agent Dorris.
1835. Did you hear any complaint from any of the settlers?—There were several complaints came into the office in writing from the settlers.
1836. Were they in regard to agent Dorris not doing his duty properly?—They were to the effect that he was too officious, if I remember correctly.
1837. Are you aware that these charges were investigated by Mr. Johnson?—I think he was sent up there to investigate them.
1838. And was not the only charge made against Dorris that made by Mr. Bell?—The whole of the correspondence is in the office. Mr. Bell made a complaint, I know. I am positive of that.
1839. And Mr. Johnson went to investigate it?—I believe so.
1840. And what was the result of that investigation?—I do not know, except that Dorris was removed to another part.
1841. He was reinstated then, but the removal took place at a later date?—Dorris was out of employ for some time.
1842. Dorris was there at the time you made the inspection?—He was in the district. I did not see him.
1843. You do not know whether he was doing his duty or not?—An Inspector was sent round to report on Otago, and I did not therefore follow him up. It was Chief Inspector Bowman who was reporting, and he was then in the district; so that my visit was very short at that time.
1844. You say you recommended the exchange of Miller from Palmerston to Queenstown?—I did.
1845. You deny having recommended the dismissal of Dorris?—I do not deny it. I tell you I could not have done so, because I made it a point never to interfere.
1846. Do you think it was a good time of the year to make a change, seeing that the poisoning-season was coming on?—Not, perhaps, wise; but, under the circumstances in which the change was made, I think it was wise to do so.
1847. What were the circumstances?—There was a good deal of friction between some of the landholders and Miller.
1848. Who were the landholders?—I think, Mr. McKenzie, you yourself were one, and Mr. Bell was another, and I know there was a good deal of feeling.
1849. I made no complaint against Miller at that time?—It was owing to the friction that existed that it was thought it would be far wiser to remove the man.
1850. Miller and Dorris were superseded by Miles and Hargraves?—Yes.
1851. Did these officers, when the poisoning-season came on, know anything of the country they had to deal with?—Not intimately.
1852. Are you aware that they were quite ignorant of the boundaries of properties?—It is quite possible.
1853. Do you think it was a good thing to put two new men there?—I think, under the circumstances, as I have said, the removal was a wise one, and I think this has been shown since.
1854. Have you any idea of what state the country was in at that time in regard to rabbits?—I had, to a great extent. About seven or eight miles from Palmerston all up the Shag Valley was very bad.
1855. How did you derive that knowledge?—From what I knew of the country before, and from the reports of the Inspectors.
1856. You did not know it from your own knowledge?—To a certain extent, because I was there some nine years previously.
1857. You stated in your evidence, in answer to questions Nos. 327, 328, 451, and 554, that no complaints have been made to you with regard to the Inspectors or their agents?—I was speaking of my last visit.
1858. That does not apply to the previous year?—In the previous year, when complaints were made, steps were taken.
1859. Are you aware that complaint had been made against your own action in recommending the exchange of these two men?—That is very possible.
1860. Are you aware that I myself made a very serious charge against you in respect to that matter?—So many charges came in that I could not particularize them just now.

1861. Then this evidence you gave to the Committee only applies to last year?—Yes.

1862. And you had complaints on previous occasions?—I had; and the officers were removed.

1863. Did you ever see the charge I made against you to the department?—I presume I have seen it, but I do not recollect to which you refer just now.

1864. Your impression is that I made so many charges against you?—No; but complaints were continually coming in.

1865. Do you not think it would have been a good thing for yourself and the department if these charges had been inquired into?—It would have been more satisfactory, I admit.

1866. Are you not aware that I tried to get them investigated and failed?—I cannot tell you that.

1867. Is it part of your duty to read the diaries of the agents?—It is. I invariably do it.

1868. Have you been doing that during the last year?—Yes, with the exception of a few months when I was away.

1869. In reading the diary from Shag Valley District, do you find that good work has been done there during the last year, judging from these diaries?—It has been my invariable custom in reading the diaries to mark anything that attracts my attention, and make inquiries.

1870. Did you see anything in the diaries that was worthy of your attention?—I think there were one or two cases in which rabbits were reported to be thickening, in regard to which I called the attention of the Inspector to the fact.

1871. When an Inspector serves notice on a landowner to kill rabbits, is it not part of his duty to put that in the diary?—I think they invariably do so, so far as I can recollect.

1872. Has that been done in the Shag Valley District to any extent?—I believe so, the same as any other district.

1873. You have already stated that Shag Valley was bad with rabbits: that means it was the whole district?—I cannot say it was the whole district.

1874. How many notices were served in the Waihemo County to destroy rabbits during the last winter?—I could not tell you.

1875. Would you believe it was given in evidence by the Inspector himself that he only served relieving notices, and of these only nine?—That is quite possible. If he thought these were the only ones not doing their duty, he would be perfectly justified in serving them with notices.

1876. Do you find it difficult to get convictions under the Act?—There is no difficulty in getting convictions, but great difficulty in getting fines.

1877. Are you aware that Inspectors ever failed in getting convictions through their own ignorance?—It is the first I have heard of it. All cases that come before the Courts are reported to me.

1878. Should not these, then, be reported to you?—They always are. It is a distinct order that all cases heard, together with extracts from the papers containing the reports, shall be sent to me.

1879. Are you aware that in Palmerston, in October last, a conviction failed because the owner of the land was not properly served?—I am not aware of it.

1880. Will you deny it?—I will not deny it: I say I do not recollect it.

1881. Is it within your knowledge that Inspectors had failed in getting convictions?—It has not been reported to me. There are so many scores of cases reported, however, from different parts of the colony, it is impossible to tell.

1882. In the case of it being reported to you, would you, as Superintending Inspector, consider it your duty to take action in the matter?—I should, certainly.

1883. You are not aware, then, that in Palmerston, in October last, two cases failed from insufficiency of notice?—I am not.

1884. Are you aware that the notices from the department are served in the same way at the present time?—If cases in point were shown to me, I should be able to state distinctly.

1885. Here, then, is a notice, signed by Inspector Hickson, at Tapanui, on the 10th of the month. Will you see whether that is within the Act?—[After reading notice] I should certainly say the landlord was specified there.

1886. You think that sufficient notice?—I think the block should have been specified. It is a legal question. He may have acted under advice in filling it up that way.

1887. Are you aware that the Magistrates for the district have ruled that section and block should be specified?—I am not aware.

1888. That is the cause of the failure of those two cases at Palmerston; so that it could not have come specially under your notice?—I do not recollect it having done so.

1889. You know Mr. Ritchie's place?—I do.

1890. How is that off for rabbits?—I have heard it is clearer than any other part of that country.

1891. He has been able to keep the rabbits down?—So I have heard.

1892. Can you explain, seeing that Mr. Ritchie has been able to do this, why you have not been able, with your large staff and expenditure, to do the same work?—There are many reasons. Mr. Ritchie's ground may be more easily worked; it is easier to get on, and is not of a rough description; and, in addition to that, Mr. Ritchie has thought it best to spend a good deal of money to get rid of the pest.

1893. The real cause is that the expense was not spared and the means were well directed?—There is not the slightest doubt of it.

1894. Would it not have been possible to have means directed in the same way in every portion of the country?—No; because the features of the country are different.

1895. Take the country between Shag Valley and Macrae's Flat. Is it worse to deal with this than Mount Royal?—Parts of it are.

1896. Is Shag Valley worse than Mount Royal?—Yes, when you get above Kakanui Ranges.

1897. If you had been aware of the fact that these notices had not been properly served, you would have given instructions to have them served?—Certainly.

1898. *Hon. Mr. Robinson.*] You are aware that the object of this Committee is to get such evidence as will enable it to arrive at the best means of getting rid of the rabbit pest. Do you think the present system is a good one?—I believe it is the best that could be devised, if carried out in its integrity.

1899. You are alluding to the Act?—And the system, if carried out thoroughly.

1900. Why do you say “if carried out thoroughly”?—You cannot get all men alike. You cannot, perhaps, get the instruments which you wish in every place.

1901. Do you think it is the best plan to have an Inspector for both Islands residing in Wellington? Do you think an Inspector situated in Wellington can see that the Act is properly administered in the Middle Island?—He can if the present instructions are carried out thoroughly. The Chief Inspector for each district is wholly responsible for his district and the state of things under him.

1902. What are the duties of the Chief Inspector of Wellington?—There is no Chief Inspector for Wellington: these are in the districts. I am the Superintending Inspector here.

1903. Is it not the duty of the Superintending Inspector to see that they carry out their work properly?—Certainly.

1904. And do you think he can do it from a central point as well as down there?—He certainly can, through his subordinates in each district—or he should be able to do so.

1905. Do you think, if the Chief Inspectors felt that they were wholly responsible for their own district without having reference to the Superintendent, they would carry out their duties better, and feel there was an honour in cleaning their districts?—I certainly do not think the duty could be carried out without some head over the lot.

1906. Taking the colony as a whole, are the rabbits spreading over a greater area?—Yes: yearly they are getting over a larger area.

1907. Do you look forward to getting rid of the rabbits?—I certainly look forward to the time when the natural enemy will be present in sufficient numbers to do the work without the expenditure that is now necessary.

1908. Can you give us about the date of that desirable state of things?—It wholly depends on the expenditure in introducing natural enemies.

1909. Then you think the eradication of rabbits depends more on natural enemies than anything else?—I do.

1910. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Supposing you were appointing a manager to a station, and you were called to England, leaving the manager in charge of the property, would you give him power to appoint and dismiss men as he thought proper?—Most undoubtedly.

1911. Suppose you were within reach, and were not going to England, would you give him power as before?—I would.

1912. Have the Chief Inspectors power to appoint their own agents and dismiss them for misconduct?—They certainly have the power—and should exercise it—of appointing agents and dismissing them without reference to anybody.

1913. One Inspector has stated in evidence that he does not consider himself in that position. He thinks he has the power of suspension, but not of dismissal, and that, as a matter of fact, his power is limited to recommendation?—The only stipulation in the appointment of agents is that the name shall be submitted by the Inspector. He has full power of appointing and dispensing with whom he thinks proper.

1914. Is it not a matter of importance that this should be perfectly clear to every officer in the district?—If they can read I think it should be clear enough already. If I mistake not there was a circular issued on this subject, which was produced at the last Committee.

1915. Is it not within your knowledge that appointments of rabbit agents have been made without reference to the Inspector in charge of the district?—There is one case that I can recollect; but I think it was under rather peculiar circumstances. An officer was sent up to the Waikato country, for the reason that he was thoroughly acquainted with the rabbit-country up there.

1916. The impression in the public mind is that too much political influence is brought to bear on these appointments, and that the officers in charge do not feel themselves at liberty either to appoint or dismiss without reference to headquarters?—Such an impression would destroy all freedom of action on the part of an officer.

1917. *Captain Russell.*] You think it would be advisable to put up rabbit-fencing as a check?—Most decidedly, where the features of the country were such that it could be erected.

1918. *Mr. McKenzie.*] You say the Government will buy ferrets wherever they can get them. Have you taken steps to let that become known throughout the country?—It is known all over the country. Every ferret of a certain description offered for sale would be bought at so much per head. It used to be 10s. but has been reduced to 8s.

1919. Do you not think it would be advisable to have the agents brought under the Civil Service regulations, which would give power to an Inspector to suspend them, rather than that he should have full power to dismiss them?—If they were brought under the regulations he could not do that, but at the present moment he can.

1920. Some three years ago you stated that you thought three years would clear the rabbit nuisance?—I said the evil would be modified in that time. But we have had a very extraordinary year this year. I am of opinion that if we could discover some summer poison it would do more good than anything else, and some steps should be taken in that direction.

1921. *Hon. the Chairman.*] We have to-day heard evidence from Mr. Grace that he has been most successful in summer poisoning. Have you heard anything of this?—I have. One of the Inspectors—Mr. Mackay, of Balclutha—gave me a full description of how he used poison successfully last summer. It is by coating oats, after mixing them with phosphorus, with gelatine. He states that by this process the oats will keep for several days.

1922. But Mr. Grace does not use anything of that description. He states that all that is required is that the oats should be prepared in a proper manner?—A great deal depends on the

situation, also the soil and climate. In that part of the country it is a moist climate, and it would certainly keep much longer than in some other parts.

1923. We have also evidence that in the Maniototo last summer poison was used with the best effect. Do you think steps should be taken to obtain information as to the processes used, and the results of experiments?—I call on the Inspectors each year to see if anything fresh has been done. In the meantime, if anything turns up it is inquired into. I must certainly admit that, as a general thing, I was always under the impression that phosphorized oats, as ordinarily used, could not be employed with effect in summer, owing to its want of strength, and its being likely to fire the country.

1924. Do you think that districts, as at present constituted, are too large or too small?—They could not be constituted otherwise. Each is kept by itself, unless in some cases where you do not require the same supervision. I think that is the best arrangement that could be made.

1925. What was the reason of your moving Miller to Queenstown?—I found, in the position he was placed in, that he could not possibly carry out his duties properly. There had been reports against him, but they were groundless; and there was some ill-feeling through his dispensing with this agent Dorris. There was no complaint against the officer, so far as I was aware; but I thought it better, for the department and his own sake, that he should be removed.

1926. I suppose you feel at liberty to transfer any Inspector from one district to another if you think the service requires such a removal?—At any moment.

1927. You observed you had a difficulty in getting fines?—I mean that Magistrates make the fine as small as possible, seeing that they are compelled to inflict a penalty if the Inspector gives certain evidence.

1928. Do you think it desirable that any change should be made in that clause of the Act?—I do not think so.

1929. It is stated that landowners have no right to interfere, when they see their neighbours are not killing rabbits, and call on the Inspector to take action?—They certainly can.

1930. And it is constantly happening?—I only recollect three such cases having occurred.

1931. Is that from a dislike to inform?—Yes.

1932. What quantity of ferrets have been turned out by the Government this year?—1,331.

1933. And what number do you know of as having been turned out by private individuals?—5,090. I have reason to think that fully one-half more have been turned out. I calculate that the proportion of the natural enemy to the rabbit at the present time is about 1 to 1,500. I would suggest that every landholder should be compelled to breed and turn out ferrets according to his acreage.

1934. In what quantity?—That would be a matter for after-consideration.

1935. Do you think the Inspectors are right in not pointing out to settlers the method in which the rabbits should be destroyed?—They should assist them in every way, but should not commit themselves in directing any particular method. In many cases the Inspectors mix the poison for them and show them how to lay it. They do this, however, irresponsibly.

1936. Do you think each should assist in that way?—He should assist without taking responsibility.

1937. Do you allow Inspectors to purchase skins for merchants?—Decidedly not. An Inspector doing it would be liable to be dismissed at once.

1938. You do not know of any such case?—No. I knew of one case of an agent, and I stopped it.

1939. There was one mentioned down South?—I think that is the case I refer to. It was an agent.

1940. *Mr. McKenzie.*] Do you know of your own knowledge a case in which the Magistrate set the law at defiance and fined a man only 5s.?—I heard of that case, and I believe the Magistrate had to make up the difference—15s.—out of his own pocket. Where it occurred I do not know.

1940A. In some cases the settlers would resent interference from the Inspectors?—Yes.

Mr. N. GRACE examined.

1941. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Where do you reside?—In the East Wairarapa, on the Mungaraki Range, equidistant between Carterton and Masterton.

1942. You have had rabbits in that district for a long time?—From the commencement of the rabbit pest.

1943. How many years is that?—Ten.

1944. Are they on the increase?—Much on the decrease.

1945. Are they a great nuisance now, or have you reduced them to such an extent that they do not do much damage?—They are not doing much damage, but still they are a great nuisance, there is so much Native land there.

1946. Occupied?—Partly occupied.

1947. Leased to Europeans?—Some of it is, nominally, but some is in the occupation of the Maoris themselves.

1948. Can you not compel the persons on those lands to keep the rabbits down?—I suppose it could be done. They have been compelled in a measure. It is a very difficult country to clean—limestone ranges, and so on.

1949. You do not complain that steps are not taken by the people to kill the rabbits?—No; I can hardly complain. They are doing their very best, I think.

1950. But the country is so difficult you do not think they can succeed easily?—Not very easily.

1951. What steps are being taken to kill the rabbits there?—Poisoning, and keeping men with dogs and guns.

1952. Do the people in the district poison all the year round?—No, I think not; but we have been poisoning.

1953. What result do you get from summer poisoning?—Very satisfactory. I never saw the rabbits take the poison better than they did during the summer months.

1954. Was the feed low then?—There was abundance of feed, but dry.
1955. How did you lay the poison?—We always disturb the surface first by turning it over with a spade or other tool.
1956. Then you lay it in a heap?—About a teaspoonful.
1957. Have you ever tried sowing it broadcast?—I have seen it done that way, but the results are not so good.
1958. Do you find that when you lay it in little heaps the sheep are poisoned?—We have had a few sheep poisoned, but there is very little danger if you take care not to distribute it over the ground.
1959. You think this method of laying it on bare places is a safe method?—I do not think it entirely safe, because I have known sheep to take it off.
1960. But it is not so dangerous as that of sowing it broadcast?—No.
1961. How do you mix your poisoned grain?—We mix it in a copper; but I believe the best plan is in one of those churns they are using now. A great deal depends on the mixing of the poison.
1962. What do you think is necessary in mixing it?—I think it necessary that before you dissolve the phosphorus the temperature should be low. If it is boiling you find the phosphorus crystallize; and that is what causes the danger of laying poison in the summer time—it is apt to take fire in the sun.
1963. Oats, I suppose, you consider are better than wheat?—No: we use either.
1964. Do rabbits take them equally well?—Sometimes I find they take the wheat best, and other times the oats.
1965. Did you notice at what times of the year they prefer oats to wheat?—No. I have tried the experiment of laying a heap of wheat and a heap of oats, and sometimes they will take the oats and leave the wheat, and at others they will take the wheat and leave the oats.
1966. How long will poisoned oats, when laid in summer, retain their strength?—I could not say, they have always been so quickly taken in my case.
1967. Then, you have also dogs and guns?—We keep a pack of dogs at work every day. We have about twenty in a pack.
1968. And you think they do good?—No doubt they kill the rabbits.
1969. Are you not afraid of their scattering?—They do not appear to do so. I think you will find that the rabbits scatter more from ferrets and natural enemies than dogs.
1970. Have you turned out any ferrets?—No; but we have a great many on the place.
1971. Where did they come from?—Mr. Waterhouse's, when he first turned them out.
1972. Do you consider they have done good?—A great amount of good—in fact, I know places which were swarming with rabbits, and where there was nothing being done except by ferrets, and now the rabbits have almost disappeared.
1973. If there was not this Maori land adjoining yours, do you think you could keep down the rabbits?—I do not see why we should not.
1974. Has the Rabbit Act worked well in your district?—No, I cannot say it has.
1975. In what respect has it not worked satisfactorily?—The Inspectors have always refused to direct in what way the settlers should take action. They say, "You can do what you like, but you must kill the rabbits." I think it should be the duty of the Inspectors to point out in what manner they wish the rabbits destroyed, and then action could be taken against those who failed to follow out that mode.
1976. Do the Inspectors call on the landowners in your neighbourhood whenever necessary to compel them to take steps to kill the rabbits?—Yes.
1977. Do you think the administration of the Act should be placed in the hands of local bodies in preference to the present system?—No; certainly not.
1978. Perhaps you are referring to County Councils and Road Boards?—Yes.
1979. But suppose a Board of Trustees were elected in a district by payers of rates to the Sheep Fund, do you think such a Board would administer the Act better than the present system?—It would all depend on who were elected. It might work. Certainly in some districts it would work, where they had good men to stand for it.
1980. But generally?—I should think not.
1981. Have you tried wire-fencing?—To a small extent.
1982. And is it successful?—I think so.
1983. Is it on flat land?—On undulating country.
1984. Will the fence keep out the rabbits?—Certainly.
1985. Does it take much trouble in keeping it in repair?—No: with an occasional inspection it is all right. We have had wire-netting up now for four years, and during the whole of that time there have only been two cases where rabbits have burrowed underneath.
1986. How have you placed the wire in the ground?—Six inches in the ground, straight down. Last summer was the first time we tried the poisoning, because people told us it was no good. I was perfectly satisfied it would answer.
1987. How often do you poison in winter?—We are continually poisoning.
1988. Once a month?—It depends. We do not poison the whole run at the same time. If we find signs of rabbits we lay poison.
1989. You do not collect the skins?—No.
1990. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Supposing the Inspector had compelled the persons round about you to poison, do you think the expense of keeping down rabbits would have been so great to you as it has been?—No.
1991. Therefore, you think that the Inspectors have not been exactly doing their duty?—I do not think they have done as much as they ought to have done, probably, in some parts. In others they have. They seem to have rather neglected that Maori country at the back of us.

1992. To the great loss of the people who were doing their duty in keeping down rabbits?—Certainly.

1993. Do you know that the Inspectors in the Wairarapa have admitted that there has been a great increase of rabbits during the summer?—I was not aware that they had admitted it, but I am aware that such is a fact.

1995. Are you also aware that when asked why they had not taken steps to suppress the rabbits they pleaded the impossibility of doing it—in other words, if they enforced the Act they would be attempting to compel an impossibility on the part of the settlers, who could not kill them?—I am not aware of that.

1996. You are perfectly satisfied that this plea, if used by the Inspectors, was not a tenable one—in other words, that rabbits could have been poisoned this summer so as to have kept them down?—I am confident of that. No one seemed inclined to try the poison at that time of the year, saying it was useless.

1997. In the limestone country, where the rabbits were once very numerous, they are now very scarce indeed?—Yes.

1998. How has that been brought about?—Ferrets, I think.

1999. Was there not a heavy poisoning in the first instance?—Yes; and the ferrets seem to have kept them down since.

2000. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] In regard to mixing the phosphorus, what should be the temperature of the water in mixing?—About 207°.

2001. *Hon. the Chairman.*] In what direction are the rabbits travelling in your district?—They are continually travelling north.

2002. They are not spreading out to the sides?—No.

2003. Can you account for that at all?—No.

2004. Have the rabbits got into the main range of the Tararua?—Yes, they have to a certain extent, but nothing to speak of.

2005. It is covered with bush?—Except the tops.

2006. Have they got to the tops?—I do not think so; but the clear country at the top is at the snow-line, and in winter is covered with snow.

2007. And I suppose they would not go through the bush?—Yes.

2008. I should have supposed they would have taken to the range because they would not be so molested?—There is a different kind of bush that they will take to. I do not think they will take to black birch.

2009. *Hon. Mr. Robinson.*] Do you mean the temperature you mentioned is the temperature when the phosphorus is added to the water?—Yes.

2010. It is never allowed to boil?—No.

2011. How do you mix the phosphorus?—Nine gallons of water to 100lb. oats and 1lb. phosphorus. We boil the water first and cool it down before putting the phosphorus into it; then add the grain and stir it and cover it up, and revolve it for six hours, and then leave it for from twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

2012. And does the grain absorb all the water?—Yes, nearly all.

2013. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you break the phosphorus into the water?—No—just put the sticks in. They dissolve very rapidly. There is no doubt that when grass takes fire from poisoned grain it is because the phosphorus is not properly mixed.

2014. *Hon. Mr. Robinson.*] Do you not think there should be a little more grain to the water, so that it may absorb it all? Is there not a loss?—I do not think so.

DEAR SIR,—

Gladstone, 5th July, 1886.

I should like to add to my evidence that “I consider the mistake people make with regard to poisoning rabbits is that they consider one poisoning sufficient to destroy rabbits, and then they allow them to increase again till the following winter, when the same thing has to be done over again; whereas I am confident it is only by successive poisonings that the rabbit difficulty is to be overcome.”

I have, &c.,

The Chairman, Joint Rabbit Nuisance Committee.

NATHANIEL GRACE.

Mr. DRUMMOND, Inspector under the Sheep and Rabbit Act for Wairarapa North, examined.

2015. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Are there many rabbits in your district?—In portions of it there are a good many.

2016. Have they been long there?—Yes; seven or eight years.

2017. Are they increasing?—Not at the present moment.

2018. Are they decreasing?—Yes; decreasing.

2019. In number and extent, or simply in number, and extending in area?—I do not know that they are decreasing in extent now. They are now poisoning.

2020. Have they been increasing during the last year?—They went ahead very fast during the last summer.

2021. Was that simply in consequence of the dry season?—It was through the dry season.

2022. If it had not been such a dry season, you do not think they would have increased so much?—I do not think so.

2023. Is it in consequence of the exceptionally dry season, or is it for want of precautions in keeping the rabbits down?—I consider it was caused by the season to a certain extent. There are a few settlers, however, that it is difficult to get to work properly.

2024. Do you think the people are taking proper precautions in your district to kill the rabbits?—Yes; because we compel them.

2025. What steps do you use to compel them?—When I find they do not take steps, I give them notice under the 9th section to destroy the rabbits, and then I lay an information under the 10th section if they do not comply with the notice.

2026. Do you get them to poison at the same time?—I try to do so, but I cannot get them to do it.

2027. Which do you consider the best time for poisoning?—The present time—the end of May or the beginning of June, when the feed begins to get scarce.

2028. Do you call them together so as to get them to act simultaneously?—I do not call them together, but I sometimes visit the homesteads and talk to them, and point out to them it would be a good thing for them to poison together, and I mention that other runholders adjoining are going to begin at a certain time.

2029. Do you send notices to each one calling upon him to destroy rabbits, so that all could commence as nearly as possible simultaneously?—The only notices I send are under the 9th section of the Act.

2030. How can you expect the owners of land to poison simultaneously if you send them no written notices?—They know very well the movements of their neighbours.

2031. How do you know that?—Only by visiting the properties.

2032. Then, if a man came into Court and said he did not know what his neighbour was doing, you could not say he did?—No, I could not.

2033. But if you send notice to him you could?—Yes; but in the case of ten neighbours some would have an excuse for putting it off.

2034. The question is, whether the excuse is fair or not. Would it not be a proper course to send notices?—It would be a very good course, but it does not do for Inspectors to say to a settler, "You must poison your land." We can only say, "You may take whatever steps you like, but you must kill the rabbits." We are the persons to be satisfied as to the steps they take.

2035. Do you consider simultaneous killing is a necessary thing?—Certainly.

2036. Do you not think every effort should be made to get all owners to begin killing simultaneously?—It would be a very good thing.

2037. Would it not meet the case if you were to send round notices a sufficient time beforehand, calling upon them to begin killing at a certain date?—Yes.

2038. But you do not send out written notices to that effect?—No.

2039. What do you consider the best means of killing at this time of the year?—No doubt, the cheapest and best is poisoning.

2040. Can you tell when poisoning is carried on efficiently?—Yes; we tell by visiting the properties. After a heavy poisoning the rabbits that are not killed are very shy, and if you go a few weeks afterwards again you will not see a great number of them.

2041. That is when they take poison that has lost its strength?—I believe some of them take poison and recover.

2042. A man might plead that he had poisoned his run to no good effect. Would you think that that man had carried out the poisoning efficiently, or would it be that the rabbits would not take the poison?—Very possibly the poison, if badly mixed, would not kill them.

2043. Is there any difficulty in mixing the poison?—None whatever. A person only requires to exercise care. There is no great art in it. If we find a man who does not know how to do it, we often show him the process, and also how to lay it.

2044. Have natural enemies been used in your district?—They have been, but not to a very great extent. Ferrets chiefly have been turned out, and a few stoats last winter.

2045. How do the ferrets answer?—Very well; but the rabbits have too great a command over the country.

2046. Do they thrive?—There is a good deal of mortality among them. I think sometimes they eat the poisoned rabbits.

2047. They are subject to distemper?—Yes.

2048. Are cats very effective?—Very, but not those from towns. Hawks destroy more rabbits than most people imagine. Last year I counted over a hundred hawks in one gully alone.

2049. Do you find any difficulty in punishing where breaches of the Act have been committed?—No; the Magistrates are obliged to convict. In some cases I have applied for higher penalties, but the Magistrate was averse to inflicting more than £1.

2050. Do you think that sufficient?—In one case the defendant would rather pay several fines than take the necessary steps.

2051. Have you any suggestion to make in reference to this subject?—Only that the Magistrate should take a little more evidence and inflict a heavier fine. But at present every one is on the same footing.

2052. The case you are referring to was at Whareama, was it not?—Yes.

2053. Whose was it?—Mr. Andrew's.

2054. What was the complaint?—Simply not killing rabbits.

2055. When did you first find rabbits on the Whareama Run?—Rabbits were on the run before I took charge of the subdivision. It was in Mr. Sutton's time. It is only within the last two years that I have had anything to do with it.

2056. In March last did you get a notice from the department to be particular about compelling the owners in the Lower Taueru and Whareama Districts to kill rabbits?—It was an ordinary circular, and no particular part was mentioned. It simply gave me instructions as an Inspector to see that the Act was carried out.

2057. Was the whole of the district alive with rabbits up to last March?—The rabbits were numerous on the Lower Taueru and parts of the Upper Taueru.

2058. When did you receive that notice?—I think it was in March.

2059. Was it not a fact that the rabbits were then very numerous in the Lower Taueru?—Yes; but that part of the district was under Mr. Orbell's charge.

2060. Was it in consequence of that circular that you issued a number of notices?—No. I had given them notice, and had intended to do so before that circular. I could not say the date of the circular: I believe it was about March.

2061. It was in consequence of that circular that you took the steps in regard to summoning?—No I had summoned some owners: but I certainly made use of it to impress them all the more. It did not make the slightest difference in my intentions.

2062. But you only discovered at that time that rabbits were in this part of the country?—No; rabbits have been there for years.

2063. Why did you only send the notices then?—Because they were increasing.

2064. Do you summon all persons in your district who are not taking proper steps to destroy the rabbits?—Yes.

2065. You make no difference as to small or large holders?—None whatever.

2066. And on large runs are the rabbits decreasing?—Yes.

2067. Do you think you will be able to keep them in that direction?—Yes, I think so; but I am not quite satisfied with some places, and I intend to go round and tell them.

2068. How many agents have you under you?—Two.

2069. Have you the appointment or dismissal of them?—I only recommend them to the Colonial Secretary, and I am instructed to appoint them.

2070. Have you ever recommended any one who was not approved by the department?—No: these two men were just handed over to me from the former Inspector.

2071. And you supposed you were obliged to take them?—Yes.

2072. Then you are not independent?—No.

2073. You cannot appoint any person that you think fit?—I cannot spend the Government money without authority. I believe I cannot dismiss or appoint a man without reference to the Government. I can only recommend.

2074. If you were told you had full authority to do so would it surprise you to hear it?—I should be surprised.

2075. And you do not remember having received a circular to that effect?—I never received one.

2076. What do the agents do?—They visit the runs. They hold appointments under the Sheep Act.

2077. But you have not much to do in regard to sheep?—Not much just now.

2078. As a matter of fact, does the sheep-work take up any considerable portion of the time of these men who are appointed to look after the rabbits?—Sometimes, when I visit a run for rabbit-inspection purposes I send an agent to do some of the sheep-work for me; and if there was a Court case I should require to take one with me in order that he might be a witness.

2079. Where do you live?—At Masterton.

2080. Does your district include Masterton?—Yes.

2081. Masterton is almost on the corner of the district?—Yes.

2082. Do you think Masterton is the most convenient place as a centre to work from?—Certainly.

2083. Can you get about easily?—Yes.

2084. And you are constantly moving about?—I have always plenty of work.

2085. Do you make a point of visiting every part of your district during the year?—Certainly. I do not say that I visit every run, but I know the state of every run.

2086. You rely on the reports of the rabbit agents?—Yes: I also know where the rabbits are numerous myself.

2087. How can you be sure that there are rabbits on a place?—I could be pretty sure, because rabbits do not come swarming on to a place at once. I am very well satisfied with the agents. I have visited every run as far as the rabbits are concerned.

2088. Do you think the Rabbit Act works well?—Yes.

2089. Have you any amendments to suggest regarding it?—Nothing more than I have recommended in my report—that the Government should admit wire-netting, traps, ammunition and guns duty-free, and provide phosphorus for the settlers at a cheaper rate. At present it costs them 4s. 9d. per pound, and I am told it could be landed here for 2s. 6d. Mr. John Martin, jun., informed me.

2090. Do you think you will ever be able to eradicate rabbits in your district?—I do not think we shall ever get rid of them altogether, but we may keep them down.

2091. You will always be obliged, then, to keep up a staff of men?—Unless we can discover some disease to destroy them.

2092. What is the best plan to deal with the rabbit nuisance?—I cannot suggest any improvement on the present system.

2093. Do you think that if the Act were handed over to local bodies it would be put more thoroughly into operation?—It would not work satisfactorily.

2094. *Captain Russell.*] Do you not find the owners anxious to help you generally?—A good many of them are, but others will slack off and make all sorts of excuses. With many it is a question of money. It is a rough year with them—the low price of produce, taxes, and so on.

2095. You think any system of an elective body would not answer?—I do not think so.

2096. If an elective body had power to levy a rate, do you not think the ratepayers would feel immediately interested in the proper carrying-out of the Act?—No.

2097. What is the advantage of simultaneous poisoning?—If one man poisons, and the adjoining man does not, the rabbits will swarm down on to him.

2098. Do you think rabbits get wary of poison?—It is very difficult to get some rabbits to take the poison.

2099. You think, then, it would be unadvisable to continue poisoning all the year round?—I think it is a good thing, according to the country and the weather.

2100. But if rabbits get shy of poison in the summer, would they not refuse to take it in the winter?—No one can say. We often think some rabbits take a little and then get right again.

2101. Do you think rabbits can be induced to take poison satisfactorily in summer-time?—The only successful plan, I find, is by turning the sod over and ploughing.

2102. Do you think, by a system of wire-netting you could subdivide the country, and eat one part down bare, and then poison?—People do that, and it is a great help.

2103. You think that by such a system you would be able to get at the rabbits all through the year?—I think so; and that is why I recommend it if the people like to put it up.

2104. How far does your district run up the East Coast?—To the boundary of Hawke's Bay.

2105. Are the rabbits increasing in your country?—Not at present.

2106. Do you know anything of the success of the fence at Waimata?—Yes; it has proved successful. There are a few rabbits on the Wairarapa side of the fence; and very often the rabbits go up to the fence and it stops them. The agent then comes up and kills them.

2107. Do you know the country through which it is proposed to prolong this fence between Hawke's Bay and the Wairarapa?—Yes.

2108. Are rabbits likely to travel up that fence?—No, I do not think so. What I recommended last spring was that this fence should be erected to a point where they would not be likely to go round.

2109. If the fence is run into a dense bush there is very little chance of rabbits going round it?—It is according to the locality. The erection of a rabbit-proof fence will undoubtedly tend to check the spread.

2110. What salaries do the rabbit agents receive?—From 12s. 6d. to 15s. per day, and only the days on which they are at work, and they have to find their own horses and everything.

2111. Is that sufficient to get absolutely responsible men?—No. Some men do not make more than £15 to £18 per month.

2112. Do their duties take them much to hotel life?—Sometimes; but often an agent stops at a station.

2113. Is the rabbit agent always welcome at a station?—Yes.

2114. Do you think the payment is sufficient to get a man fit for such a responsible position?—I think it is little enough, and it would be better if they were paid so much per month.

2115. *Mr. Buchanan* (after reading an extract from the report of a similar Committee held two years ago, referring to the fitness of certain officers employed under the Act).] You would not feel empowered to dismiss or suspend an agent for misconducting himself, such as getting periodically drunk and so forth?—I should feel justified in suspending him and reporting him.

2116. Do you think your position is a satisfactory one in this sense?—I think the Colonial Secretary would support me if I showed him clearly the circumstances.

2117. Do you not think you should have the power of dismissal upon misconduct?—I think, if it was shown it was through misconduct it would be well to give that power; but there is a way of getting it done by reporting it to head-quarters, and I think the department would support the Inspector.

SIR,—

Wellington, 9th June, 1886.

May I be allowed to make the following addition to my evidence given before the Rabbit Nuisance Committee to-day.

I think that the Board or the Inspector should have the option of prohibiting trapping in any rabbit district.

Trapping is very useful where rabbits exist in isolated patches, but should be strictly prohibited where natural enemies abound.

I should also like to say, with reference to the Hon. Mr. Robinson's question as to whether it would be advisable to procure some experienced men from Australia: Upon further consideration I do not think that it would be necessary, because we have plenty of men in this country who have had quite as much experience as the Australians; and, further, that the conditions as regards climate and country are so very different to those existing in Australia, that I think our own men, having an intimate knowledge of the country, are far better fitted to cope with the pest than strangers would be. If it was thought advisable, it would be better to send a man over to Australia to see and report upon the various modes of treatment in that country.

I have, &c.,

Hon. G. R. Johnson,
Chairman, Rabbit Nuisance Committee.

REGINALD FOSTER,
Inspector of Sheep.

SHEEP.

FRIDAY, 18TH JUNE, 1886.

Mr. ORBELL examined.

1. *Mr. Buchanan*.] Can you tell the Committee whether complaints have been made as to the administration of the sections in the Sheep Act relating to lice?—There have been a few complaints.

2. Did you bring a case in the Forty-Mile Bush into the Magistrate's Court lately?—No; Mr Drummond did.

3. Have you made a general inspection of flocks in your particular part of the district to see whether any lice can be found in those flocks?—Yes.

4. All the flocks?—Almost all.

5. In the event of your finding lice in one or two sheep in a flock during the present month—scarcely noticeable—would you consider it your duty to give the owner notice within a month under one of the sections of the amended Act?—I think, so far as the Act goes, we are bound to do so. I think the Act should give the Inspector discretionary power, as I think it is unnecessary in all cases to have the sheep dipped; but, according to the Act, we are obliged to carry it out—we have no discretionary power.

6. Suppose you made the discovery during lambing-time—would you do so then?—I should

be very loth to do so; but the Act is very clear that if the Inspector finds lice he has to give an order to clean.

7. Is it not a fact that the Rabbit Act is equally imperative?—Yes.

8. Do you enforce the provisions of the Rabbit Act to the letter? Do you not, as a matter of fact, use a discretionary power?—Yes, to a certain extent.

9. Can you tell the Committee absolutely that you are not at liberty to use a similar discretionary power in the administration of the lice-sections of the Act?—It appears to me, by the reading of the Act, that it is imperative. It authorizes the Inspector to dip the flock if any lice are found.

10. Have you made any inquiries at head-quarters as to what is expected in this matter?—I think they would refer us to the Act.

11. It has been stated that the clause is not a bit more imperative than the clauses dealing with the destruction of the rabbits. Do you deny that?—I do not think they are both alike.

12. In the case of fat sheep passing through to market—possibly sold, and coming down to one of the freezing-establishments—if you discovered a single lousy sheep amongst them you would consider it your duty to order them to be dipped before going further?—We should have to do it by the Act.

13. Do you know that in the case of Mr. Mace that has been done?—Yes. It was a very hard case.

14. Was he ordered to dip?—I do not know. I could not say. It was Mr. Drummond's case.

Mr. DRUMMOND examined.

15. *Mr. Buchanan.*] You have had one or two prosecutions in your district under the lice sections of the Sheep Act?—Yes.

16. If you felt satisfied that you had discretionary power, would you have taken proceedings in the case of Mr. Whitcombe, in the Forty-Mile Bush?—Certainly not.

17. Has he dipped this year?—Yes.

18. To what extent did you find lice in the sheep?—I did not examine the sheep—it was Inspector Cameron; and he only saw about five or six hundred, and he said they were not very bad. I think he has two thousand sheep.

19. Do you think that in such a case Agent Cameron is a sufficiently-experienced man for a prosecution to take place on his report without personal visiting yourself?—I certainly think that the Inspector has no discretionary power. It is quite sufficient, once he finds lice, to give an order to dip. He examined a few of the sheep to satisfy himself that they were lousy, and Mr. Whitcombe pleaded guilty in the Court. The Justices of the Peace were not satisfied with this, and wished to hear evidence, and Cameron and Whitcombe were examined. They adjourned the case for two or three weeks, and then gave their decision, inflicting the minimum penalty of £5; but they intimated they would recommend that the fine be reduced to £1.

20. Is it not true that Mr. Whitcombe explained to the Magistrate that a delay took place before he could replace the dip owing to the timber not coming to hand?—What I understood was that he ordered totara, and instead of sending him totara they sent him white pine; hence the delay; and I reported to Mr. Bayly that I believed the timber was the cause of the delay in getting the dip erected.

21. Is it true that Mr. Mace was compelled to dip his sheep when they were going away?—It is quite true.

22. Is it true also that Tatham was compelled to dip fat sheep in a similar way?—No. He had an order at the time to dip all his sheep, and he asked me to allow him to move these fat sheep without dipping; but I told him I had no power. If they had been in a sale-yard I could have allowed him to move them to some place to be dipped.

23. You admit having a discretionary power under the Rabbit Act?—I have no discretionary power: we give notice to destroy rabbits on a property, and if steps are not taken to eradicate them I am obliged to take proceedings.

24. You contend that clause 2 of the Amendment Act leaves you no discretionary power?—I have no such power under the Rabbit and Sheep Act.

25. Suppose, in July or August, passing along the road, you saw lousy sheep in possession of an owner, do you mean to tell the Committee that you would order the dipping of these sheep if they were ewes, and either on the point of lambing or lambing?—I have not inspected sheep for lice at lambing.

26. You admit, then, you have a discretionary power to that extent?—I admit that I leave myself to get a rap over the knuckles.

27. *Hon. the Chairman.*] In regard to Mr. Whitcombe's case, he apparently failed to dip his sheep because the dip was not actually erected on his run?—That is so.

28. Is there not some clause in the Sheep Act which compels them to have a dip?—Not under the Lice Act; but under the Sheep Act a month is allowed.

29. Has Whitcombe lately come there?—No, he has been there for some time; but he has only had sheep for two years. He had a few cattle before.

30. Do you think it desirable to introduce an amendment into the Lice Act giving discretionary power?—I think so. If near shearing-time a month is not long enough, nor if on the eve of lambing.

31. The amendment you would recommend, then, would be in the direction of allowing a longer time to dip in at certain times of the year?—Yes.

32. But if you introduced a discretionary power to say whether a man should dip or not, that would be opening the door to all sorts of abuses?—Yes. I mean only in respect to time for dipping.

APPENDICES.

APPENDIX A.

INSTRUCTIONS referred to in Mr. Cooper's Evidence. (*Vide* page 25, question 691.)
(Circular No. 4.)

SIR,—

Colonial Secretary's Office, Wellington, 28th April, 1886.

From information which has recently from time to time reached the department, the Colonial Secretary has reason to believe that the increase of rabbits throughout the colony is going on at the present moment at a rate quite as fast, if not faster, than at any time previously, and that this applies to districts in which the existence of the pest has not been known, or at all events has not been reported by the Inspector in charge.

I am accordingly instructed to inform you that it is Mr. Buckley's desire that the instructions which have been from time to time given to all Inspectors, directing them to use their best endeavours to eradicate the pest, shall be strictly carried out, and that the provisions of "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1882," shall be rigidly enforced on all occasions without respect of persons or fear of any consequences that may ensue from a strict and impartial discharge of his duty by any officer employed by the Stock Department.

I have, &c.,

G. S. COOPER.

APPENDIX B.

RESOLUTIONS referred to in Mr. Fraser's Evidence. (*Vide* page 64, question 1791.)

SIR,—

County Chambers, Clyde, 26th May, 1886.

I have the honour, by direction of the Chairman, to forward copy of resolutions passed by this Council at a meeting held on the 26th instant:—

"1. That the responsibility for keeping the rabbits in check on occupied Crown lands devolves primarily on the occupiers thereof.

"2. That, in consequence of the low value of rabbit-skins, in conjunction with the ruinous price for produce of all kinds, it is impossible for the occupiers of land to bear unaided the entire cost of destroying rabbits effectually throughout the year.

"3. That the Government should defray a certain portion of the cost of abating this evil, as, apart from the consideration which it should have for the prosperity of its settlers, it is directly interested in the rabbit question as the landlord of a valuable estate which is gradually but surely being depreciated.

"4. That for the foregoing reasons the Government be respectfully requested to recommend Parliament at its present sitting to grant a bonus of 1d. per skin on all rabbits exported from the colony.

"5. That, in the event of this bonus being granted, the provisions of the Rabbit Act should be enforced most stringently against all occupiers of land who fail in their duty to continually keep the pest effectually in check.

"6. That more efficient measures should be adopted for the future in regard to destroying rabbits on unoccupied Crown lands and reserves."

I am further directed to solicit your influence and support in the matter, with a view to the resolution being given effect to by the Legislature.

I have, &c.,

JOHN S. DICKIE,

Clerk, Vincent County Council.

APPENDIX C.

SUMMARY of Payments made during last Financial Year for Destruction of Rabbits on Crown Lands, exclusive of Agents' Wages.

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Wairarapa North	57	10	0
Wairarapa South	112	3	1
					169	13 1
Kaikoura	75	0	0
Timaru	40	9	10
Oamaru	99	7	3
Waikouaiti	103	15	0
Dunedin	246	0	0
Maniototo	6	17	9
Vincent	349	0	0
Lake	536	18	2
Tuapeka	550	7	0
Clutha	420	10	6
Southland	463	4	5
Wallace	656	15	4
					3,548	5 3
					£3,717	18 4

APPENDIX D.

STOCK BRANCH.—EXPENDITURE on Rabbits during the Year ended 31st March, 1886.

Salaries of Inspectors of Sheep who are also Rabbit Inspectors ...	£	s.	d.
	13,415	0	0
Wages of Rabbit Agents, costs of poisoning Crown lands, and contingent expenditure	13,693	0	0
	<u>£27,108</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>

APPENDIX E.

APPROXIMATE AREA of Unoccupied Crown Lands in Country badly infested with Rabbits, not badly infested but dangerous, and where a few only are to be found.

County.	Unoccupied Crown Lands.	Unoccupied Crown Lands badly infested.	Unoccupied Crown Lands not badly infested but dangerous.	Unoccupied Crown Lands not infested.
	Acres.	Acres.	Acres.	Acres.
Hutt	197,000	...	...	197,000
Horowhenua	118,500	...	...	118,500
Wairarapa East	513,000	127,000	8,600	377,400
Wairarapa West	185,000	100,700	...	84,300
Waipawa	31,900	...	...	31,900
Collingwood	657,300	...	...	657,300
Sounds	96,200	...	...	96,200
Waimea	635,900	11,500	...	624,400
Buller	1,022,700	...	...	1,022,700
Marlborough	394,800	21,300	...	373,500
Inangahua	1,610,500	...	...	1,610,500
Kaikoura	42,000	42,000	...	...
Grey	670,000	...	...	670,000
Amuri	515,200	...	2,500	512,700
Waitaki	153,500	101,500	...	52,000
Vincent	215,000	194,500	...	20,500
Lake	872,500	353,500	...	519,000
Maniototo	25,700	25,700	...	...
Waihemo	2,500	2,500	...	...
Waikouaiti	5,200	5,200	...	...
Taieri	32,700	32,700	...	...
Tuapeka	86,000	86,000	...	...
Bruce	8,800	8,800	...	...
Clutha	176,500	176,500	...	...
Southland	375,000	375,000	...	...
Wallace	1,007,000	659,000	...	348,000
Fiord	1,842,000	29,000	...	1,813,000
Ashburton	293,600	161,000	...	132,600
Geraldine	26,000	...	...	26,000
Mackenzie	538,000	5,000	...	533,000
Totals	12,350,000	2,518,400	11,100	9,820,500

RETURN showing the Approximate Area of Unoccupied Crown Lands in each Rabbit District in the Colony.

District.	Area.	District.	Area.
Napier	303,485	Tuturau	1,272
Castlepoint	212,000	Kaiwera	856
Masterton	96,000	Wyndham	6,713
Wainuioru	75,000	Hokonui	32,200
Awhea	30,000	Aparima	50,520
Carterton	44,500	Wallace	75,970
Palmerston North	42,600	West Oreti	1,000,500
Otaruaia	27,800		
Tapanui	11,899	Total	2,781,013
Vincent	66,698		
Lake	703,000		

APPENDIX F.

PAYMENTS made during last Financial Year for Destruction of Rabbits on Crown Lands.

Vincent—			Lake—		
	£	s. d.		£	s. d.
Jones, W., Cromwell ...	101	5 0	Cables, W. ...	15	0 0
Gunion, R. ...	50	0 0	Scott, J. ...	10	0 0
Kearney, F. H. ...	17	15 0	Kelly, J. ...	55	0 0
Williams, W. ...	20	0 0	Kelly, J. ...	3	10 0
Maclean, D. ...	20	0 0	Butement, J. ...	20	0 0
Butler, J. ...	5	0 0	Butement, J. ...	20	0 0
Williams, W. ...	25	0 0	Beer and Co. ...	30	0 0
Ritchie, J. ...	50	0 0	Cables, W. ...	35	0 0
McLean, D. ...	20	0 0	Thomas, W. ...	4	10 0
Williams, W. ...	20	0 0	Scott, J. ...	16	0 0
			Wither, J. ...	30	0 0
	329	0 0			
Payments out of imprest advances to Inspector ...	20	0 0	Payments out of imprest through Inspector ...	297	18 2
	£349	0 0		£536	18 2
Timaru (Rees)—					
Payment out of imprest advances	£40	9 10	Kaikoura (Rabbit)—		
			Wages, grain, and phosphorus	£75	0 0

APPENDIX G.

DURING the year ended 31st March, 1884, 400 ferrets were liberated on Crown lands by Government, and about 4,000 on private lands by landowners.

During the year ended 31st March, 1885, 786 ferrets were liberated on Crown lands by Government, and about 5,000 on private lands by landowners; 55 stoats and 183 weasels were also liberated by Government.

During the year ended 31st March, 1886, 1,331 ferrets were liberated on Crown lands by Government, and about 6,000 on private lands by landowners; 82 stoats and 126 weasels were also liberated by Government, and 87 stoats and 283 weasels by landowners.

SUMMARY of Return of Natural Enemies liberated by the Government and Landowners during the Years 1884, 1885, and 1886.

	1884.	1885.	1886.	Total.
By Government ...	400	1,024	1,539	2,963
Landowners ...	4,000	5,000	6,370	15,370
Grand total ...				18,333