

150. But the fact remains, that the rabbits never did increase on this property very much. That might, perhaps, be attributed to natural causes, or it might be owing to the introduction of ferrets?—It was not owing to natural causes, because it was dry, suitable land for rabbits to thrive upon; and, as I have said, they did increase very rapidly on parts, till checked by the ferrets.

151. Then, why do you think rabbits would increase elsewhere, notwithstanding ferrets being turned out?—Because the ferrets were chiefly trapped by rabbiters. No one can imagine the amount of mischief done by rabbiters. I am told that within the last month the Rabbit Agents have absolutely told owners of property that they must trap; but I would certainly check trapping as far as possible.

152. *Mr. Lance.*] Do you think the ferrets are killed to any extent by poisoned rabbits?—No; I do not think so.

153. It seems to me, Mr. Pharazyn, you have been very fortunate as regards the position of your property. I should not imagine, for instance, that you have been subjected to the great inundations of rabbits like many people in Otago?—Yes; I have been in just the same position. I remember on one occasion passing along a property in my district, and, looking on the side of a hill, I said to myself, "Would it be possible for me to fire a gun without hitting a rabbit," and I came to the conclusion, after looking carefully, that it would be impossible; they were as thick as they possibly could be.

154. Are you aware that the Government are going to stop the breeding of ferrets this year? Do you think that will be a mistake?—I think such a course would be a public calamity. I remember about eight years ago writing a memorandum for the Government on this very subject, and I put it before the Chief Surveyor, Mr. McKerrow. I suggested that steps should be taken at once for the steady introduction of the natural enemy of the rabbits. I suggested that the Agent-General should give notice, on behalf of the New Zealand Government, to the effect that they would be purchasers for many years for weasels, stoats, and ferrets. Had that been carried out, I am convinced we should now have been cleared. If I had the power I would spend all the money that now goes in other ways in the direction of breeding and importing these animals, and any others which may be found suited to the wants of particular localities.

155. Do you think ferrets are killed off by distemper?—In some places they are subject to it.

156. Do you think it would be of advantage to the colony if science could in any way do something in the direction of staying this?—Yes; certainly I do.

157. Now, how do you find the Act works in your district?—I was just thinking yesterday, with regard to our district, we should have succeeded just as well without the Act. Not one of our people have ever been summoned. We have, of course, received formal notices, but, so far as I have been concerned, I have thrown these notices in the fire.

158. You have done what you considered was necessary?—Quite so.

159. Have you ever heard of any of the Inspectors giving orders as to the method to be used in getting rid of the rabbits, and insisting that those instructions should be strictly carried out?—I have never had any official orders myself, but in many cases the distinction between suggestions and orders is difficult to draw when it is known that a prosecution will follow any refusal.

160. In 1884 this Committee had strong evidence in this direction, and then most implicit instructions were issued that they were not to go on to property and say put on rabbiters?—It is, I believe, done now by making the sort of suggestions I have referred to.

161. *Mr. Walker.*] Do I understand you to say that some of the Inspectors have issued orders that you must trap?—I am not prepared to go quite so far as that. At any rate, I am not prepared to name any particular case.

162. *Hon. Sir G. Whitmore.*] No doubt your attention has been called, or, at any rate, you have seen a letter from a person in Australia who proposes killing off the male rabbits and leaving the females?—Yes.

163. Have you known anybody who has tried this?—No; I do not think anybody is likely to take that plan up. It would be quite impracticable, and I do not think there is any probability of any one trying it. It would be impossible, in fact, to carry out such a course on large blocks of rough country.

164. Have you ever known of anybody trying the experiment?—No; that I have not. I have only heard the proposal laughed at.

165. But you must be aware there are very concise details given as to the success of this plan, but you say it is not done?—No; I believe it is all nonsense; the female will always breed.

166. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Can you tell the Committee what number of ferrets you have turned out?—Probably not more than 1,000, and about 300 stoats and weasels, amongst us, on about 250,000 acres.

167. *Mr. Dodson.*] What length of time would that extend over?—About fourteen years.

168. *Mr. Buchanan.*] You are acquainted with the Brancepeth Estate?—Yes.

169. Do you know the number of ferrets that have been turned out on that estate alone?—Well, I should say nearly as many as have been turned out in the whole of our district put together.

170. Could you imagine it possible that in one district the distemper in ferrets had nearly exterminated them altogether, while in other districts it might not have done so?—That is possible, no doubt. In wet places, for instance, the ferrets would be more liable to the disease than in others.

171. I have seen the ferrets on my homestead so sickly that they could scarcely get out of the way, and disappearing altogether where they were previously very numerous?—What has struck me very forcibly on this question is that there is a marked difference between that land and ours. We have water in every little gully; in the country you refer to water is comparatively scarce, and the ferrets would not thrive so well in consequence. I do not think a ferret would, for instance, care to go to a dam for a drink if he could not find other water; he would very probably leave that part of the country and go to some other part where water was more plentiful.