

SESS. II.—1891.
NEW ZEALAND.

RABBIT - FENCE, SOUTH CANTERBURY

(REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED TO INSPECT THE).

Laid on the Table by the Hon. J. McKenzie, with the Leave of the House.

The RABBIT-FENCE COMMISSIONERS to the Hon. J. MCKENZIE.

SIR,—

Oamaru, 21st March, 1891.

As requested by you, we have the honour to report that we have inspected, on foot, every yard of the eighty odd miles of the South Canterbury rabbit-fence, which extends from Mount Cook to the River Waitaki, nearly opposite Kurow.

We first inspected the section running from the head of Lake Pukaki up the north side of the Tasman River, past Braemar and Burnett's stations, terminating at Bluff Rock, where a wing-fence of about half a mile has been erected, at an angle to the main fence, across the shingle-bed to a branch of the Tasman River. We are pleased to be able to report that we find this section is answering the purpose for which it was erected, and, with careful supervision, the fence is capable of withstanding any invasion of rabbits such as might be expected, especially so, because no point between the fence and the Tasman River exceeds a distance of one mile; and we would venture to point out that it is the duty of the Inspector to see that rabbits are not allowed to accumulate upon this line of country referred to. This section is in good order. The terminus at Lake Pukaki is, in our opinion, perfect, but we can hardly say the same with respect to the other terminus at Bluff Rock, which, we think, might be improved by an extension farther up the river for some two or three miles, together with one or more wing-fences running out to the river. At the same time we must say we saw no traces of rabbits above the wing of this fence. We recommend a double ending on the north side of the Jollie River.

We found the wing-fence at Birch Hill in good order, and it has apparently done good work; but for better security we would recommend that this section be extended up the hill, terminating on the south side of the gully at (if possible) a Bluff Rock, and material be kept ready at the other end for use as the Tasman River recedes. Material should be kept for such purposes at all river-ends and floodgates.

The Pukaki-Tekapo section, as regards condition, is similar to those previously inspected. We found rabbits much more numerous here, especially at the Pukaki end, than on any other section. At the Tekapo end where the fence runs for three miles, more or less, over a rocky-bed, the bottom of the netting has been laid on the surface, and we consider this method, when over stony ground, to be as efficient as when sunk in the ground; but to insure permanent safety the netting should be tied to the bottom wire and pegged between each standard.

The Tekapo-Haldon Saddle section we found in fair order. Supervision here is evidently lax, the caretaker is not supplied with pliers, &c., and his traps are useless because badly erected.

The Haldon-Waitaki section wire-netting has not been properly overlapped and laced where cut for the purpose of keeping the netting straight over uneven ground, and the benching along the Hakateramea faces is too narrow, consequently rubbish, stones, &c., accumulate on the upper side of the fence, which is already low in several places. At the floodgates on this section an extra piece of netting might with advantage be laced on the bottom and weighed down with stones instead of the means now adopted. On account of this section going over high and broken country, we would suggest that another hut be erected in the vicinity of the Haldon Saddle for the use of caretakers working on these beats.

The weak point in the fence we consider to be the gates: first of all they are flimsy and defective in construction, many fastened with wire to the post instead of being hung on hinges. One near Balloon Creek was found with its lower fastening at the post broken, which left a space of 3in. for a foot high between the gate and the post; this had apparently been broken the day before by the shepherd when driving sheep through the gate. Another, a double-gate on Sutton's Road, near the Waitaki River, was found unchained but fastened at the top, the head of one gate not bolted and standing away from the sill nearly 3in.; further, this gate (as in many other cases) had no penalty notice-board affixed as required by the Act.

A few irregularities which can easily be remedied came under our notice, such as broken meshes, want of lacing of netting, &c.—things which should not be allowed to remain; and we beg to suggest that the officer in charge of the fence be directed to give them early attention.

During our inspection we saw scratchings and caught rabbits on both sides of the fence, traces being as numerous on the Canterbury as on the Otago side throughout the whole length of the fence;—and, having seen no indication that rabbits have passed the fence, we are of opinion they must have been on the Canterbury side before the fence was erected.

In conclusion, we cannot too strongly impress upon all property-owners north of the fence the very great necessity that exists for immediately taking active and energetic steps in endeavouring to exterminate the pest which so seriously endangers the whole of Canterbury.

We have, &c,

THOMAS DUNCAN, M.H.R.,
J. S. RUTHERFORD,
J. T. SHAW,
T. H. LANCE,

} Rabbit-fence
} Commissioners.

The Hon. J. McKenzie,
Minister of Lands and Agriculture, Wellington.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation (nil); printing (1,300 copies), £1 2s.

By Authority: GEORGE DIDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1891.
Price, 3d.]