

SESS. II.—1891.
NEW ZEALAND.

LIVE-STOCK AND RABBITS COMMITTEE

(REPORT OF THE).

Report brought up, and ordered to be printed.

Your Committee have the honour to report that they have inquired into the various matters relating to stock, referred to them, and in doing so have felt they were free from one of the chief causes of anxiety to Committees previously appointed—viz., the necessity for the consideration of scab.

They confidently express the hope that at no distant date a free interchange of stock will take place between New Zealand and other countries on lines of perfect safety.

This desirable object can, in the opinion of your Committee, be best attained by maintaining relations of reciprocity with Australia on all matters relating to quarantine, and by giving effect to the following resolutions, which your Committee unanimously adopted:—

1. That in the opinion of this Committee the proclamation by Cattle Boards of private premises as quarantine grounds for imported stock, under clauses 20 and 21 of "The Diseased Cattle Act, 1881," constitutes a grave public danger, by virtually abolishing all safeguards against the introduction of disease, and that the Government should immediately amend the law so as to withdraw powers which directly conflict with the general quarantine regulations agreed upon with the Australian Colonies.

2. That the Government be requested to negotiate with the several Australian Governments with a view of including the time occupied in the ocean transit of stock in the ninety days provided in the regulations for quarantine within this colony.

3. That the Government be urged to take the necessary steps towards lessening the almost prohibitive expense hitherto imposed upon imported stock while undergoing quarantine.

4. That the Government be requested to declare the colony free from scab at the earliest possible date compatible with the engagements understood to have been entered into at the Sydney Stock Conference.

During the session of 1890 the Committee (which was then a joint one, composed of both Houses) devoted considerable attention to the alleged prevalence of cancer and tuberculosis in stock slaughtered for food, as well as in cows used for dairy purposes, and valuable evidence was taken, upon which the report was framed.

Your Committee regrets that it was impossible to take up the question this year, but in consideration of its great importance they would suggest that the Government should carefully consider during the recess the question of inspection of slaughterhouses and dairies, and of such cattle as are slaughtered for human food.

Your Committee desire to bring under the notice of the Government the indisputable fact that a slaughterhouse can only become a nuisance to those residing in its vicinity through the gross mismanagement of the persons in charge. Modern experience in England and America, as well as in this colony, amply proves this.

Your Committee express their satisfaction at the increase of the number of sheep in the Colony notwithstanding the rapid growth in the export of frozen meat; but they regret they had no time to discuss the probable injury to our flocks from the exportation of the ewe lambs which are the first to mature. It is a question which is obviously worthy of serious attention.

Your Committee took no evidence on the question of the rabbit-pest, but they are pleased to learn from reports sent in to the Head Office of the Stock Department, by the Inspectors of the various districts, that the pest is not increasing in numbers.

Your Committee heard evidence given by a deputation from the Hurunui Rabbit Board asking for assistance on the pound-for-pound principle, to erect rabbit-fences; but as this involved the protection of private estates as well as Crown lands held as runs within the Midland Railway area, your Committee advises that a sum of money be placed on the estimates for this purpose, but not

to be expended unless the Midland Railway Company and others interested contribute their fair quota, and that the Chairman of your Committee and Mr. Ritchie, head of the Stock Department, visit the locality in order to ascertain, from a personal inspection, whether the object claimed by the deputation can be attained by the expenditure.

Your Committee deeply regrets to find that the strong recommendation made by the Joint Committee in 1890 on the subject of lung-worm and other diseases in stock has not been given effect to—viz., “That Professor Thomas should be requested to complete the investigation commenced by him a few years ago, and that Mr. J. F. McClean, M.R.C.V.S.E., should be employed in the same direction.”

When it is considered that our live-stock provides an important portion of the food of our population, in addition to furnishing fully two-thirds of our total exports, it is not creditable to us as a business community that the industry above all others upon which the welfare of the colony depends should virtually be left to shift for itself by successive Governments. In the Australian Colonies large sums are annually spent on this industry, and some of the results of similar action by the United States of America are visible in the valuable book on parasites in sheep recently to hand from that country.

Your Committee would strongly urge the immediate attention of the Government to this important question, with a view of endeavouring to lessen the heavy death-rate amongst sheep which prevails in some districts of the colony.

Your Committee earnestly recommends the important matters contained in this report to the serious consideration of Parliament, and also the country.

22nd September 1891.

F. LAWRY,
Chairman.

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LIVE STOCK AND RABBITS COMMITTEE.

TUESDAY, 18TH AUGUST, 1891. (Mr. LAWRY, Chairman.)

Mr. McRAE examined.

Witness : At the last meeting of the Rabbit Board, I may state, we considered the matter of a fence being required to be carried on, and came to the conclusion that it would be better for some members of the Board to come up here and interview the Government upon it, and try to explain matters, because the speech of the Hon. Mr. McKenzie, which we saw in *Hansard*, looked as if they were not going to take any notice of it. But Mr. Lance would not go. He said he would do the best he could for us by writing to Mr. Perceval. And we have come up to urge upon the Government the necessity of having this fence continued to the junction of the original fence at the upper end of the Clarence fence. Well, gentlemen, what I would particularly urge upon the Committee and members of the Government is that, seeing the necessity of it, by the way the rabbits are getting in over Hammer Plains, a fence should be erected from the bridge to Gorge Creek, for the rabbits on that part are getting most serious. And we find it will be necessary to carry that fence on to protect the rest of Canterbury. Mr. Rutherford put down £1,000, and paid it into the Board at once, and then they were accused of favouring Mr. Rutherford by putting a fence on his land. But it only goes through three miles of his freehold, the balance of thirteen miles being leasehold, and through Mr. Jones's property, and does not benefit him alone, but the whole country south. But he deserves to be given great credit for what he has done in trying to stop the wave of rabbits. If we were to get about £2,000 for this piece of fence I think the rest of Canterbury would be well protected for some time.

1. *Mr. Duncan.*] Would £4,000 finish the fence from the distance you have got now?—I think £4,000 would complete it altogether. I am not quite sure whether it would take so much, but it is better to be outside than inside the mark. We do not want to go on spending more money than we are entitled to get.

2. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Can you give the Committee an idea of what would be the cost of the best rabbit-fence, such as you want here, per mile?—The best fence that has been put up there—I believe it was put up by Mr. Rutherford—cost him £180 per mile. Of course, that is the best. There is strong material in it, which ran into a lot of money. The present fence will be much cheaper, being about £120 a mile, and it will be lighter wire.

3. Has the deputation gone into any estimate as to the relative area of Crown lands and private lands, say, within a reasonable distance south of the line gone into by this fence?—No; we have not gone into that.

Mr. Duncan : You can get that information from the department, so it is not necessary to put that question now.

4. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Then, as I understood yesterday, the pound for pound that the deputation offers to provide for the erection of this fence would come not from the Rabbit Board, but from private individuals?—Yes; it would come from private individuals; and the Board would have nothing to do beyond seeing that the fence was erected.

5. Is it correct that the Chairman of the Board says that the Rabbit Board District is rated to the highest point it can be at present, and that no additional rate can be struck?—Yes; the district is rated up to the very highest point it can be rated at.

6. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Can you give us the amount of the money you spent on the erection of the Clarence line?—It would take some time to go into the matter and give a list of what has been done.

7. *Mr. Duncan.*] Is the Board prepared to complete this fence if the Government give a subsidy of £2,000, and to maintain it afterwards?—Yes. What we wish is to have the answer as soon as possible, so that we may lose no time in getting material to go on with the fence. We will have the skeleton pushed on so that we can go on erecting the other part after. We consider that not a day should be wasted; the sooner it is done the better. I would beg to refer you to the report of the Rabbit Commissioners on the Clarence fence.

Mr. RUTHERFORD examined.

Witness : I am not a member of the Board in any shape or form. My property is leasehold, and the bulk of the leases are up in about eighteen months, so it is hardly fair to ask me to give the Government pound-for-pound subsidy to protect their property. But I am prepared, myself, to give the Government pound-for-pound subsidy so far as my boundary goes to Steyning Creek if the pound for pound which I pay is made a charge on the leasehold provided I do not get a renewal of the lease. And should we decide on erecting this fence I am prepared to maintain the fence on my own ground at my own cost; and, not only that, but I am prepared, with my neighbour, Mr. McArthur, to keep two men continually with dogs and guns to keep the rabbits down inside, for it is simply impossible to stop rabbits unless you keep continually at them inside.

8. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Unless you keep them away from the fence, I suppose?—Yes; and thus I consider this fence up the Waiau would be the best line we could possibly get. On account of having the Waiau River close to the fence on the north side, the caretakers would keep the rabbits away from the fence. It would only be a chain or two from the river to the fence at most parts. Of course, gentlemen, you must understand that my offer to give pound-for-pound subsidy with the Government is if I get a renewal of my lease.

9. *The Chairman.*] You do not mean by that that the Government should extend the present lease?—The leases are put up by auction, and I expect to get mine again. I think the distance of the fence erected is something about twenty-eight or thirty miles, and I think that the lighter style of fence that McArthur and myself propose to erect would not come to over £120 to £130 a mile. I am quite satisfied in my own mind, if I am able to carry out my proposal, that Canterbury will be comparatively safe for some years unless the rabbits come through at the West Coast side, and come down that way.

10. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Roughly, what acreage of Government land have you under lease? I suppose it lies between the Boyle and the Waiiau?—It runs round Steyning Creek. I have only 8,600 acres, and such very poor land that it takes about six acres to the sheep.

11. Is all that in the midland area?—I suppose so; and there is no danger of any one buying it, because 10s. an acre is too dear.

Mr. McARTHUR examined.

Witness: Mr. Chairman, I think, after what Mr. Rutherford has said, I have nothing to say. I am exactly in the same position as he is. It is simply a continuation of the fence from Mr. Rutherford's boundary to where the present fence joins the Clarence fence in the Waiiau Valley. There may be a better place five miles nearer, but we must explore that. This fence only protects about one-third of my run. I am prepared, in exactly the same way as Mr. Rutherford, to pay pound for pound. But I think in my case the Government should do a little more, considering one-third of my land is only protected by the proposed fence. Of course, I am prepared to do what Mr. Rutherford is doing in any case; but I think when two-thirds of the land is thrown out of this proposed fence probably the Government will give me a little more then. I do not think there is anything else I have got to say; Mr. Rutherford has already shown the points of the case.

12. *Mr. Buchanan.*] When you say the fence would only protect one-third of your land, you mean two-thirds are out of the proposed fence?—It is. It cost me about £500 to kill these rabbits, because it costs about three or four shillings a piece to have them killed.

13. The present fence ends in the main bush?—Yes; it ends in a dense bush at the end of the Waiiau River, and I think it would be possible, with great care and watchfulness, to keep them out at that end. It ends in a precipice of bare, barren rock. Of course, it is hard to say where rabbits will go, but as yet there is no sign of them working round, and we watch them very carefully. If the rabbits get round there, then there is a place about four or five miles lower down where we should run a fence in to the West Coast. However, the upper end would have to be taken down and run into this valley, and then across the saddle, at a height of 3,000ft.

14. *Mr. Duncan.*] Has anything been done to make this fence at Waiiau?—No.

15. Then, does the Committee understand you to say that you want more concession than Mr. Rutherford with regard to the erection of this fence?—I did not say I wanted it; I only pointed out that this fence only protects one-third of my land.

16. What area is that one-third?—I think from about 20,000 to 25,000 acres.

Mr. McFARLANE examined.

Witness: I do not think I have anything to say except to back Mr. McRae up and in supporting these gentlemen in petitioning the Government. Of course, I represent the freehold interest in the district entirely. I will show you, pretty roughly, what we have already done in the way of fencing. On the freehold there are forty-five miles erected; on the leasehold, through Crown lands, thirty-two miles. The freehold cost £6,200 and the leasehold cost about £8,000—that is, £2,000 more than the freehold fencing has cost us. The wages for maintenance in the freehold are £387 a year, and on the leasehold it is about £705. Freeholders have been paying pound for pound with the Government, and they do not feel disposed now to do anything further on the Crown lands in the way of fencing, and they are simply backing up Mr. McArthur and Mr. Rutherford in their proposition to the Government. The Rabbit Board is rated up to the full amount, and they are not disposed to rate themselves any further.

17. *The Chairman.*] I suppose we may take you to be an absolutely disinterested witness so far as the leasing of Crown land is concerned?—Yes.

18. And your evidence, in consequence, will be more valuable. Do you think it will at a future time enhance the value of Crown lands, when the present leases expire?—Yes. If the country is left as it is at present it will be overrun with rabbits in a few years, and the leases will become valueless.

19. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Your property is a good deal away from this?—Yes; but I am acquainted with this country.

20. You have no personal interest?—No; no personal interest whatever. No more than that supposing this fencing is not done the whole of the Crown lands will become infested with rabbits, and will become a menace to the whole of Canterbury.

21. *Mr. Duncan.*] I suppose you are well acquainted with this country that the fence runs through?—I am fairly well acquainted with it. I have seen the most of it.

22. Then, would you suppose, or do you suppose, that it is a right thing for the Government to do to spend this money in erecting this fence?—Yes, I think it is a perfectly legitimate thing for them to do, considering they are acting in the position of landlords, and it is through their own property, and that it is right for the Government of the country to protect their own interests.

23. Would the railway company not necessarily benefit by the erection of this fence?—I should take it that that would be a matter between the Government and the railway company.

Mr. McRae: I might state, gentlemen, that unless the fence is put up, in my opinion, the country will neither be good for the Government or the Midland Railway Company. If the rabbits get on to it it will be perfectly useless for anybody.