

upon inflicted. I think, if it is expedient Sheep Inspectors should have that power to secure the proper working of that Act, the Trustees, County Councils, or the Government—whoever has the enforcement of the Rabbit Act—should have that power similarly

163. Do you think Inspectors should have power to enter on private lands and destroy rabbits?—Yes; but I do not see where that power can be exercised with any benefit, except in the case of absentees. I think, in the case of occupied land, the owner should be compelled to exterminate, leaving the means to himself.

164. Would you increase the minimum penalty under the Act?—Yes, to from £5 to £10; not less than £5.

165. Would you increase the maximum?—I think the question of acreage must come in in considering that, because, certainly, a large acreage would harbour more mischief than a small extent of ground. The mischief, for example, that would be harboured by 50,000 acres would be out of all proportion to that of 100 acres.

166. Do you think repressive legislation would be best administered by the Government, by County Councils, or by Trustees?—I certainly think that, assuming the county boundaries to remain as they are, the Government should have the final power of enforcing the Act in the event of the local bodies not exercising their powers. The Rabbit Act, speaking generally, is not worth the paper it is printed on until some such power as that is put behind the local bodies. I feel quite certain that local jealousies prevent the Act being worked by Trustees, and the Act, therefore, is rendered quite a farce. I think decidedly the County Councils should have the enforcement of the Act, instead of rabbit Trustees.

167. And in the event of the County Councils failing, the Government to enforce it?—I think it would be the most effectual way for the Government then to enforce the Act themselves, through the Sheep Inspectors, because there would be a great deal of difficulty on the part of the Government compelling an unwilling county to enforce it.

168. *Hon. Mr. Nurse.*] But why not let the Government do it, to begin with, altogether?—That is a very difficult question. You have only Sheep Inspectors, perfectly competent for those particular duties as Sheep Inspectors, and it would be going in the direction of making them jacks-of-all-trades; and, perhaps, on emergencies, one class of duties would interfere very seriously with another.

169. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Sheep Inspectors should have the power to appoint persons to carry out the work, do you say?—I mean that the Sheep Inspectors might be the men the Government should employ to enforce the Act, failing the County Council.

170. The Sheep Inspector could, of course, see what rabbits were doing when he went to inspect sheep; but you could hardly expect him to go out of his way, where there were no sheep, to see if there were rabbits. Do you mean he should take up that part of the duty?—That is, if there is failure on the part of the County Councillors. My idea is, the County Councils should take the place of Trustees.

171. But should the Sheep Inspectors do all this without special assistance?—My recommendation is this: That the present Boards of Rabbit Trustees should be superseded in the administration of the Act by the County Councils, with the power behind of the Government to enforce the Act, either by the Sheep Inspectors or by other means, if found advisable, in any case where the County Council failed.

172. *The Chairman.*] Clause 20 of the Act provides that all Sheep Inspectors shall be Inspectors of Rabbits. Do you think the present Act sufficient for that purpose. It provides that the Sheep Inspectors shall take action if the County Councils do not, after giving sufficient notice that the rabbits exist in sufficient quantities?—That meets my views to a certain extent; but it appears to me, either through the bad wording of the Act, or otherwise, it is a dead letter. I am quite satisfied that the present system of Trustees' Boards, with local influences, and the state of rabbits on Trustees' lands, will always prevent the proper enforcement of the Act.

173. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] But would not the same influences actuate County Councils?—No; there is a different class of men on the County Councils.

174. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] Do you not think it would be better for the Government to carry out the Act at first hand, rather than only through failure by other bodies?—I think the same reasoning which applies to other matters of local administration applies to this case of rabbits. The members of County Councils would be much more likely to administer local Acts, so to speak, effectively than the Government would.

175. Can you suggest any way to abate the nuisance on Crown lands or reserves?—Yes; I think under any amended Act the Government should assist by placing the means of poisoning at the disposal of County Councils or whoever might administer the Act, and should assist in the introduction of natural enemies, which would be the ultimate cure.

176. How would you suggest the nuisance on Native lands should be dealt with?—I would let Native lands bear their fair share of the charge, the Government charging it against the proceeds of the land when sold, as provided for by Major Atkinson in the new scheme of local government. In most cases Native land is occupied, except it is covered with bush, and the occupiers are liable in the same way as freeholders. That is sufficient for rabbit-pest purposes.

177. Have your Board of Trustees already succeeded in bringing the Natives to book, and obtaining a conviction?—Yes; there was one case in our district where a Native was fined £2, and, refusing to pay, was sent to prison.

178. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Was that land under Crown grant?—He was simply the occupier with other Natives.

179. *The Chairman.*] As Chairman of Trustees, should you think it your duty in all cases to enforce the penalty against Natives?—Yes. Where Natives are the beneficial occupiers, it is to their interest to enforce the Act, apart from the public interest altogether.

180. How has the carrying capacity of the land been affected by the rabbits?—That is a very wide question. I know properties in the district the carrying capacity of which has been reduced 70 per