

1881.  
NEW ZEALAND.

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# RABBIT NUISANCE COMMITTEE

(REPORT OF THE), TOGETHER WITH THE MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS, EVIDENCE,  
AND CORRESPONDENCE.

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*Report brought up 22nd July, 1881, and ordered to be printed.*

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## ORDERS OF REFERENCE.

*Extract from the Journals of the Legislative Council.*

THURSDAY, THE 23RD DAY OF JUNE, 1881.

*Ordered*, "That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into all circumstances connected with the increase of the rabbit nuisance, and to consider and report on any measures that may be deemed advisable to eradicate the pest; with power to confer with any similar committee appointed by the House of Representatives; with power to call for persons and papers; three to be a quorum, and to report within thirty days. The Committee to consist of Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Waterhouse, Hon. Captain Fraser, Hon. Mr. Martin, and the mover."—(*Hon. Mr. Holmes.*)

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FRIDAY, THE 24TH DAY OF JUNE, 1881.

*Ordered*, "That the name of the Hon. Mr. Nurse be added to the Rabbit Nuisance Committee."—(*Hon. Mr. Holmes.*)

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*Extract from the Journals of the House of Representatives.*

WEDNESDAY, THE 29TH DAY OF JUNE, 1881.

*Ordered*, "That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into all circumstances connected with the increase of the rabbit nuisance, and to consider and report on any measure that may be deemed advisable to eradicate the pest; to confer with any Committee appointed by the Legislative Council; with power to call for persons and papers; three to be the quorum, and to report within thirty days. The Committee to consist of Mr. Bain, Mr. Bastings, Mr. Collins, Mr. De Lautour, Mr. H. Hirst, Captain Kenny, Mr. Pyke, Mr. Thomson, Captain Russell, and the mover."—(*Mr. Beetham.*)

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WEDNESDAY, THE 13TH DAY OF JULY, 1881.

*Ordered*, "That the name of Mr. H. Hirst be discharged from the Rabbit Nuisance Committee, and the name of Mr. Shanks be added thereto."—(*Mr. Beetham.*)

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## REPORT.

Your Committee has conferred with a Committee of the other branch of the Legislature appointed for a similar purpose; and, acting as a joint Committee with it, has taken the evidence of a number of individuals, and obtained, by circular, an expression of opinion from a large number of others, part of which is appended, and has also agreed with the aforesaid Committee on the following report:—

Your Committee having, in concert with a Committee of the other branch of the Legislature, obtained a great amount of information on the subject of the rabbit nuisance, from many persons and from various parts of the colony, has agreed that a measure calculated to deal more effectively with the nuisance is urgently required, and therefore recommends that a Bill be introduced in this session to deal with the question, which shall provide that its administration shall be conducted by officers of the Government on a principle similar to that by which the provisions of "The Sheep Act, 1878," are enforced, and that all unoccupied Crown land, also native or reserved land, as well as private land, should bear their proportionate share of the cost of destroying rabbits and expenses of administering the Act; and that provision should be made therein for the protection of the natural enemies of the rabbit at present in the colony.

The Committee desires to impress upon the Legislature its conviction that immediate and energetic action is essential in order to arrest the further extension of, and to suppress, this pest; otherwise the result will be ruinous.

## MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS.

FRIDAY, 8TH JULY, 1881.

The Joint Committee met at 10 o'clock a.m.

*Present*: Legislative Council—Hon. Captain Fraser, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson, Hon. Mr. Martin, Hon. Mr. Nurse, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Peter. House of Representatives—Mr. Bain, Mr. Bastings, Mr. Beetham, Mr. Collins, Mr. De Lautour, Mr. Hirst, Captain Kenny, Mr. Pyke, Captain Russell, Mr. Thomson.

Orders of reference read.

On the motion of Mr Beetham, the Hon. Mr. Holmes took the chair.

Mr. Fraser and Mr. Rees attended the Committee.

Mr. Fraser, Earnsclough, Otago, examined (*See Appendix A*). He then received the thanks of the Committee, and withdrew.

Mr. W. G. Rees, of Galloway Station, Otago, examined (*See Appendix B*). He was then thanked, and withdrew.

The Committee deliberated. *Resolved*, That the Chairman is requested to telegraph to the Chairmen of the various Boards of Trustees for suggestions as to amendments in "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1880;" also that Mr. Gooch, Mr. Buchanan, Mr. J. Martin, jun., and Mr. Bullen, of Kaikoura, be requested to attend the next sitting of the Committee.

The Clerk was instructed to procure a return of the Government runs abandoned in consequence of the ravages of the rabbit pest.

The Committee then adjourned until Tuesday next, at 10.30 a.m.

TUESDAY, 12TH JULY, 1881.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

*Present*: Legislative Council—Hon. Captain Fraser, Hon. G. R. Johnson, Hon. Mr. Martin, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Nurse, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Waterhouse. House of Representatives—Mr. Bain, Mr. Bastings, Mr. Beetham, Mr. Collins.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed.

On motion of Hon. Mr. Waterhouse, Mr. Beetham took the chair.

*Resolved*, That the printed list of questions be sent to the following gentlemen, with a request that they will offer any suggestions that occur to them with reference to the proposed amendment of the Rabbit Nuisance Act: C. R. Keene, Esq., Kaikoura; Mr. Shannon, Tapanui Plain; Mr. Kelly, Tapanui Plain; Burton Boyes, Esq., Carterton; R. Cuthbertson, Esq., Queenstown; J. Ellis, Esq., Merriville, Waiau; J. Stuckley, Esq., Rangitumau; A. D. Bell, Esq., Shag Valley; E. G. Price, Esq., Riverton; R. S. Hawkins, Esq., Bowlands, Masterton; C. Bastian, Esq., Woodstock, Dacre, Southland; W. S. Stevens, Esq., Gummie's Bush, Riverton, Southland; the various Sheep Inspectors.

*Resolved*, That J. J. Hankinson Esq., Union Bank of Australia, be requested to attend the Committee. The Hon. Captain Fraser dissenting. (Telegram sent 12th July, 1881.)

The Chairman informed the Committee that Mr. Gooch, Mr. Buchanan, Mr. J. Martin, jun., and Mr. Bullen had been requested to attend the Committee; also that a circular telegram had been sent to the Chairmen of the various Boards of Rabbit Trustees, in these terms: "Forward suggestions as to proposed amendments in 'The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1880,' without delay;" and that Mr. McCulloch, Invercargill, had been telegraphed as follows: "State defect in Act which prevented you from granting verdict in favour of Rabbit Trustees some time ago." Mr. McCulloch replied: "Section 18. 'Efficient steps' too vague. Two cases in November last: Spencer dismissed owing to defective information. Lawrence showed he had made reasonable efforts by dogs, poison, &c., and bounded by large blocks of unoccupied lands and bush reserves."

*Resolved*, That the Clerk ascertains if Sheep Inspectors have reported under the Act, also that he procures from the Customs Department a return of rabbitskins exported during the last three years, up to the latest date. (Letters sent, 12th July, 1881.)

On motion of Hon. Mr. Menzies, *Resolved*, That the list of printed questions be reconsidered and reprinted, before sent to the above-named gentlemen.

The Committee then adjourned until Thursday next, at 10.30 a.m.

THURSDAY, 14TH JULY, 1881.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

*Present*: Legislative Council—Hon. Captain Fraser, Hon. G. R. Johnson, Hon. Mr. Martin, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Nurse, Hon. Mr. Peter, Hon. Mr. Waterhouse. House of Representatives—Mr. Bastings, Mr. Beetham, Mr. Collins, Mr. Thomson.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed.

Mr. Jackson, of Stonestead, Featherston, examined (*See Appendix C*). He was then thanked, and withdrew.

Mr. Buchanan, of Tupurupuru, Carterton, examined (*See Appendix D*). He having received the thanks of the Committee, withdrew.

The Committee deliberated.

The Committee then adjourned until Tuesday next, at 10.30 a.m.

TUESDAY, 19TH JULY, 1881.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

*Present:* Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Martin, Hon. Mr. Nurse, Hon. Mr. Peter. House of Representatives—Mr. Bastings, Mr. Beetham, Mr. Collins, Mr. De Lautour, Captain Russell, Mr. Thompson.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed.

Order of reference of the House of Representatives read.

On motion of Mr. Beetham, Hon. Mr. Holmes took the chair.

Mr. J. Ward, Wairau, being in attendance, was examined (*See Appendix E*). He then received the thanks of the Committee, and withdrew.

*Resolved*, That Mr. Hankinson be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee.

The following correspondence was read relative to the proposed amendment of the Act: Telegrams from W. Quin, Tapanui; A. Baldey, Chairman, County Council, Southland. Letters from Thomas Mackay, Te Nui; R. Cuthbertson, Southland (*Appendix No. 1*); D. Sutherland, Oamaru; J. H. Perkins, Matura; F. G. Moore, Masterton; R. S. Hawkins, Bowlands, Wairarapa; A. Baldey, Chairman, County Council, Southland; A. McHutcheson, Castlepoint; C. Pharazyn, Longwood.

Letters were also read from T. Mackay, Te Nui, relative to wire-netting for Crown lands; G. Tolhurst, Wellington, introduction of foxes (*Appendix No. 5*); W. Fletcher, Kaikoura, stating Mr. Bullen too ill to attend Committee; Secretary of Customs, export of rabbitskins for past three years (*Appendix No. 10*); and James Gall, of Dunedin, destruction of rabbits on Crown lands (*Appendix No. 6*); A. Douglass, Inspector, West Oreti Rabbit District (*Appendix No. 4*); D. S. Laulor, Invercargill (*Appendix No. 3*); G. F. Bullen, Kaikoura (*Appendix No. 2*).

*Resolved*, That the Chairman and Mr. Beetham are requested to select such portions of the correspondence for printing as they think desirable.

*Resolved*, That the evidence now taken, and the letter from Mr. Cuthbertson, be printed.

The Committee then adjourned till Thursday, 21st instant, at 10.30. a.m.

THURSDAY, 21ST JULY, 1881.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

*Present:* Legislative Council—Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. Martin, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Nurse. House of Representatives—Mr. Bain, Mr. Bastings, Mr. Beetham, Mr. De Lautour.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed.

Mr. Thomas Hankinson, of Te Anau, Otago, being in attendance, was examined (*See Appendix F*). He then received the thanks of the Committee, and withdrew.

The following correspondence was read: (1.) From the Under-Secretary for Crown Lands, forwarding list of runs abandoned in consequence of the ravages of the pest (*Appendix No. 11*). *Ordered*, That the Under-Secretary for Crown Lands be requested to supplement the return by stating what amount of rent per annum was obtained by the Government previous to the abandonment of the runs, or to the date of their being re-let. (2.) From Burton Boyes, Taratahi, replying to the questions framed by the Committee. (3.) From F. F. C. Huddleston, Secretary to Lake Rabbit Board, Queenstown, forwarding copy of letter received by C. C. Boyes, Esq., Chairman of the Board, from one of the Trustees. (4.) From F. G. Moore, Secretary, Masterton Rabbit District Trustees, enclosing resolutions of the Trustees as to amendment in the Act (*Appendix No. 7*). (5.) From D. A. Cameron, Southland (*Appendix No. 8*).

On motion of Hon. Mr. Menzies, *Resolved*, That the Chairman be authorized to draw up a report embodying the opinion of this Committee, That, in order to insure uniformity and efficiency of action in securing the extermination of rabbits, it is expedient that the administration be conducted by officers of the Government, on a principle similar to that in which the Diseased Sheep Act is enforced; such report to be submitted to the consideration of the Committee at the next meeting; and that the Hon. Mr. Menzies and Mr. Beetham do assist the Chairman in preparing the said report.

*Ordered*, That notice be given to each member of the Committee that this resolution would be considered at the next meeting.

Mr. Beetham gave notice that at the next meeting of the Committee he would move, "That, in any amending Act to be introduced during this session, provision should be made to include within the operations of the Act all private, Crown, and Native lands and reserves; also that provision should be made for the protection of the natural enemies of the rabbit."

*Ordered*, That the Government Printer be requested to state whether the evidence and other printing required by the Committee could be undertaken at once.

The Committee then adjourned until 11.30 a.m. to-morrow.

FRIDAY, 22ND JULY, 1881.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

*Present:* Legislative Council—Hon. Captain Fraser, Hon. Mr. Holmes, Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson, Hon. Mr. Martin, Hon. Mr. Menzies, Hon. Mr. Nurse, Hon. Mr. Peter. House of Representatives—Mr. Bain, Mr. Bastings, Mr. Beetham, Mr. Collins, Captain Kenny, Mr. Thomson.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed.

The Chairman informed the Committee that the Government Printer had undertaken to proceed with the printing without delay. The Chairman laid the draft of a report before the Committee, which was read by the Clerk, as follows:—

*Report of the Committee appointed to consider the Rabbit Nuisance.*

Your Committee has conferred with a Committee of the other branch of the Legislature appointed for a similar purpose, and, acting as a Joint Committee with it, has taken the evidence of a number of individuals, and obtained, by circular, an expression of opinion from a large number of others, all of which is appended, and has also agreed with the said Committee on the following report:—

Your Committee having, in concert with a Committee of the other branch of the Legislature, obtained a great amount of information on the subject of the rabbit nuisance from many persons, and from various parts of the colony, has agreed that a measure calculated to deal more effectually with the nuisance is urgently required, and therefore recommends that a Bill be introduced in this session to deal with the question, which shall provide that its administration shall be conducted by officers of the Government on a principle similar to that by which the provisions of "The Sheep Act, 1878," are enforced; and that all unoccupied Crown land, also Native or reserved land, as well as private land, should bear their proportionate share of the expenses of administering the Act.

The Committee desires to impress upon Parliament its conviction that immediate and energetic action is essential in order to arrest the further extension of, and to suppress, this pest; otherwise the result will be ruinous.

Mr. Bastings moved, and the question was proposed, That the report as read be adopted.

Mr. Beetham moved to amend the report by inserting the words, "the cost of destroying rabbits and," after "share of," in line 13.—Agreed to.

Another amendment proposed by Mr. Beetham to add the words, "and that provision should be made therein for the protection of the natural enemies of the rabbit," after "Act," in line 14.

The question being put, Mr. Thomson moved, That the words "at present in the colony" be added to the proposed amendment.—Agreed to.

And the question as amended being put, it was resolved in the affirmative.

*Resolved*, That the report as amended be agreed to, and brought up this day

On motion of Hon. Mr. Menzies, *Resolved*, That the Chairmen of the Committees appointed to consider the Rabbit Nuisance be requested to communicate with the Government to urge upon them the necessity of bringing in a Bill without delay; failing which, that the Chairman aforesaid prepare a Bill to embody the suggestions contained in the report.

The Committee then adjourned.

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

### APPENDIX A.

FRIDAY, 8TH JULY, 1881.

Mr. FRASER, of Earnsclough, Otago, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] You occupy pastoral country in the Middle Island?—Yes; and freehold as well.

2. About what extent?—70,000 acres of leasehold in Otago.

3. What experience have you had of the rabbit pest?—I have been endeavouring to destroy rabbits for the last seven or eight years, but I have had them on the property for a much longer time.

4. What means have you employed for abating the nuisance?—During the first few years I employed men with guns and dogs, but found that even thirty men did not effect any permanent reduction in the number of rabbits; since then I have used grain poisoned with phosphorus. I have also used bisulphate of carbon, as well as all other means known.

5. Which do you consider of all the most effectual?—Poison is the only one to have any effect at all.

6. Has your district been under the Rabbit Nuisance Act?—Yes, it has, for the last eighteen months or two years.

7. Does the Act work satisfactorily or otherwise?—It does not work satisfactorily

8. Can you suggest any improvement in the present Act?—If the present Act is to remain in force, and to be administered by elective bodies, certain amendments are absolutely necessary. The words "landowner," "owner," "occupier," or "resident agent," are found in the various clauses of the Act, sometimes singly, sometimes collectively in the penal clause, section 18, the word "occupier" alone is used. Hence, an owner of property, who was not the occupier, could not be summoned under this clause. These terms should be held to be synonymous. I know of an instance in the Vincent Rabbit District, of which I am Chairman, where the owner, not being the occupier of the run, our solicitor advised us that an action would not lie against said owner. The occupier was a man of straw, had no stock on the run, indeed had nothing but rabbits, so it was of no use proceeding against him. As the nuisance to the adjoining properties was becoming very serious, the Trustees at length resolved to put men on to clear off the rabbits, but this course is not nearly so satisfactory as compelling the owner or occupier to do the work himself. In short, unless it is desired to see the whole country overrun with rabbits, every owner or occupier of property on which rabbits are numerous should be treated as the owner of scabby sheep is treated, namely, compelled to abate the nuisance, or be severely fined. Under the Act, the onus of proof that efficient steps are not being taken to destroy rabbits is thrown on the body administering the Act. A little reflection will convince any one how difficult, and in many instances how impossible, it would be to prove a negative. The onus of proof should clearly lie with the owner or occupier of the property. The Trustees or other body administering the Act should have the power to delegate their authority to their Inspector, or to one or more of their own number. In large districts it may and does happen that the Trustees reside twenty or thirty miles apart, and it is too great a tax on their time to insist on their meeting so frequently as it is sometimes at present necessary that they should do. If they had the power I suggest, even were such delegation to hold good only from meeting to meeting, their Inspector could deal with cases as they arose, and thus enable the Act to be promptly and efficiently administered. This is of great importance. I have had practical experience of the inconvenience arising from the absence of this power.

9. Can their powers not be delegated to the Inspector?—No; there is no such person mentioned in the Act: merely a collector, and he has no power.

10. Is not power vested in the Sheep Inspector?—Not so long as the Trust exists.

11. Are there any other improvements you can think of so as to make the Act more workable?—No. The Act should be less cumbersome in the matter of elections, power should be given to delegate authority, and an alteration should be made in the interpretation of "landowner," "owner," or "occupier." If elective bodies are to continue to administer the Act it can be rendered more workable by the adoption of the foregoing suggestions. It is also somewhat cumbersome to be compelled to follow all the provisions of the regulation of the the Local Elections Act, and also of the Rating Act. No valuation roll is necessary, as the rate is on the acreage, not on the value of the property. Occasionally, through having to follow the elaborate machinery of these Acts, difficulties arise. Thus, in one rabbit district, the Trustees, having a slight confusion in their minds as to the terms "making a rate," and "striking a rate," found themselves unable eventually to levy the rate. They had incurred certain liabilities, and could not raise any money to defray them. Eventually the County Council, by resolution, abolished the Trust, but several months had elapsed during which time nothing was done to enforce the efficient destruction of rabbits within the district.

12. *Mr. Beetham.*] Do you consider the ratepayers' roll satisfactory?—I do not attach much importance to the limitation of the area.

13. Do you approve of clause 19?—I do not. The persons one would prefer to see acting as trustees are not likely, as a rule, to accept office if they are liable to be dismissed summarily at the will of a majority of the County Council of their district.

*The Chairman:* It might be as well, when we have an important subject before us, that honorable members should, before we pass on to another subject, ask any questions relevant to the one under consideration. From my personal knowledge of the working of the Act I am confident that the rabbit nuisance will never be properly dealt with till the Government assumes the administration of the Act. In my opinion no elective body is competent to deal effectively with this nuisance, as they would not enforce the penal clauses strictly and impartially. Only Inspectors entirely independent of local influence can be depended upon to do this. Scab would never have been stamped out if the Scab Act had been administered by elective bodies.

15. Have you not found in your experience that some of the Trustees have failed to administer the Act in their own case?—No, not within my experience. The Trustees in our district are the ones who have made the most strenuous efforts to destroy the rabbits. I have heard that what you state has occurred in other parts of the country, and I can quite conceive it would be very possible. This question of administration is one which does not affect only one or two districts but the whole colony, because, from my experience, the rabbits during the last few years have spread over an enormous area of country, and the evil is an increasing one. A few years ago the runholders on the Maniototo Plains rather laughed at the idea of rabbits becoming a nuisance; that is, four or five years ago. Now, however, they find the evil becoming nearly as great as with us. In the Waitaki District the people laughed at the rabbit question, and held the theory that rabbits would not thrive at all in their part of the country. I felt satisfied it was only a question of time, and now in some runs in the Waitaki they are nearly as bad as in our district. From Waitaki to Foveaux Strait the whole country is more or less infested with rabbits. In South Canterbury they are on the increase. Only the other day I was speaking to some persons in South Canterbury, who asked if anything was likely to be done to check the evil. They mentioned that rabbits were coming over from the Mackenzie Country to the vicinity of the freehold lands. They desired that something might be done to prevent their properties being destroyed.

16. But, in addition to private persons not taking any steps to clean their runs, has the Government taken any steps?—No, none whatever. It is greatly owing, in many parts of the country, to the enormous numbers of rabbits upon unoccupied Crown lands that all the efforts of large and small holders have been quite futile. The work is a never-ending one. I can instance my own case. During the last two or three years I got the rabbits pretty well down till the spring-time, when they came in again in thousands on to the run. Messrs. Cargill and Anderson, my neighbours, whose property is bounded by unoccupied Crown lands and commonage, began to poison last year, and did splendid work. They must have killed about 500,000 rabbits. Last spring their place was in as bad a state as if they had never put poison down. Another instance in regard to the Mount Benger freeholders. The Government sold a portion of this run under the pastoral deferred-payment system. There were four sections of from 1,000 to 1,200 acres each, and right across these is the Benger commonage. This place is swarming with rabbits, and nothing has ever been done to destroy them. The holders of the sections cleared their properties two or three times, but they have been nearly ruined, and are talking now of abandoning their holdings, as they feel it to be perfectly hopeless work.

17. Have many Government runs been abandoned during the last few years in consequence of rabbits?—A good many. I have heard of an area of land in Southland, which formerly used to carry a large number of sheep, having been let lately for a few pounds, evidently with a hope or desire of evading their responsibility. That is a mistaken policy, because they can never carry out their desire. To let lands to persons who will take them at a nominal figure will never effect the destruction of rabbits, as these persons will only kill the rabbits while it pays them to do so; and when the body administering the Act became too oppressive they would throw up the land, and the penal clause could not be enforced against them, as there would be nothing to recover against.

18. Did you observe some time ago about fifteen or twenty runs advertised to be let by auction?—Yes; but nobody offered for them. For one of the runs the Government used to get £240 a year. When the lease expired the holder refused to have anything more to do with it, and the Government brought down the rent to £100, then to £60, and the other day it was offered for £30, and nobody would take it.

19. Did you observe 34,000 acres offered for £10 a year, and 37,000 acres offered for £20 a year?—The last is, I believe, the one I referred to. I am certain that the failure of the Government to take efficient steps to destroy the rabbits on the unoccupied Crown lands I have referred to will result in a considerable diminution in the letting value of the adjoining pastoral country.

20. Supposing the Government do not clear these unoccupied lands, what would be the consequence to the Government and to the value of property?—A good deal of the country will be abandoned, and the area of unoccupied Crown lands will increase very considerably; it must do so. I am sure the only mode of dealing with the difficulty is by dealing with it the same as with scab, namely, by the Government administering the Act through their own Inspectors. It could be done by using the machinery of the Sheep Inspectors' Department. The funds could be obtained from the surplus arising from the sheep-tax, and any deficiency could be made up in some other manner. The way I should like to see it done would be by appointing the Sheep Inspectors inspectors under this Act. A number of other men would also have to be appointed as assistants, and they should have full power to administer the Act, and report every month to the Sheep Inspector of the district. This, however, is a matter of detail which is perhaps not worth going into at present. It would be absurd, however, to expect the present Sheep Department to overtake the duties required. If that is to be done, better to let the administration remain as at present. No one man would be competent to supervise effectively a large district, especially if it contained many small holdings, as the latter, from my experience, are much more troublesome to deal with than the large holdings.

21. *Mr. Thomson.*] You say the Act should be administered by the Government, and you say also that the Crown lands are very much affected by the rabbits. Do you not think the Inspector might have a delicacy sometimes in doing his duty, from the circumstance of the Government, owning so much Crown land, in enforcing the Act against the Government?—Not if you have the right person as Inspector. The Government would bear the responsibility eventually, because, if they brought pressure to bear upon an Inspector, they would have to account for it. I do not suppose the Government would attempt to evade their responsibility in that way, and, what is more, I think that, if the Government have to assume the responsibility of killing rabbits on unoccupied Crown lands, they would prefer to do so through their own officer rather than through an irresponsible elective body.

22. *Mr. Bastings.*] You are quite certain that the primary cause of the pest, up where you allude, is from the fact that on the Crown lands no means have been taken to destroy the rabbits?—In one portion of our district it is so.

23. Do you remember the year before last Mr. Kitchen had nearly a hundred men for four months, and thus cleared his land?—Yes, I am aware of it; they are worse than ever now. He has eighty-five men just now. Mr. Clark's agent, a short time ago, discussed with me the advisability of fencing with wire-netting the freehold from the leasehold land, and of abandoning the leasehold.

24. They did abandon one run?—Yes; that is the one they used to pay £240 a year for, and it has been since offered for £30. I would not take it as a gift.

25. You know Gall's run?—Yes. They suffered most terribly from the rabbits coming down upon them.

26. They employed an enormous number of hands, and found it impossible, from the vicinity of this breeding warren, to keep the land clear?—I know that. Every acre of unoccupied Crown land is nothing but a breeding warren. It would be quite easy for the Government Inspectors to employ gangs of men to clear the rabbits.

27. *The Chairman.*] Is that not the practice in Australia?—I understand it is in South Australia.

28. What does Mr. Clark do on his run now?—He has eighty-five men on. I have had twenty-five men on for seven months until recently. A neighbour has forty men, and another neighbour eighty or one hundred men, laying poison.

29. *Mr. De Lautour.*] Are not these commonages under the management of the County Councils now?—They are supposed to be: they derive revenue from them, but do not admit their entire responsibility. In our district the Vincent County Council did endeavour last year to destroy the rabbits in the Clyde and Cromwell commonages. This year, however, the rabbits are as numerous as ever, and the few men employed shooting are doing little or no good. The Mount Benger District is not in Vincent County, it is in Tuapeka County; but nothing has been done, nor is being done, to kill the rabbits, which are there in countless thousands.

30. *Mr. Bain.*] You say it is seven or eight years since the rabbits appeared?—No; since I began to kill them. The rabbits were introduced on my run by the miners resident thereon, who turned them out in the gullies in spite of my remonstrances. I had no power to stop them from doing it. The rabbits did not appear to make any great headway for some years. The first year I commenced to kill them systematically I got 5,000, next year 20,000, the next year 40,000, when I thought I had conquered them, but they came in on me from Southland; since which time I have killed from 80,000 to 160,000 a year. The 160,000 skins obtained last year would represent fully 400,000 rabbits destroyed, as great numbers die in their holes when poison is used.

31. Then how much will it cost you per annum now? What I want to ascertain is, whether the Government would be recouped if they undertook the work?—When the rabbits are very numerous the skins nearly clear expenses; as soon as they become scarcer then there is a loss. The rabbits must be very numerous before it would pay to kill them. At first it would cost the Government nothing; in fact, I believe, unless they want to let or sell the land, the mere cost of preventing the rabbits being a nuisance to other people would be next to nil.

32. When the bonus was paid upon skins it pretty well met the expense?—Yes; I consider that it did, taking the whole year round.

33. Then you think the system of bonuses acted well?—Yes.

34. *Mr. Collins.*] I should like to ask you if you have lost many sheep from eating poison. Is it necessary to move sheep off the part you poison?—Not at all; I do not know of half a dozen sheep having been lost by it on my run. I can quite conceive it possible to kill both sheep and cattle if the poison is laid in a reckless manner.

35. Then there would be some danger in allowing ignorant persons to lay poison?—Yes.

36. *Captain Russell.*] Has the rabbit pest been affected by the fact that the leases run out shortly?—Not at all. We are obliged to kill the rabbits in order to keep our sheep. Rabbits and sheep cannot live together.

37. You do not think a renewal of the leases would increase activity, then?—Yes; money would then be expended in wire-netting, and other things which people are not justified in undertaking at present.

38. Then you think the subdivision of the country would not tend to diminish the danger?—The subdivision of a property by wire-netting would be a most effectual mode of destroying the rabbits therein, as each subdivision could be dealt with in detail; but the subdivision of the country into small holdings would not have the same immediate effect, owing to the difficulty of securing united and simultaneous action. Of course ultimately the result would be the same, if the Act is administered strictly.

39. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Do you think a renewal of the bonus would be any permanent benefit unless the Government lands were cleared of the rabbits?—No; I do not think so.

40. Just for the time being it assists people?—It means a higher price for skins; but, as far as helping to diminish the number, unless it was an inducement to people to occupy Crown lands, it would not be effective.

41. *Captain Russell.*] It should be compulsory to clear the land?—Yes; but the Government must accept their responsibility as well as other owners of property, otherwise they will very soon be still larger owners of property.

42. *The Chairman.*] What, in your opinion, would be the effect of introducing natural enemies?—I think a most excellent effect. I understand that ferrets do very well in most parts of New Zealand, but they must be turned out regularly in large numbers to be of any service.

43. Should an effort be made to introduce the weasel into the colony?—I think so; if you can do it.

44. Have you ever seen the native fox of India?—No. You must be careful not to introduce enemies to stock as well as enemies to rabbits.

45. Are there any other natural enemies that you can suggest?—I do not know of any. I feel satisfied that the ferret will do the work, and I think it would be a good thing for the Government to bring a number of ferrets out from England: they are very scarce here.

46. *Hon. Captain Fraser.*] Are you aware that the hawk destroys young rabbits?—I suppose it does.

47. Are you aware that the Acclimatisation Society offers a reward for the head of every hawk brought in?—I believe it is the case, but I am not sure. I have heard something about it.

48. *Mr. Thomson.*] Do you think it desirable to introduce ferrets and weasels? Would not poison be sufficient?—I am afraid not. You should turn out lots of ferrets. There are tracts of country where it would hardly pay to poison.

49. I think it is a very important point whether we should introduce natural enemies; they might become a nuisance?—I think they would be easier to get rid of than rabbits.

50. *Mr. Bastings.*] You mean that, after you check the rabbits, it would be necessary to have natural enemies?—Yes; you reduce the rabbits down to a certain point, and then put in ferrets. You will very often come across rabbits at certain seasons that will not take the poison. Whenever a lot like that was come upon, if you turned out thirty or forty ferrets you would destroy the colony of rabbits.

51. *The Chairman.*] You have already referred to phosphorus. Do you think that the best remedy?—I think it is the only effectual remedy that has been adopted. You may occasionally have to use guns and dogs, but I do think, where you have stock, dogs are a greater nuisance than rabbits. There is a danger to be apprehended from rabbiters' dogs going wild. I have known as many as six or seven dogs killed at one time by shepherds: the rabbiters had abandoned them. A man can poison a piece of country where stock are running, without disturbing them at all, but it is impossible not to disturb them when dogs and guns are used.

52. *Mr. Bain.*] Do not the wild dogs attack rabbits?—I have no doubt they do, but they will never put them down; the dogs are much more likely to tackle sheep.

53. *The Chairman.*] From your knowledge, how many sheep have been lost by the use of poison?—I have heard of cases where sheep have been destroyed, but merely through people not knowing exactly how to lay it.

54. Can you give an estimate of the cost of poisoning per 1,000 acres?—Well, I cannot do so exactly, because it would depend upon the number of rabbits upon the 1,000 acres.

55. Have you tried ferrets?—Not by turning them out in the way that I have suggested.

56. On whom should the onus rest of proving that efficient steps have been taken to remedy the evil?—On the owner of the property, or the occupier.

57. Do you think Inspectors should have power to enter upon private property and destroy rabbits, as indicated by clause 17 of the Act?—Yes, I do think so. As a rule this power will not require to be exercised on the large properties, but on the small properties where action to be of any effect must be united and simultaneous. There is little to be gained by fining small holders heavily, and it might happen that five or six men holding small properties might prefer men being put on by the Inspector, while one or two in their midst might object, and prevent this being done if the Inspector had not power to act.

58. *Mr. Beetham.*] From your knowledge, do you know that the right of the Inspector has been challenged in your district?—The Inspector has no power; the Trustees have the power. One person upon whose property poison is being laid has put an advertisement in the local paper threatening all sorts of penalties against us. This has not troubled us.

59. Have you power to enter?—I believe we can do so.

60. *Mr. De Lautour.*] You could not enter unless you had decided that the person neglected to clear his land; then, of course, clause 18 would come in. If he refused to do so, you could press for a penalty under clause 18?—We endeavoured to do so, but found that, as he was the owner, and not the occupier, we could not deal with the case. The clause says "occupier," and the occupier has neither sheep nor money. We were advised that it was no use to summon the owner, because he was not the occupier. It shows that you ought to be able to get at both owner and occupier. If we could have come upon the owner afterwards it would have been all right. The occupier had nothing on the land except rabbits.

61. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Does not clause 17 give power to enter upon limits less than forty acres?—Yes.

62. *Mr. Beetham.*] Have you heard of any successful attempt to resist entry?—I have heard of an occupier or owner in another district resisting an attempt to enter to destroy rabbits, and successfully resisting; but that I think was before the Act was amended.

63. Would you give this Committee a report of the case?—I think I can tell where it was.

64. *The Chairman.*] Would you recommend increasing the minimum penalty of £1 for failure or refusal to take steps?—I think in the first instance £1 would do; but, if a person was brought up two or three times for the same offence, the minimum penalty might be increased, because it would pay a man much better to pay £1 or £2 than to go on clearing the rabbits off.

65. Do think that repressive legislation would be best administered by the Government, by County Councils, or by Trustees?—By the Government, most unhesitatingly.

66. *Hon. Captain Fraser.*] Have you ever asked the Government to make a rebate upon shot and powder?—No; it is hardly worth while.

67. *The Chairman.*] Does not the rabbit nuisance diminish the number of sheep?—Yes, very considerably.

68. Does it not render them all in poor condition?—Yes; it destroys the value of the wool and character of the sheep.

69. *Hon. Captain Fraser.*] Are you aware that the mark "Rabbitry" is used in connection with wool in London, and destroys the value?—It may be so. Unless you have abundance of food for stock, you cannot have large sheep or good wool.

70. *The Chairman.*] Have you made any estimate as to the number of sheep in the colony now, compared with the number between 1876 and 1878, before the pest had extended so much?—No; I could not tell. I know in my own district of three runs whose aggregate carrying capacity was from 25,000 to 30,000 sheep more than at present.

71. *Mr. Beetham.*] Would that be 25 per. cent.?—Yes.

72. *Hon. Captain Fraser.*] Before the rabbits came in, what were the weights of fleeces?—They ran from 7 lb. to 8 lb.; now from 6 lb. to 6½ lb. is the average.

73. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Are facilities given for procuring phosphorus. It was, I believe, very expensive?—In the South it can now be procured at a more reasonable rate, because there are large importations.

74. I ask the question with a view to ascertain whether the Government could possibly assist in the matter. You do not think it necessary to make any special remark upon it?—I think it is a thing which may be left to private enterprise.

75. *Captain Russell.*] Do you think united and simultaneous action would almost immediately diminish the nuisance?—Yes; it would have a marvellous effect. I speak from my knowledge of what has been done on two or three runs near me. I am perfectly satisfied from what we have done that it only wants united and simultaneous action to get rid of the rabbits as a pest. You would never get rid of them altogether without natural enemies, but they would cease to cause the grievous losses which they at present do.

76. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Do you imagine that when the pest is reduced by phosphorus, and the grass has come up, they will not eat the grass instead of the poisoned wheat?—In some cases they will.

## APPENDIX B.

Mr. REES, of Galloway Station, Otago, examined.

77. *The Chairman.*] You have heard all these questions. I think you might just give your own experience with regard to the matter under consideration?—I have been seven years manager of the Galloway Station, and have had to deal with rabbits. I first commenced with dogs and guns, and have since followed it up with poison. The Act does not work satisfactorily in our district. With regard to the question, "Can you suggest any improvement in the present Act?" I have not given that attention to the subject to enable me to speak on it as Mr. Fraser has done.

78. What, in your opinion, would be the effect of introducing natural enemies?—Any natural enemy which would not interfere eventually with lambs should be introduced. I am afraid the polecat ferret might kill the lambs, whilst the white ferret would not survive the winter on the high grounds. The domestic cat gone wild kept the rabbits in check in Waitaki for many years, but now the rabbits there have increased by numbers coming from the Southland side. The weka will also kill young rabbits, but you cannot depend upon that. I do not think the hawk kills them. I do not think the native cat of Australia would survive here. I am now only speaking of the district of which I have knowledge.

79. Have you used phosphorus, and with what result?—The last eighteen months I have used it with the most efficacious result. All through the winter and up to early spring the rabbits seem to take to it. Even in the spring, by increasing the dose of oil of rhodium, they still continue to take it for a time. I principally use wheat. I found, after careful trial of the two grains, that wheat is the one they will take most readily. I always mix oil of rhodium with wheat. I do not take anybody's experience but my own. In laying down the poisoned grain we take a very little, and every three or four yards throw it down; but care must be taken not to leave it in heaps.

80. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Is wheat used because it swells more?—I do not think so. I have found wheat the best. I have had oats and wheat side by side. The wheat has sometimes been taken and the oats left. I never found the contrary to be the case.

81. *The Chairman.*] Tell the Committee the greatest number of rabbits you have killed in a year?—One hundred and eighty thousand last year. When I have had men with dogs and guns I have paid for small rabbits and nesters as well as large, and this has caused an outlay with no return. Otherwise rabbiters used constantly to let the small rabbits go.



82. From your knowledge, how many sheep have been lost by the use of poison?—I should not think two in a thousand; but I know for a fact, where long-woolled sheep have been accustomed to pick up grain on stubble land, many have been lost. I do not think merinoes will suffer if the grain is laid down properly.

83. *Mr. H. Hirst.*] Do you not think a great many rabbits are poisoned in their holes that you never see?—I have known twenty-five dead rabbits taken out of one hole. I believe for every dead rabbit found there are ten not found. We are more likely to see them in our country which is rocky, than where they can burrow deep.

84. *The Chairman.*] Can you give an estimate of the cost of poisoning per 1,000 acres?—That is a difficult thing to arrive at. It cost Mr. Campbell last year to keep the rabbits down on Galloway Station, 168,000 acres, £3,000, for a return of £1,500. There are 64,000 acres at Galloway on which you cannot put sheep in the winter-time.

85. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Is not winter a good time to poison?—You cannot get men to work among the snow; they will not do it. I might say, with regard to the Government trying to clear the land, that, in my opinion, it is a perfect impossibility to clear the high unoccupied Crown lands in this country; but I think the Government might keep the rabbits in check, and clear along the edges of the occupied lands.

86. How do they live in winter?—I believe they live among the snow-grass, with the snow right over it.

87. *The Chairman.*] Have you tried ferrets?—I have not.

88. On whom should the onus rest of proving that efficient steps have been taken to remedy the evil?—I quite agree with what Mr. Fraser stated—the owner or occupier.

89. Do you think Inspectors should have power to enter upon private property, and destroy rabbits, as indicated by clause 17 of the Act?—Decidedly; on any property whatever. They should go everywhere.

90. Would you recommend increasing the minimum penalty of £1 for failure or refusal to take steps?—I should certainly recommend an increase after the first summoning before the Bench.

91. Do you think that repressive legislation would be best administered by the Government, by County Councils, or trustees?—Decidedly by the Government. You cannot get men elected by local bodies to act in a fair and straightforward manner against those who may have the power to deprive them of their appointments.

92. What was the carrying capacity of the run you manage before the rabbits became a nuisance, and what is the present capacity?—When I took charge of the Galloway Station, seven years ago, the run was overstocked, and I reduced the number to 71,000, hoping, in a year or two, to again increase the stock to at least 76,000; but the number still remains the same, owing to the rabbits. I find no appreciable difference in the wool, except on the breeding portions of the run—the ewes cutting half a pound less per head than formerly, as I had to relax my efforts to keep down the rabbits during the spring and lambing season.

93. Is the condition of your sheep generally equal to what it was before the rabbits became a nuisance? Yes, nearly so; but it has been only secured at a great expense, in always attacking the rabbits.

94. Did Mr. Campbell abandon any runs?—I believe 250,000 acres in Southland.

95. That is to say, the land was not worth keeping?—It was not worth keeping.

96. *Mr. Hirst.*] Is it his intention to abandon the reserve at Burwood?—I do not know. The Burwood property used to carry 80,000 sheep; it now carries 24,000.

97. *The Chairman.*] Are there not a great many runs now in the condition of those abandoned by Mr. Campbell, which have been abandoned by other parties, and are unoccupied?—I believe so; but I have not been in the district where they are. The bulk of the back country in the Wakatipu District has been abandoned, or rendered nearly useless.

*The Chairman:* In confirmation of what has been said by these two witnesses, I may state that several runs were put up for sale in Otago two months ago, and some of them did not meet with a purchaser, even at a very low price. For example, 37,000 acres near Athol were offered for £20 per annum, and there was no purchaser; 34,000 acres in Waikawa were offered at £10 per annum, and found no purchaser. These runs are again advertised in the *Gazette* for sale in the same way and at the same prices. This shows the effect of rabbits on the value of Government runs.

#### APPENDIX C.

THURSDAY, 14TH JULY, 1881.

Mr. JACKSON, of Stonestead, Featherston, examined.

98. *The Chairman.*] What experience have you had of the rabbit pest?—About twelve years ago a neighbour turned out a quantity of rabbits, and in the course of six years they swarmed on my land. They were in great numbers, and destroyed everything. To show the Committee how numerous they were, I was afraid I should have actions for damages from persons travelling on the road getting injured by the burrows made by the rabbits.

99. What means have you employed for abating the nuisance?—I got as many dogs as possible, and in a few months they succeeded very well. I occasionally encouraged them by firing a shot at the rabbits. Now they are so well kept down that, with the exception of one settler's land, the neighbourhood is badly supplied with rabbits.

100. Have you used phosphorus?—No, I never used poison—only dogs; and therefore I know nothing about it.

101. You have not tried ferrets?—No; ferrets are very good if kept tame; but I would not turn them wild. When they become wild they are very dangerous.

102. As to the question what percentage does the return obtained from rabbitskins bear to the cost of keeping down the nuisance?—I think if steps are taken in time they can be prevented from becoming a nuisance.

103. What, in your opinion, would be the effect of introducing natural enemies; and what animals would you suggest?—That is a ticklish point, that of natural enemies. I think if those who talk of introducing natural enemies knew as much about weasels, and stoats, and polecats as I do, they would never think of introducing them. If the Committee told me I could have a dozen weasels or a hundred rabbits on my land, I would say turn out the rabbits. That will show the dread I have of them. Weasels and stoats would soon prove a nuisance. Ferrets might be useful for large burrows, where poison could not be very well introduced. I was told lately of a man who caught a rabbit and attached dynamite to it, and then put it in the burrow, which was blown to atoms; and now I hear he is going to take more dynamite for the same purpose.

104. You say weasels, and stoats, and ferrets would do a good deal of mischief? What is your reason for thinking so?—Because I have known them to do a deal of mischief in the old country.

105. *Hon. Captain Fraser.*] Do they kill lambs?—I have known and seen such instances. I have known stoats to suck young lambs. Turkeys, and geese, and fowls they would go to. They will destroy anything where they can get blood. I believe if a man was lying helpless in the road they would suck his blood.

106. *The Chairman.*] And to polecats and ferrets would you apply the same remarks?—No; I would use ferrets in a domestic way, but would never let them go loose.

107. There would be danger from ferrets, if wild?—No doubt about it. They have many of the propensities of the stoat. I remember, when young, putting my hand into a rabbits'-nest and pulling it out with a stoat hanging to my fingers' end. Those who have once handled a stoat never forget it. Their smell is so bad that rabbits will not go again in a hole a stoat has been in. I do not think polecats could be got very well. They are very scarce in England. I only saw two or three all the time I was there. You can get ferrets in any numbers; but I would never think of turning them out.

108. *Mr. Collins.* What do you think ferrets would do if turned out?—After the rabbits were done, they would kill anything they could get hold of. They would eat lambs, and kill geese, and turkeys, and game. They would kill all that destroy the insects, and then we should have a nuisance of grasshoppers and other insects, which would be quite as bad as the rabbits.

109. *Hon. Mr. Waterhouse.*] What is the size of your property?—3,000 acres, most of which is cleared. There is not much danger from rabbits in the solid bush. They are worst in blackthorns, because you cannot get the dogs in. Rabbits will not live in the real bush, because they will not eat the fern and those sort of things.

110. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] How about their being in the Seventy-Mile Bush?—They follow the road, and eat the grass on the road-side.

111. *The Chairman.*] Has your district been under the Rabbit Nuisance Act?—It was suggested to bring that Act into force in Wairarapa West County. I am a Councillor in that county, and I opposed it being in force in the riding I represent, and it is not in force there, but is in the rest of the county. I do not like the rating clause. I do not think it right that a man who kills his rabbits should pay for the killing of them for a man who does not.

112. Does the Act work satisfactorily?—I say no; because it is invariably found that the men who have most rabbits are Trustees, and do not like to touch one another. A man affected with any complaint does not like to fall out with any neighbour who has got the same disease. That is the case with the Trustees. With that, and with the rating, the Act is not working well. I consider it is not satisfactory.

113. What is your chief objection to the Act?—To the rating; and the Inspectors ought to be appointed by the county.

114. You consider that those who kill rabbits should not be rated to keep the rabbits off the ground of other people?—Exactly so. The rate does not encourage the killing of rabbits. It encourages a good many people not to kill them.

115. On whom should the onus rest of proving that efficient steps have been taken to remedy the evil? You know that the difficulty in the Scab Act was in proving whether a man had done his duty or not. Should the onus of proof rest with the Inspector that a man had not done his duty, or should the man have to prove that he had?—I would allow that to the Inspector. A man would never lay an information against himself. I should have Inspectors and not Trustees, and the Inspectors should be appointed by the county.

116. Do you think Inspectors should have power to enter on private property and destroy rabbits?—No doubt. If he had not power to enter he would not have power to lay an information. He should have power to go on the land and to kill rabbits, after proper notice, charging the cost to the owner; not to have a rating clause.

117. Would you recommend increasing the minimum penalty? Yes, to £20. The present law, with a minimum of £1, is of no use at all. The maximum should be double the minimum at least. People only laugh at the idea of being fined £1, and saving £20.

118. Do you think repressive legislation would be best administered by the Government, the County Councils, or the Trustees?—Under Inspectors appointed by the County Councils.

119. *Mr. Bastings.*] Do you not think County Councils would be open to the same charge as the Trustees—that members would not proceed against themselves?—I would leave proceedings to the Inspectors.

120. Yes; but the Inspectors would be under the control of the County Councils, and possibly the Council would pass a resolution not to enforce the Act?—I think the General Government should have the power to force them to.

121. *Mr. Collins.*] You would leave the ultimate power to the General Government?—Yes; but the counties should do all the work.

122. *The Chairman.*] You would have it done by the County Council in the first place, and, if that body did not carry out the Act, the General Government to step in?—Yes.

123. You think that clause 19 of the Act meets the case?—Yes, I think it does.

124. Can you suggest any means of abating the nuisance on Crown lands and reserves?—Well, the only plan that I can see is to have the land either occupied, or the Crown to destroy rabbits. The

Crown should be compelled to destroy, the same as freeholders, or it must allow people to occupy the land.

125. *Mr. Bastings.*] How about rating Crown lands?—I think that is a very serious thing to consider, the rating of Government land. We are the Government, and it would be only paying rates to destroy rabbits on our own land. It could be done, but I think it would be very bad policy if any other means could be devised.

126. You think the Crown has a liability in the matter?—No doubt, and the Natives.

127. *The Chairman.*] Should power be given to compel local bodies to put the Act in force?—Yes; if the counties do not put the Act in force the Government should.

128. *Mr. Bastings.*] You say, if the county does not enforce the Act, it should be possible to have a *mandamus* to compel them?—Yes.

129. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] Do you think it better that Government should put the Act in force where counties fail, or should the counties be compelled to enforce the law by the Supreme Court?—Either would do, I believe; but I do not know which would be best: the question is, which is cheapest. I think the Government could do it with the least expense, rather than the Supreme Court.

130. How has the carrying capacity of your district been affected by the rabbits?—I have not found myself much injured, because I abated the nuisance on my land. I think the capacity in other parts of the district had been seriously affected before any attempts were made to stop them. No doubt in some places the carrying capacity has been lessened one-half.

131. *The Chairman.*] Has the natural pasture been permanently injured by rabbits?—All my pasture is artificial, but I know in other places they have eaten the natural grass clean out, and even barked the blackthorn.

132. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] How many acres have you cleared?—I have only about 500 acres of bush, the rest is in artificial grasses. Some of it is able to carry four or five sheep to the acre.

133. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Is there much Native land in your district?—No, very little.

134. Can you suggest any way in which the Native land can be dealt with?—The Natives object to a rabbit rate, as they object to all rates. Natives would not clear their land of rabbits unless compelled by Act. Most of the good Native land is principally leased to white men, who, of course, are responsible for the rabbits on it.

135. Do the rabbits eat the English grass as well as the natural grass?—They prefer the English grass to the natural, but where they cannot get the English they eat into the roots of the native grasses, and, as native grasses do not seed so well as English grasses, the effect is more felt.

#### APPENDIX D.

Mr. W. C. BUCHANAN, of Tupurupuru, near Carterton, examined.

136. *The Chairman.*] What experience have you had of the rabbit pest?—I have had from seven to eight years' experience in the Wairarapa, of the pest, and am Chairman of a rabbit district.

137. What means have you employed for abating the pest?—Dogs, guns, and traps—the last to a very slight extent; and clearing—that has been the most effectual factor in my case, clearing off the cover to a large extent: it is not possible to clear all. Clearing a large percentage of the land, and the employment on the average of one good man, have been so far effectual in keeping down the pest, that the weekly average killing over 11,000 to 12,000 acres does not now exceed thirty to forty rabbits. At the same time I do not consider my land an average tract of country. I do not consider for a moment that one man would be enough for same acreage of some land.

138. What is the character of your country—clay?—A free limestone soil.

139. Not light sandy soil?—No.

140. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] How many rabbits were there when you commenced operations?—I took the thing in time. I attribute much of the success in keeping them down to beginning early, and giving it close attention.

141. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] What neighbours have you?—On one side there is unoccupied dense bush land. On a second side I have a boundary which, as far as rabbits are concerned, is no boundary at all for at least six months of the year. On the third side the boundary is to a considerable extent Native land. On the fourth side I am bounded by land, on which rabbits are never allowed to increase to any extent.

142. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] Do the Natives keep the rabbits off their land?—Only partially so. About four years ago I sent my man across the boundary with a good pack of dogs for a day's shooting to see what there was there. He killed over one hundred alongside the other boundary.

143. *The Chairman.*] Do you know anything of the use of phosphorus?—Nothing but what I have gathered from the statements of others. From what I have heard, poisoning, when properly conducted, in the winter months, is very successful. I have been on properties where poisoning has been very successful.

144. Do rabbits take the poison when feed is plentiful?—I can only give the experience of others, and the evidence on the point is very contradictory. In many cases there have been good results from poison when grass has been plentiful. In other cases the evidence is to the contrary.

145. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] What is the cause of the discrepancy?—I can only suggest that it is due to difference in the mixing of the poison, and in the ingredients, and the difference between wheat and oats. I think it possible that a difference in handling the poison might produce opposite effects. For instance, where it was mixed by people's hands the effect would possibly be different from when mixed with some implement—the rabbits might take it readily in the latter case. A gentleman will attend the Committee who will be able to give valuable information on the question of handling the poison.

146. *The Chairman.*] Have you tried ferrets?—The man I employ always carries a ferret; but I do not use them in any other way. I have no evidence on that point. I have heard that they have been successful with ferrets elsewhere.

147. Are many sheep lost by poisoning?—I have known of two or three instances. I do not think that a very serious consideration if the poison is laid down properly

148. Can you give any estimate of the cost of poisoning per 1,000 acres?—I think the Committee can easily get better information on that than I can give.

149. What percentage does the return of skins bear to the cost of keeping down the pest?—That, of course, would vary with different circumstances. Take my own case. The cost of the man and appliances is about £120 a year; and I could not reckon upon getting more than £10 for the skins. Where rabbits were very numerous, and poison was used, the yield from the skins would be greater than the cost of getting them. I can only give a general answer to that question. The practice largely differs. Where contract men are employed, in some cases they are supplied with poisoned grain, in other cases they are supplied with provisions. That would mean that the value of the skins is nearly, if not quite, equal to the cost of getting them.

150. The proportion in your case is £10 to £120?—Yes.

151. What do you think of introducing natural enemies; and which would you suggest?—I have paid very great attention to this, and am thoroughly satisfied this is the only solution of the difficulty. I was eight or nine months in England recently, and I left no stone unturned to get the best information I could on this point. The general evidence of all most competent to speak was, that where game was left to take care of itself there would be no trouble from rabbits. I am convinced that weasels and stoats would settle the difficulty, without any interference.

152. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] What would they live on when the rabbits were all dead?—Mice, rats, frogs, and numerous other things. They have sparrows and many small birds at Home. With regard to the evidence of Mr. Jackson before the Committee, I may say I lived in what was almost purely a sheep district at Home, until I came to the colony, and I never heard of any authenticated case of injury to lambs from weasels and stoats. It seems to me an utter absurdity to think any serious damage could come from these things. These stories about lambs being seized by weasels, stoats, and ferrets are like the story of the three black crows. I am thoroughly convinced there need be no fear from that cause.

153. *The Chairman.*] From your personal knowledge, you do not know of any case at Home?—No; I could never trace an authentic case where these animals proved destructive to lambs.

154. You are alluding to stoats and weasels?—Yes.

155. And as to ferrets and polecats?—I have seen very few polecats. By the time I left England they had been pretty well exterminated by the gamekeepers as a nuisance to game. The last specimen I saw was one killed on a sheep-farm by a farmer merely for fun, not that it was of any harm.

156. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] Do you not think the enormous rate of increase out here might have a different effect than in England with these animals?—I do not think that would be a difficulty. These animals breed once a year at Home; rabbits breed a number of times a year, and their increase is simply limited only by the feeding-power: the same with hares. At Home or here, where free from natural enemies, the rabbits' increase is only limited by feed and climate.

157. But would these animals, after the rabbits were gone, destroy the game and fowls of all kinds which keep down the insects, and so cause an increase of insects that would be very destructive?—I do not think that. At Home, though I lived where there were many weasels, I do not remember a case of losing a single fowl. We never saw the weasels about the homestead, except when there was a sudden fall of snow or a prolonged hard frost, and then they would be seen about the stackyards and the stone fences, looking for rats and mice. They would suck eggs, certainly, and that would be the principal damage if they got into the fowlhouses, but that would be very easily guarded against.

158. *Hon. Mr. G. R. Johnson.*] Might not the reason of lambs not being attacked by them at Home be, that there the sheep are brought into enclosures to lamb?—That was never done in my part of the country any more than here. It was mostly hilly country, and sheep were as little attended to at lambing as here: they were left in the open.

159. Do you think foxes would prove a nuisance?—Where there were foxes at Home the farmers certainly thought they were a nuisance. I may point out a rather extraordinary fact in connection with foxes. When we had foxes in my own district at Home we had no rabbits. In that part of the country there were no rabbits until the year 1853. Within half a dozen years they had spread all over the place, and every winter they had to be tackled the same way as here, where game was preserved. Where game was not preserved, rabbits never gave any trouble whatever, and that was upon farms that produce the best sheep in the district. So strongly do I feel on this question of the natural enemies, that when I was in England I trapped five weasels, but it being the wrong season I could do nothing with them. I have a subscription list here that we have started in our district for the introduction of natural enemies, and, though it has not yet been sent round to any extent, we have already £250: and we expect the Government to aid us in this when we show ourselves ready to help ourselves. We have no doubt it is perfectly feasible if gone about in the right way.

160. Has your district been under the Rabbit Nuisance Act? Does it work satisfactorily?—The district is under the Act, and it works very unsatisfactorily. In reply to a telegram from this Committee, at the last meeting of the Trustees we went as fully into the question as time would permit in the way of suggesting amendments. We drew up some, which should have been here by now. (See Appendix No. 7.)

161. *The Chairman.*] They will be here no doubt, and they will express your own views?—Yes.

162. On whom do you think the onus should rest of proving that efficient remedial means have been taken?—The great difficulty we have had to contend with is as to the different meanings of the word "efficient." That has been the stumbling-block all along. The Trustees have felt thoroughly satisfied that the steps taken have not been sufficient, but the evidence has been so conflicting that the landowner, in almost every case, has got the benefit of the doubt. The consequence has been that hitherto £5 has been the maximum fine in our district. I feel quite satisfied that some such clause is required in an amended Act as is contained in the Sheep Act, so that the Inspector's opinion—his dictum, as it were—as to whether or not sufficient steps have been taken in sufficient time to clean the sheep, is taken as final. The Court cannot get behind that, and the fine is there.

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

cent. at least. The reduction would vary of course according to the circumstances of each case, and the means taken for suppression. It must not be taken that, because the carrying capacity has been reduced from two sheep to one, the reduction is 50 per cent. That is not the percentage at all, because the return to the owner from the 50 per cent. left may be very different from the half of the former return.

181. How far has the capacity to carry increased, where rabbits have ceased to be a nuisance?—The carrying capacity has increased, as the rabbits lessened, in the same proportion as the capacity decreased as the rabbits first became numerous.

182. Has the natural pasture been permanently injured by rabbits?—I am able to give a very pertinent answer to that question. About four years ago I happened to pass over a part of the district that was very well naturally grassed, and able to carry two sheep to the acre if fenced. Ten days ago I passed over the same ground, and literally there was not a vestige left of anything in the shape of vegetation except a little moss. There was literally nothing of the tussock, and even the cabbage trees had been gnawed right through.

183. Then the natural pasture there was permanently injured?—It was wholly destroyed. There was nothing left.

184. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] Do you know of any country where the vegetation was destroyed and sprung up again when the rabbits were thinned?—I knew some land up the Ruamahunga that had a good deal of longish grass on it when I first knew it, but rabbits brought it almost to the same state as the land I have just spoken of. About two years ago the rabbits were so much reduced as to give the grass a chance. I passed over the ground the other day, and the grass was not by any means so good as formerly.

185. In this case, after two years elapsing since the rabbits were destroyed, the pasture is not nearly so good as it was before the rabbits came?—Decidedly not.

## APPENDIX E.

TUESDAY, 19TH JULY, 1881.

Mr. JOSEPH WARD (of the Wairau, near Blenheim), examined.

186. *The Chairman.*] What experience have you had of the rabbit pest?—I saw them first turned out at Kaikoura, and since then I have known as many as 90,000 killed in a single season on two runs, and some adjoining land that was not runs. On one run known to Mr. Collins, they completely destroyed everything. That run used to keep 10,000 or 12,000 sheep, but I heard only the other day they had all been boiled down—all but two. Now the rabbits there have been headed by poisoning, and turning out ferrets. Some years ago I knew that ferrets would be the best if they could be obtained, and a lot of us sent Home to England and got 600 sent, but only three ferrets and two weasels were landed, so it was a rather expensive affair. There are a great many there now.

187. You have not the ordinary wild rabbit there, as in Southland?—No, the silver grey.

188. That has a more valuable skin altogether?—Yes. I said at the time they were turned out I thought it would be a very foolish thing, but Mr. Keene said they would do no harm, and would only give a little sport.

189. You have not the ordinary wild rabbit there yet?—No, I think not; chiefly the silver grey. A run in which I am interested, in the Wairau, thousands upon thousands were killed on it. On the Vernon Run, 4,000 or 5,000 acres of the best land was swept clean like a floor by them. The first season, the poison was used without any ill-effects, but the next season—that was last season—1,600 sheep were poisoned. Sheep take very readily to it after they once begin. Sheep must be in inclosures while poison is laid where rabbits are most numerous. This season is the best we have had. We poisoned with phosphorus and oil of rhodium. We mixed the poison with wheat at first, but most of the sheep were killed with poisoned oats. I believe sheep would take the wheat. When once they get to know it they take up every grain.

190. Have you used any other means except poison?—Before we began to poison we trapped and shot them, and turned out what ferrets we could get, but we made no impression on them until we got the poison. Now, since the ferrets have got numerous, the rabbits do not trouble us. My own impression is that poison is the best remedy, and, when poison has reduced their numbers very much, ferrets, weasels, or stoats should be had to keep them down.

191. Would you recommend the introduction of weasels?—I would. As far as my knowledge goes, they are most active, destructive little animals.

192. Any other natural enemy?—The stoat.

193. That is a stronger variety of the weasel?—My impression is that the stoat is the smaller of the two. I should have said that on an adjoining run 2,000 sheep were lost by poison. It requires the greatest care, or you may have great losses.

194. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] How did you lay the poisoned grain?—In little heaps. I do not think the manner of laying it makes much difference; because in a stubble-field sheep will pick up every odd grain. They were merino sheep killed on both runs.

195. *The Chairman.*] Then these two cases of poisoning sheep have come under your own notice?—Yes. I have known of other cases also, where sheep have been lost. At Kaikoura some were poisoned.

196. Can you give any estimate of the cost of poisoning, say, the 1,000 acres?—No. It varies in every instance. We gave the poison and supplied the men with food, and the men had the skins. We calculated the cost to us was about 1d. per rabbit. Mr. Carter was giving at the rate of 1s. a rabbit.

197. In Southland, we have the ordinary wild rabbit, and you have the silver-grey; so that the cost to you would be less, the skin of that species being more valuable?—Yes; the skin is more valuable.

198. What percentage does the return from the skins bear to the cost of keeping down the nuisance?—I cannot answer that. I know cases in which the killing of the rabbits may be said to have paid itself. We calculate we lose 1d. per rabbit. The rabbits are mixed. Some are perfect silver-grey, and others are mixed. The skins fetch 3s. a dozen, full grown. The cost varies, so that I cannot say what it would be. I think to poison them down, and then to keep them down with natural enemies, is the best course. I have read that in a part of Spain they were infested with rabbits, and that they could not get rid of them until they imported the African ferret. The African ferret, I think, is the white ferret with red eyes.

199. Has your district been under the Rabbit Nuisance Act?—No. We considered we were better as we are.

200. You thought private combination was best?—Yes. I therefore know nothing about the working of the Act, and cannot suggest any improvements in it.

201. On whom do you think the onus should rest of proving that efficient steps have been taken to remedy the evil?—Well, when we found what would be an efficient course, we were bound to take it, or have nothing left. Mr. Keene's run was quite cleared out.

202. Do you think Inspectors should have power to enter on private property, and destroy rabbits?—I think not. I can hardly believe an owner would not himself attend to it. I have a great objection to Inspectors going on the land. I cannot imagine a case where an owner would not himself do all he could to clear them.

203. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] But many of them do not?—Well, I cannot give any evidence on that. I should say that, if a man will not do it, it would be necessary for an Inspector to see to it; the same as we have the policeman.

204. *The Chairman.*] Would you increase the minimum penalty of £1 for failure to take steps to remedy the evil?—I cannot say anything about that.

205. Do you think repressive legislation would be best administered by Government, County Councils, or Trustees?—I should say by Trustees. We have no County Council, no machinery at all in connection with the Act.

206. Can you suggest any way of abating the nuisance on Crown land or reserves?—I think Government ought certainly to take the same steps as private owners to poison, and import ferrets and weasels, otherwise it would be most unfair to the private owners.

207. You think that Crown lands should in this respect be just the same as private property?—I think so; otherwise Crown lands would be merely rabbit preserves. We found it necessary to do all we could in the summer. We found, by killing them only in the winter, that we enabled them to breed all the quicker.

208. How would you deal with Native lands?—On that I cannot speak at all.

209. Should power be given to compel governing bodies to put the Act in force, by *mandamus* or otherwise?—That I really do not know. I should never dream of such a thing being necessary. It is like trying to keep out the small-pox.

210. You think the Act is somewhat similar to the Scab Act, and should be administered in the same way?—I do not know. I think, if you got Trustees to carry it out, there would be no difficulty. I am rather opposed to the present Scab Act, and to the way it is worked by the Inspectors.

211. How has the carrying capacity of your district been affected by the Act?—In our district I think rabbits lessened the carrying capacity by about 2,000 sheep in 20,000—that is, 10 per cent. Now, since they have been poisoned, there is very little difference.

212. Did the rabbits, where plentiful, affect the condition of the sheep left on the runs?—Yes; that was the cause of the greatest loss. It greatly affected the condition of the sheep. There were very few fat sheep while the rabbits were numerous.

213. Has the natural pasture been permanently injured by rabbits? We have not found the natural pasture to be permanently injured. Where the land was made very bare by the rabbits this season there has been plenty of feed.

214. *Captain Russell.*] Do you not think rabbits can be destroyed without introducing vermin?—I doubt very much if they could be kept down without natural enemies. I know of no other means.

215. But you say that poison will destroy them to a certain extent?—But during the summer time, when the feed is plentiful, they will not take the poison, and so they breed up again. At Kaikoura they breed up to the same number again. I have heard they will take the poison in summer; but they certainly will not to the same extent. You may poison them, and think you have cleared them, but you will find them to breed up again.

216. *The Chairman.*] There have been no ill-effects from the introduction of weasels in your district?—Only two have been introduced at present. The farmers adjoining do not like the ferrets, which go to the hen-roosts. Ferrets have become numerous, and they are now being sold.

217. There is no game in the Kaikoura District?—No.

218. *Hon. Mr. Nurse.*] You say you think the working of the Act should be left to Trustees?—That is my impression.

219. Are there any Crown lands in your district?—Yes.

220. Could Trustees work that?—I suppose so. There is not a great quantity of Crown land there.

221. Do you not find that land to be a preserve for the rabbits?—Of course. That land should be treated just the same as private lands, otherwise the rabbits will be constantly breeding.

222. Do you not think, then, that the suppression would be better in the hands of the Government?—I do not think so myself. I am inclined, as a rule, to local management. Government does not know these things. All the information has to be supplied to them by others.



## APPENDIX F

THURSDAY, 21ST JULY, 1881.

Mr. THOMAS FRANCIS HANKINSON (Hankinson Brothers, Te Anau Run, Otago), examined.

223. *The Chairman.*] What experience have you had of the pest?—About four years. Our run has been infested about four years.

224. What means have you employed for abating the nuisance?—Men, dogs, and guns, and finally phosphorized oats.

225. Which did you find most effectual?—The phosphorized oats.

226. Do the rabbits take the poison when feed is plentiful?—No; they take it about seven months of the year. In the hot months poison is not so successful.

227. Have you tried ferrets?—No.

228. From your own knowledge, how many sheep have been lost by poison? How many have you lost?—I do not think we have lost any by the use of poison. Our sheep are merinos, and I do not think merinos will take it.

229. Can you give any estimate of the cost of poisoning per 1,000 acres?—I have tried to get at it as near as I can. I think about 30s. This is only approximate, and would most likely be more. I have only estimated one day's work for two men at 8s. each, and it would likely take two days.

230. What percentage does the return from skins bear to the cost of keeping down the nuisance?

While the rabbits are plentiful it balances, but as soon as they get scarce it is expensive.

231. What do you think would be the effect of natural enemies being introduced, and which would you suggest?—Stoats and such animals might do if brought from cold countries, say Scotland. But they would perish in our mountainous country in winter unless they came from cold countries. I very much doubt if they would be successful. They might be. I know very little about stoats, ferrets, and weasels.

232. *Mr. Beetham.*] But have you had any experience? Do you know of any loss of ferrets or anything of that kind?—I have been on stations where ferrets have been used. Whether they were carelessly treated or not I do know, but they certainly died in winter.

233. *Mr. De Lantour.*] Were they domesticated?—Yes. I know nothing about their being turned out wild, none at all.

234. Has your district been under the Rabbit Act?—Yes.

235. Can you suggest any improvement in the Act?—I think the working of it should be put entirely in the hands of the General Government.

236. Have the Trustees in all cases performed their work satisfactorily?—Well, pretty well. I can only speak of own experience. They have told us what to do, and we have striven to follow it out.

237. On whom should the onus of proving efficient steps at remedying have been taken lie?—On the owners or occupiers.

238. But, provided the owner does not put down the pest himself, should the Inspector have the power to enter on private property and destroy rabbits?—If he refuses to do it himself, after due notice given, he must bear the consequences, certainly.

239. Would you increase the penalty for failure or refusal to take steps?—Yes, I would increase the minimum from £1 to £5. I think the maximum of £20 is pretty severe, because it can be imposed every fortnight.

240. Do you think repressive legislation would be best administered by the Government, by Trustees, or County Councils?—By the Government.

241. How would you abate the nuisance on Crown lands and reserves?—The Government should take it in hand, and use the best means at their disposal, exactly the same as private individuals.

242. How do you think Native lands should be dealt with?—I have had no experience of Native lands.

243. Should power be given to compel governing bodies to put the Act in force by *mandamus* or otherwise?—I should leave it in the hands of the Government.

244. How has the carrying capacity of your district been affected by rabbits. Our run is 74,000 acres. When the rabbits became a pest we had 28,000 sheep, and we finished with 15,500.

245. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] And they not very good?—By using poison pretty plentifully we have a good show of grass this year, and the sheep are now looking very well. We stopped poisoning for a short time, and the result was very perceptible. After the rabbits have been cleared I consider the lands are decidedly improved by their having been there, by the droppings, etcetera, of the rabbits. I have seen a run perfectly bare, and after the rabbits have been cleared for, say, six months there would be a fine show of grass upon it.

246. Has the natural pasture been permanently injured by the rabbits?—I do not think so. I may add that the number of skins from our run in 1878–79 was 68,860; for 1879–80, 57,860; for 1880–81, to April, 64,620. The skins for the last period were principally from poisoned rabbits. These numbers only represent a tithe of rabbits destroyed on the run.

247. *Mr. Bain.*] You said the cost of poisoning per 1,000 acres was 30s., as near as you could make it: was that for laying the poison alone?—That is, for the poison, the oats, the carriage, the men's wages, and the machinery. That is supposed to cover all.

248. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] That is deducting the return from the skins?—Yes. I may be far wrong; it is very likely to be more. When rabbits are plentiful the skins about pay, but when they get scarce it is a very different thing: then you may have to give 2d. or 3d. a rabbit.

249. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] Do you mean the cost is 30s. exclusive of the value of the skins, or that the absolute cost would be 30s.?—As I said, it would cost that to do it. What the skins would yield would be quite another thing altogether. That is to be deducted from the 30s.: 30s. is about it. Of course you may get more skins from one 1,000 acres than from another. If it took two men two days to lay 100 lb., it would cost say £2 5s. approximate.



## APPENDICES.

*Copies of Letters, &c., relative to the Rabbit Nuisance.*

## No. 1.—From Mr. ROBERT F. CUTHBERTSON.

FIRST and above all, Government must undertake destruction on unoccupied Crown lands, or submit to see whole colony devastated. The area of unoccupied Crown lands in the West Oreti Rabbit District (Southland) is over one-half of whole area, and in Lake Wakatipu District three-sevenths of whole area. Destruction must be made universal, and compulsory on all alike where rabbits exist. On mountainous country it might be desirable to introduce stoats, weasels, and ermine from Great Britain, or probably California and British Columbia. As Chairman of West Oreti Trust, I sent Home some years ago, *carte blanche*, to get out £500 worth of vermin, but failed to get any at all. Would recommend sending to British Columbia; and to India for mongoose. Australian native cats are quite useless. The true specific for exterminating rabbits is inoculation with some deadly and infectious disease; but the danger is its being communicated to man, as well as other animals. However, mange might be tried, and inquiries instituted on this point. Leasing mountain country with stocking clause is useless; it has failed in Southland. Much country cannot carry a hoof in winter. When rabbiters take up a run for the purposes of their trade they only work on special portions, reserving others as breeding-grounds for next season, and thus propagate the pest. In farming districts, where holdings are small, one man may poison now; while his neighbours may not for months. This has been found to be a serious evil; and it has been proposed that in such districts where holdings are small, stated periods should be fixed, once or twice a year, during which it would be compulsory on every owner to poison his holding. I fear the suggestion would not be easily carried out. Stringent supervision is a much better remedy. In some farming districts there are now more rabbits than on the same area up-country, owing to the inaction among farmers. As many leases of runs in Otago and Southland expire in March, 1883, and are sold by auction in March, 1882, it follows that between these two dates, as well as for the year prior to the auction, the present owner will do little or nothing in the work of destruction, unless he be the successful competitor at the auction; and trustees, when themselves runholders, are not likely to enforce the Act during that period. I would recommend that out-going tenants be compelled to kill during last two years of their leases, receiving compensation from in-coming tenant for part of their outlay. Runs would, in that case, yield Government a far higher rental than at present, as bidders would know what state the country was likely to be in when they got possession. If a tenant kill during the year prior to auction, he is manifestly increasing the value of the run as against himself; and if he lose the run at auction, and is not obliged to kill during the last year of his tenancy, the new owner will become the possessor of a much depreciated property, while during these two years rabbits have been spreading over the surrounding district. The remedy is either to give present tenant compensation for part cost of killing during last two years of his tenancy, payable by in-coming tenant, or let him be made to clear his run to the satisfaction of Government within a given time, and, as compensation for so doing, let him have an extension of lease for so many years at a fair rental.

## No. 2.—From Mr. G. F. BULLEN.

YOUR favour *re* rabbits, of the 9th instant, is duly to hand. I am glad to say the ferrets have done, and are still doing, a great work for us in checking the rabbits; and I do believe the ferrets will be the salvation of the country, for truly the rabbits will ruin the country—at least, the sheepfarmers—if they are not kept down. My firm belief is the rabbit-catchers do more harm than good: they kill everything that kills a rabbit. I believe the cat and woodhen are both very destructive to the enemy. We have always encouraged and turned out all the cats we can: the ferrets kill all the woodhens. We turned out ferrets about eight years ago, and have been turning out more or less every year, the last two or three years going in to breed and turn out about two hundred a year, which we shall continue as long as we see any rabbits around. The dark ferrets are the best. This country extends, you may say, from the Kahautara to the Conway. They will go where they please. It is considerably over 100,000 acres, and I believe there are many hundreds of ferrets on it; we leave it entirely to them to do the work, keeping one man to breed and act as keeper over the ferrets. He carries a gun, and kills a rabbit whenever he gets the chance; but, unfortunately, our neighbours allow men to catch rabbits on their country. These men catch the ferrets, and they pay them better; consequently our ferrets are being exported to all parts of the country. This, Sir, I consider is very cruel (after expending thousands to try and master the rabbits, our greatest enemies) to find any loafer can go on Government land adjoining yours and catch every ferret, and send them out of the district, and advertise them as your ferrets. Now, Sir, if you can use your influence to show the present Government the necessity of protecting us, by protecting the rabbits' enemies, you will do a great deal of good to yourself and yours truly,—G. F. BULLEN, Kaikoura. —21st June, 1881.

## No. 3.—From Mr. LAWLOR.

I wish to lay emphasis on a matter of which you are quite aware. The rabbit pest has left homeless and desolate many families down here, and it is not difficult to predict that it shall do so by many more unless their ravages be stopped; and, as a first step, a clearly-framed Act. I have sufficient experience to say that the nuisance is one that can be abated, and this can I say, did I get the chance of clearing all that country south of Maitara, I would, in three years from the time of setting to work, have the country restored to its normal carrying capacities, provided the Act would work. But with an Act that will not work the evil must remain, for the people themselves will never clear the rabbits. We all know the history of the scab and the Scab Act; and it is only by an equally strong hand that the rabbits can be driven out.—D. SHEA LAWLOR.—Invercargill, 20th June, 1881.

## No. 4.—From Mr. A. DOUGLAS.

IN conformity with your request that I would give you a few jottings of my experience of the rabbit-nuisance question I beg to state as follows: About three and a half years ago, I was appointed Inspector of the West Oreti Rabbit District, which includes all that portion of the Wallace County north of the hundred line, and of the Southland County west of the Oreti River, comprising about 1,200,000 acres of occupied country, and about the same quantity of unoccupied Crown lands; a great portion of the latter, however, lies between Te Anau Lake and Bligh's Sound, and consists of densely-timbered country, or mountain tops with some narrow valleys. For the first two years an average of 150 men, with large packs of dogs and traps, were employed in the destruction of rabbits; but, though they could keep down the pest on the low-lying open country, the rabbits were constantly getting a firmer hold of the river-banks and timbered or rough broken country, and gradually working northward, in consequence of which the Hon. Robert Campbell threw up over 200,000 acres of hill country. Early in the year 1880 phosphorus was used, more or less, by several parties in the district; but the winter was half over before phosphorus could be obtained in large quantities and at a reasonable cost (the Trustees then getting a shipment direct), and the best of the season was past before any great extent of country was poisoned. I have, however, no hesitation in stating that where the grain was properly mixed, and laid out systematically hardly a rabbit was left alive, and at the present time, seven months having elapsed since the poisoned grain was laid, the decrease in number of rabbits and corresponding improvement in feed is very marked: the Merrivale Gorge and Cuthbertson's Plain, on the Waiau River, being a good sample. Before phosphorus was used there, notwithstanding great expense and trouble was incurred with dogs, guns, traps, and ferrets, no permanent impression was made, and towards evening rabbits could always be seen in hundreds, but now there is fine feed, and very few rabbits. The Trustees are keeping up a regular supply of phosphorus for the use of the ratepayers; and at present about 120 men are engaged laying it out. Next month there will be several extra hands employed, and I have no doubt that the pest can be reduced to a minimum by united action. The large bush reserves and unoccupied country are, however, a great difficulty: Mr. Thomas, of Mararoa Station (manager for Mr. Campbell) has constantly employed from twenty-five to thirty men poisoning in winter, and using dogs, &c., in summer; but, as soon as the grass gets a little clean, fresh swarms of rabbits come in from the Takitimos on the south side, and the bush and hill country on the north side. Bush land is the hardest to deal with, as it requires frequent doses of poisoned grain round the edges, and but few skins are obtained, as the rabbits die inside, and cannot be found. In the case of high

country, most of the rabbits come down into the valleys before the snow in winter, and could be killed wholesale if trustworthy men were engaged poisoning in winter; but of course it is against the interest of men who are making their living by the skins to do so; and before letting hill runs to rabbiters, who have nothing to lose, a good deposit or bond should be insisted on that poisoned grain would be properly used. In the event of any alterations being made in "The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1880," I would strongly urge the necessity of making clause 17 to read, "The Trustees, or their duly-appointed Inspector or other officer to sign the notice." This would save a lot of valuable time: the Trustees living from twenty to seventy miles apart, it takes a long time to get a quorum together. It would still remain for them to take action or not, as they saw fit. Also, in clause 18, after receiving notice to kill from the Trustees or their Inspector, the onus of proving efficient steps should be thrown on the occupier, as it is very difficult to prove a negative, and one stubborn landowner can neutralize the efforts of all his neighbours. One legal notice should hold good for, say, six months. Good poisoned grain will kill rabbits several weeks after it is made, and rabbits will eat it amongst good feed, and in the summer time, when the weather is showery. I shall be happy to give you any further information in my power, and remain, ALFRED DOUGLAS, Inspector, West Oreti Rabbit District.—Invercargill, 31st May, 1881.

No. 5.—From Mr. G. E. TOLHURST.

My Victorian correspondent advises me as follows: "I have your favour of 10th ultimo, asking for information as to the desirability of introducing foxes for the purpose of clearing rabbits, and I have to inform you that the Messrs. Chirnside and some of their neighbours have tried the foxes without success. As your friend surmises, the foxes make great havoc amongst the lambs, and the former have multiplied so much on Mr. Bullivant's property, near Larra, that a hunting party the other day managed to run down and kill thirteen of them. Foxes will not do."—GEORGE E. TOLHURST.—Wellington, 16th July, 1881.

(Telegram.)

No. 6.—From Mr. J. GALL.

If Government does not arrange to destroy rabbits on Crown land country will be ruined. No necessity for new department; Sheep Inspectors should look after work. Ask in House what Government intention is.—JAS. GALL.

No. 7.—RESOLUTIONS by the TRUSTEES of the MASTERTON RABBIT DISTRICT.

THAT, in the opinion of this Board, although it is expedient and necessary to check the rabbit pest, it is unfair in principle, and unjust to the ratepayers to spend their money on Government lands, and lands in the possession of Maoris. (2.) That all attempts to exterminate the rabbit pest will be ineffectual while the exemptions of the Act of 1880 be allowed and that, therefore, all those exemptions should be removed, and all Government lands, and lands belonging to the Maoris, as well as those within boroughs, be brought under the operation of the amended Rabbit Act. (3.) That a special clause be inserted in the amended Act dealing with lands belonging to absentees, whose whereabouts is unknown, making the land responsible for rates as well as expenses incurred in destroying rabbits thereon. (4.) That any landowner who encloses the whole of his property with rabbit-proof fencing, either independently or with the co-operation of his neighbours, should, so long as he maintains the same in good order, be exempt from payment of rates; but that such landowner should not thereby be relieved from supervision by any ranger or person appointed by the Trustees in that capacity. (5.) That, it having been decided in cases already tried in the Masterton District that under section 18 personal notice is necessary and, considering the great inconvenience and expense of serving such notices on absentee proprietors, the same process as is directed under section 17 should be made applicable to section 18.—F. G. MOORE, Secretary.

No. 8.—From Mr. D. A. CAMERON.

From experience, I am of opinion that Rabbit Trusts, Rabbit Inspectors, and rabbit rates are altogether unnecessary, and should be abolished. That the office of Sheep, Cattle, and Rabbit Inspector should be combined, and that the sheep-rate be administered so as to cover any additional expense thereby incurred. That, in the execution of his combined duties, the Inspector be responsible to the head of his department, and not to the County Council, as the division of authority in this case would prove unsatisfactory in its results. . . .—DONALD A. CAMERON—Southland, 21st July, 1881.

No. 9.—EXTRACT from the Report upon the Crown Lands Department, Year 1881, C-5, by JAMES MCKERROW, Secretary for Crown Lands.

*Rabbit Pest.*

CLOSELY connected with the settlement of the country is the difficulty of coping with this evil. It can be kept under by poisoning, shooting, and introduction of natural enemies; but where there is a region of broken back-country the contest has to be maintained from season to season at great expense, which is only partially met by the sale of skins. The carrying capacity of the infested country is of course seriously diminished, and some of the higher-lying runs have been abandoned altogether, very much from this cause. This in itself would not be so material, were it not that the abandoned country becomes the breeding-ground for fresh hordes, which overrun the lower occupied country. It is manifest that any partial treatment is unequal to the suppression of an evil which now affects several millions of acres of Crown and freehold lands. Rigorous concerted action is necessary; and this cannot be expected of district associations, unless under the compulsion and direction of one authority. It therefore devolves on Government to possess itself of powers that will require every person to keep his ground clear on pain of severe penalties. This implies that Government must clear the unoccupied Crown lands; and if these measures succeed in reducing the pest to small dimensions, as certainly they would, the expense would be far more than recouped in the increased carrying capacity of the country, and the greater rentals that would be got in reletting. Increasing the number of runs and holdings will in one way tend to diminish the evil by having more persons to contend against it; but, in the increase of settlers, there will be still greater need for Government inspection of rabbit districts, because the neglect of two or three persons in a district to keep their ground clear would render abortive in a great measure the efforts of those who did.

No. 10.—From Mr. H. S. MCKELLAR.

RETURN of the Number and Value of Rabbitskins exported from New Zealand during the past three years, and to 31st March, 1881:—In 1878, 3,976,409 skins, value £33,460; 1879, 5,384,506 skins, value £46,759; 1880, 7,505,616 skins, value £66,976; 1881 (March quarter), 1,413,739 skins, value £11,915: total, 18,280,270 skins, value £159,110. The June quarter's returns have not all been received at this office.—H. S. MCKELLAR (for Secretary and Inspector).—Customs Department, Wellington, 12th July, 1881.

No. 11.—From Mr. J. P. MAITLAND.

RETURN giving names of Lessees, Area, and Locality in which situate, of all Runs which have been abandoned in consequence of the Rabbit Pest:—

No. 389, 40,000 acres, Lake and Wallace County; No. 391, 50,000 acres, Southland County; and No. 452, 19,400 acres, Lake and Southland County: Lessee, Hon. R. Campbell, jun. Board asked to accept surrender on account of rabbit pest; matter referred to the Government, who refused to comply with the request; but the country has remained unoccupied.

*Runs Abandoned, but since Relet.*

No. 415, 64,560 acres, North Mairā Lake: Lessee, Hon. R. Campbell, jun. Relet to Joseph Weir and Sons, for ten years, at £35 per annum, from 2nd April, 1880.

No. 416, 74,000 acres, Clintonside: Lessee, Hon. R. Campbell, jun. Relet to Messrs. Kemp and Boyd, for ten years, at £20 per annum, from 25th February, 1881.

No. 418, 30,000 acres, Greenstone Valley: Lessee, Hon. R. Campbell, jun. Relet to Henry Steele, for ten years, at £15 per annum, from 2nd April, 1880.

No. 423A, 6,000 acres, Nokomai District: Lessee, D. A. Cameron. Relet to D. A. Cameron, for ten years, at £12 per annum, from 20th May, 1880.

No. 426, 3,000 acres, Manipori Lake: Lessee, A. M. Clarke. Relet to J. Richards and Co., for ten years, at £5 per annum, from 8th July, 1881.

No. 431, 15,000 acres, Greenstone River: Lessee, Hon. R. Campbell, jun. Relet to F. and J. Thomson, for ten years, at £5 per annum, from 25th February, 1881.

No. 436, 34,500 acres, Waikaia District: Lessee, Joseph Clarke. Relet to Ewen Cameron, for ten years, at £39 per annum, from 8th July, 1881.

No. 438, 37,000 acres, Eyre Peak District: Lessee, Joseph Rodgers. Relet to William Crowe, for ten years, at £38 per annum, from 8th July, 1881.

No. 324, 63,350 acres, Wakatipu District: Lessees, New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company (Limited). Relet to New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company (Limited), for ten years, at £250 per annum, from 1st March, 1881.

No. 350, 46,000 acres, Wakatipu District: Lessees, New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company (Limited). Relet to New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company (Limited), for ten years, at £200 per annum, from 1st March, 1881.

Of the above runs abandoned, but since relet, Nos. 416, 426, 431, 436, and 438, have been sold, subject to being stocked within a certain time.—J P MAITLAND, Commissioner of Crown Lands.

No. 12.—STATEMENT of Rent received for the under-mentioned Runs, previous to the date of their being abandoned. (See Parliamentary Paper, C.—11A, 1877):—No. 389, 40,000 acres: Lessees, R. and R. Campbell; £182 5s. 10d. No. 391, 50,000 acres: Lessee, R. Campbell, jun.; £66 4s. 2d. No. 452, 19,400 acres: Lessee, R. Campbell, jun.; £43 15s. No. 415, 58,000 acres: Lessees, R. and R. Campbell; £151 13s. 4d. No. 416, 74,000 acres: Lessees, R. and R. Campbell; £116 13s. 4d. No. 418, 30,000 acres: Lessees, R. and R. Campbell; £58 6s. 8d. No. 423A, 4,000 acres: Lessee, D. A. Cameron; £58 6s. 8d. No. 426, 3,000 acres: Lessee, A. M. Clarke; £29 3s. 4d. No. 431, 14,000 acres: Lessees, R. and R. Campbell; £35. No. 436, 63,000 acres: Lessee, Joseph Clarke; £262 10s. No. 438, 35,000 acres: Lessee, Joseph Rodgers; Rent not stated. No. 324, 66,350 acres: Lessees, McARDell and Hodge; £758 14s. 3d. No. 350, 46,000 acres: Lessees, Mathieson Brothers; £526 4s. 6d. Total, 502,750 acres; £2,288 17s. 1d.

Ten of these Runs have since been relet at a gross rental of £619, showing a serious loss to the Government.

Total number of sheep in the colony, 1878	...	...	...	...	13,069,338
Ditto, ditto, 1879	...	...	...	...	11,405,389
Showing a deficit of	...	...	...	...	1,663,949

The departmental returns for 1880 and 1881 are not yet compiled, but the Hon. Mr. Waterhouse estimates the deficiency now at two millions, and the loss to the exports of the colony at £500,000 per annum. (See *Hansard*, 23rd June, 1881, page 172.)

#### RETURN showing the Approximate Area of Unoccupied Crown Lands in each Rabbit District in the Colony.

District.	Area.	District.	Area.
Napier	303,485	Lake .. ..	703,000
Castlepoint ... ..	212,000	Tuturau .. ..	1,272
Masterton .. ..	96,000	Kaiwera .. ..	856
Wainuioru .. ..	75,000	Wyndham .. ..	6,713
Awhea ... ..	30,000	Hokonui .. ..	32,200
Carterton ... ..	44,500	Aparima .. ..	50,520
Palmerston North .. ..	42,600	Wallace .. ..	75,970
Otaria .. ..	27,800	West Oreti .. ..	1,000,500
Tapanui .. ..	11,899		
Vincent... ..	66,698		
			<u>2,781,013</u>

General Survey Office, Wellington.  
5th August, 1881,

A. BARRON.

