

ferrets had been turned out, and passed through some cold low wet bush. As I was going along the bridle-track two white ferrets passed it. I am perfectly convinced that it must be the ferrets that are keeping down the rabbits, for I cannot conceive anything else that could do it. I know that men with dogs never could do it. I firmly believe that ferrets are doing work that is wanted to be done, and protection for the ferret is necessary. There should be discretionary power given to the Inspectors to require pastoral landowners to turn out ferrets as the means of exterminating rabbits. One of the difficulties of the ferret question—of course, what I say applies to stoats and weasels—lies in this: Suppose I have 5,000 acres, and on this land I turn out ferrets; suppose my neighbour did not choose to turn out ferrets, but preferred to keep trappers. In such circumstances I might go on turning out ferrets for any period, and they would soon be all killed. That would be a positive evil. The negative evil would be that you might get ferrets to stock 5,000 acres, but could not get ferrets to stock 100,000 acres, and it would be almost hopeless to stock your 5,000 acres, if the owners of the 95,000 acres would do nothing.

277. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Do you think then that this Committee, in reporting upon this section, should recommend to the effect indicated in your evidence: is it your opinion that the clause in the Act, which deals with the “natural enemies,” should be made use of for the protection of ferrets; in other words, that instructions should be given to Inspectors that as far as possible methods of killing, which at the same time destroy rabbits, should be stopped?—I think there should be a discretionary power in the Inspector. As to whether all other methods of killing rabbits should be stopped, I am not prepared to say. Outside the natural enemy, you can have one remedy, that is poison. You can always poison. It would be hard to say whether there should be any prohibition of trapping and rabbiting. I think it should be matter for the Inspector in his judgment to say—if the natural enemies were taking possession and trapping at the same time was going on—the trapping should be stopped.

278. An Inspector in the South Island, in a district where ferrets are numerous, says in his report that he has no opinion of the ferrets: do you think that an Inspector holding such opinions holding his office would be detrimental to the eradication of rabbits?—I do not think it was a wise thing to say upon the part of the Inspector. But his position may have been this: that he did not find the ferrets in sufficient number in his district to overtake the rabbits; consequently he would find that the ferret was making no perceptible difference in the number of rabbits. He would then probably come to the conclusion that ferrets were of no use. The question of retaining men or not would depend on many considerations. It is very difficult to say whether continuing such an Inspector in his employment would be proper or not. Suppose the case of a man in my own employment who had charge of ferrets. If he expressed such an opinion, I should consider whether he did the best he could in the performance of his proper duty. If I thought he was unfavourable to ferrets, and wanted to do away with them, I would dismiss him. If he was honestly and capably doing his work in breeding and taking care of the ferrets, I would take no notice of his opinions.

279. Are you of opinion that the local management would be more effective than it is at present?—When you ask me about local government and management, I answer that there is no local government worth a rush to deal with anything. As long as that is the case I would prefer to see the matter dealt with by the General Government. Take one item alone in which the value of the ferret is apparent. The pastoral owners have been put to vast expense in purchasing wire-netting to prevent the spread of this nuisance. I believe we shall be able to avoid this expense in the future. There will be no necessity for wire-netting, and this is the more important, because wire-netting is perishable. But over and above all this, the spread and protection of the “natural enemy” is of immense importance to the biggest landholder of all—I mean the people of the colony; for the Crown lands of the colony, especially in the South, are in many cases valueless from rabbits. I attach immense importance to it. I certainly think that, unless some conclusive and absolute reasons can be shown against the “natural enemy” of the rabbit, the Government of the country is bound to give the “natural enemy” the strongest protection and support.

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FRIDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 1884.

Mr. FOSTER, Sheep Inspector, examined.

280. *Hon. the Chairman.*] I would like to ask you if you can give us any information about rabbits?—I have had some little experience at Kaikoura, and I reported upon South Canterbury to the Government some two years ago.

281. Acting upon your knowledge gained by that experience, what do you consider the best way of dealing with the rabbit nuisance?—At Kaikoura, where the plan was commenced by Mr. Bullen, we have had great success with ferrets and poisoned grain. We have completely got them under at Kaikoura.

282. Do you use wheat or oats?—We use wheat for silver-grey rabbits. There are silver-grey rabbits at Kaikoura. They seem to take the wheat better than oats; but farther north, where there is the common brown rabbit, I am told they seem to prefer the oats. There is no doubt that the ferrets have been of very great assistance at Kaikoura.

283. Do you think that poisoning and ferrets are sufficient to keep the rabbits down or diminish them?—It appears to me that it depends a great deal upon the breed of the rabbits. In South Canterbury and North Otago there are rabbits of a large kind, that appear to breed chiefly on the surface. They do not burrow very much except in very soft or sandy places. The Kaikoura rabbit—the silver grey—will burrow through anything, and there the ferrets appear to get shelter in the burrows. The second generation of ferrets that are bred in this country will, I suppose, get hardier, and in time may be able to live on the surface, the same as the rabbits.