

this rabbit pest, if everything is right?—I do not say it is right. I simply said I had no complaints. I think a great deal is owing to the summer we had. Before that, I was in hopes we should have made great advances in keeping down the nuisance.

545. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] You object to local bodies dealing with this question. Do you allude to bodies like County Councils?—As a rule, I do not think such a system would be desirable.

546. Do you not think that local bodies elected by people interested in the rabbit question might do good?—In some places, but not in others.

547. *Mr. Dodson.*] When did you first know there were rabbits in any quantity in the Clarence Valley?—Last year.

548. Had you any personal knowledge of that?—I went through part of the country myself.

549. Frequently?—On two occasions.

550. We had it on evidence yesterday that a report was sent up by an officer in your department saying that at a given date there were no rabbits; and then a month afterwards the rabbits were there in alarming numbers?—My own knowledge of the matter is this: When I went through there were a good few rabbits on the Helen Creek, and a few more down towards the Tytler. They went in largely for breeding ferrets, and they reduced their numbers to such an extent that they had to go five miles for rabbits to feed the ferrets upon. I am told that the manager was so satisfied that he not only turned out the ferrets that he had, but broke up his breeding establishment. A dry summer came, and the pest again went ahead.

551. What was the condition of Flaxbourne?—They were pretty well cleared. There is another reason that can be given for their apparent increase. Owing to the high river the rabbits congregated about the cultivations, where they had not been so thick in former years. They gathered down to where the best grass was, and so the people have seen more.

552. *Mr. Cowan.*] You have expressed yourself satisfied with the conduct of the department. What is your opinion with regard to employing agents the whole year round?—In winter time, when simultaneous poisoning and active work requires to be done, they are absolutely essential; but I am certainly of opinion now that fewer agents might be done with in the summer time.

553. After many years' experience in the South Island, that is also the conclusion to which I have come. You agree with me, then, that in the summer time, if large powers were given to the Inspectors, the same good would be accomplished at a less cost?—I think so.

554. Do you think an inducement should be offered by the Government in summer for the taking of rabbit-skins?—If a bonus were offered it should be for the skins of suckers.

555. But in summer the commercial value of rabbit-skins is almost *nil*?—I am aware of that.

556. Would it not also be an assistance in reducing the pest if a bonus were offered for large ones as well?—I should confine myself to the small skins.

557. *Mr. Dodson.*] Some two years ago we had a witness before the Committee who complained that he had been interfered with, and that the Inspector insisted on his using one special means of destruction where he wished to use another. Did you inquire into that matter?—I did not. I had no opportunity of doing so. An Inspector is supposed not to interfere.

558. *Hon. the Chairman.*] In reference to the case in the Wairarapa, was not the plea urged by the runholder that he was taking all steps to kill the rabbits, but objected to the method directed by the Inspector?—I should not think so.

559. Do you not get reports of these cases?—Yes; but I do not recollect that being so.

560. If a complaint of that kind were sent you would inquire into it?—Decidedly.

561. *Captain Russell.*] Do the Sheep Inspectors report on rabbits?—Yes.

562. To whom?—To the head of the department.

563. And how often?—They send in their diaries every month.

564. And who is the responsible head of the department?—Mr. Cooper.

565. He is the practical head, the working head, of the department? There is, I suppose, some official in whom the thing centres?—I believe Mr. Cooper is the responsible head. I am Superintendent, but I have never regarded myself as head.

566. Who comes next to Mr. Cooper?—I do.

567. Have you thought of any scheme by which the spread of rabbits might be arrested?—I have thought of two—one to endeavour to secure the assistance of some scientist in Europe for the purpose I have indicated, and the other to seek for a summer poison. I do not see why that should not be done.

568. Have you submitted to the department any practical scheme which you think could be better than the present one?—I have not. The only suggestions I have made have been in my annual report.

569. Do you look upon the evil as an increasing one?—I think it is getting over a larger area.

570. Do you think it is necessary there should be some scheme devised?—Yes.

571. Have the Inspectors reported the large increase of rabbits in the Taieri?—No.

572. Or towards the Mackenzie Country?—Yes; in fact, I was up there myself.

573. Or in the Amuri District?—Yes.

574. And on the east coast of the North Island?—There has been no special report from there. We were aware of the increase, and were continually taking steps.

575. Or about the King country?—No.

576. Then, no steps have been taken by the department to abate the evil where it is known that the pest has increased?—I think, as far as lay in their power, the department have taken steps to stop.

577. What has been done in regard to the King country, for instance?—I am not aware that any steps have been taken, except that special men have been sent up to report on that country.