

1887.
NEW ZEALAND.

THE RABBIT NUISANCE IN SOUTH CANTERBURY

(REPORT AND CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE LANDS DEPARTMENT ON).

Return to an Order of the House of Representatives, No. 23, of 1887.

Ordered, "That there be laid upon the table copies of reports, and correspondence which has taken place with the Land Department, on the question of rabbits in South Canterbury."—(Mr. LANGE.)

No. 1.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS, Christchurch, to the UNDER-SECRETARY for CROWN LANDS, Wellington.

Crown Lands Office, Christchurch, 23rd April, 1887.

Canterbury Runs and the Rabbit Question.

HAVING lately travelled through the Mackenzie country, up the Pukaki Lake and Tasman River, Lake Ohau and the Hopkins and Dobson's Rivers, then across Benmore to the Omarama Station, and down the Waitaki to Kurow, I deem it my duty to call your especial attention to the rabbit question, which, if not faced and the evil checked, will seriously affect the rentals of the Canterbury Crown lands when the runs are relet in 1890.

From my own observations up the Hopkins and Dobson's Rivers there can be no doubt that the Otago rabbit has established itself within the Canterbury District, and, unless remedial measures are taken, will soon overrun that portion of Canterbury between the Dobson and Tasman Rivers. I do not think they will head it, as the perpetual snow and glaciers of the Mount Cook Range will probably prove a barrier that even they will not force; but they will cross the Tasman, and take possession of the country known as the Mackenzie country by entering it on that side.

I noted that on the Benmore Run along the Ohau River forming the boundary between that run and Canterbury, they have become somewhat numerous; but after crossing the Ahuriri River on to the Omarama Station I found the country swarming with them, and literally eaten out—in fact, I do not think that even in Southland I ever saw them in denser numbers than in the Omarama country—and it is not to be supposed that the Ahuriri River, or even the Ohau, will stop them from infesting the Canterbury country if they are allowed to increase as on the last-named station.

Apart from this, however, I am told that the rabbits have crossed, or have been put across, the Waitaki on to Mr. Miller's and the Waitangi Stations, and that they are now found there. I cannot say as to this, but the truth could be ascertained from the department dealing with the matter; but if such is the case, and different measures are not taken to check them than have been taken in the Omarama country, they will inevitably overrun the whole of the hilly country, including the Mackenzie Plains, between the Waitaki and Rangitata Rivers.

The pastoral Crown lands lying between these rivers, let at the present time to various tenants, contain in round numbers 1,535,000 acres, carry about 720,000 sheep, and yield a yearly revenue of £25,800. If this country should become overrun with rabbits, when it is relet in 1890 the Government will lose at least £10,000 a year; for many of the runs could not pay the present rental if they had to cope with the rabbits, and large tracts of the back country would be abandoned, as is the case up the Makarora, Hunter, and Ahuriri Rivers, where nine runs have been abandoned since 1879, in which year they returned a rental of £639 to the Canterbury Land Fund.

It is not too much to say that if the country was allowed to become infested with rabbits it would carry a third less sheep, and the wool-money—say from £35,000 to £40,000 per annum—would be lost to the country, independently of the value of the increase of stock that would otherwise have resulted.

A tax of £50 on each tenant, or a penny per sheep, would, with some assistance from the Government, probably cope with the danger now: £500 per tenant would not do it three years hence. How it is to be averted does not come within my province to suggest. I can only say that it is a real danger, which, unless checked, will cause a loss of £10,000 per annum to the Canterbury Land Fund, and ultimately nearly a total deprivation of revenue from this source.

It is a most serious question, and as such I submit it to the attention of the Hon. the Minister of Lands.

The Under-Secretary for Crown Lands, Wellington.

JOHN H. BAKER,
Commissioner, Crown Lands.

No. 2.

The UNDER-SECRETARY for CROWN LANDS to the COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS, Christchurch.

(Memorandum.)

General Crown Lands Office, Wellington, 9th May, 1887.

YOUR memorandum of the 23rd April, with reference to the invasion of South Canterbury by rabbits from Otago, has been carefully considered by the officers of the Lands and Rabbit Departments, and I have now to inform you that the Rabbit Department is fully alive to the necessity of taking active measures for preventing the spread of the rabbits in the districts referred to in your report. Mr. Thompson, one of the most energetic officers of that department, has ample authority to take such steps as he may consider necessary. A copy of your report will be laid on the table of the House of Representatives, on the motion of Mr. Lance, the member for Cheviot.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands, Christchurch.

H. J. H. ELLIOTT,
Under-Secretary.

[*Approximate Cost of Paper.*—Preparation, nil; printing (1,275 copies), 19s.]

By Authority: GEORGE DEDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1887.