

513. Will you give the Committee what information you can in reference to the rabbits before and after you resided in the district?—Yes.

514. You were at one time a Rabbit Inspector, I believe?—Yes; I was an Inspector for some time in Otago; after that I was located at Burke's Pass. I found there a number of rabbits, but of a different class to the southern rabbit, being larger and slower in their movements. There was every indication to show that the southern rabbit was going up on the south side of the river. Before the fence was put up there were a few rabbits on both sides, but since then they have diminished considerably on the north side. The branch fence going from the Tasman River into the hills has checked the rabbits going up from the south. Last year I could see them almost anywhere, but last season I could find but few. From these facts I have come to the conclusion that this fence has brought them to a check from going up the valley, and the new fence has checked them from getting through into the Canterbury side. Between the river and the fence the rabbits have increased, and on the north side, where there were a few, they have almost disappeared.

515. Then, you consider the fence has been the means of effectually stopping the rabbits?—Yes; it has been an effectual stoppage to the rabbits going further up. If the fence is properly attended to, and looked after by the keepers, I am convinced that it will be a sufficient check.

516. How many keepers are there employed?—From Pukaki to Mount Cook end there are two.

517. What is the distance?—It would be about ten miles for each man to look after. There are two lads employed within the cross-fence, and their duty is to stop the rabbits from getting through the fence, and pay visits to the line of fence and destroy any rabbits they come across. In their spare time they destroy rabbits above that line of fence with tame ferrets, shooting, and poisoning; but during this winter they only killed eight, while in the same time last year they killed fifty or sixty, and the summer before that 140; so, it will be seen that the fence has checked the stream of rabbits up the valley.

518. Are the settlers on the north side looking after the rabbits as they should?—Yes; ever since the district has been declared a rabbit district. I may say I have had some experience on my brother-in-law's place, Captain F. Hayter, Burke's Pass. He took active measures, and within two years he obtained three thousand skins. Since then he employed rabbiters, but they could get scarcely any; but they are still increasing on the south side of the fence.

519. Are the settlers on the south side taking means to stay their progress?—Yes. The run-holders have been at work for the last four or five years. They always keep men at work, but they are not sufficient to check, or even diminish, them.

520. Are the natural enemy being turned out now?—Yes; the last two or three years. A number have been turned out in the Tasman Valley, on both sides of the valley; some were also turned out within the forks of the high-spurs, and are, I think, doing excellent work, because I have seen no signs of rabbits lately.

521. Then, your opinion is that, if the fence is properly looked after, it will prove very successful?—Yes; that is my opinion. The fence had a very severe test last winter, for there was about 2ft. of snow on it. Of course, it requires attending to, so that the rabbits will be kept from banking upon it.

522. *Mr. Dodson.*] When you say there were 2ft. of snow on it, do you mean that the fence was covered with snow to a depth of 2ft.?—Yes; in some places it was; but it was soft snow, and the rabbits could not travel over it.

523. How long is this branch fence?—About a mile.

524. *Mr. Duncan.*] Have those station-owners who did not offer again for their leases taken the necessary steps to keep the rabbits down?—Yes; one has employed rabbiters, and has also been poisoning.

525. Which station is that?—Glentanner.

526. *Hon. Mr. Walker.*] Last year, you say, you experienced exceptionally heavy snow?—Yes.

527. After the snow had cleared away, did you find many of the natural enemy dead?—No; I did not see any. I have seen their tracks since.

528. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Tracks of ferrets or stoats?—Tracks of both, I saw.

529. *Mr. Buchanan.*] On the snow?—Yes. I may say that several ferrets have been seen by a party of gentlemen who were over the country in June, hunting. This was at Pukaki. I am sure the ferrets in that part are doing their work well.

FRIDAY, 23RD AUGUST, 1889.

RICHARD HULL examined.

530. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What is your name?—Richard Hull.

531. You are aware you have come here to answer a petition from Mr. Ross?—Yes; and I should like to refer to each clause seriatim. I may say that the petition was sent in in August. Does the clause in reference to rabbits being numerous refer to that date, because they are not numerous there now?

The petition was here read as follows:—

“(1.) That one Richard Hull is Inspector under ‘The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1882,’ and its amendments, having his head-quarters at Palmerston, in the Provincial District of Otago.

“(2.) That rabbits are numerous throughout various parts of the Dunback district.

“(3.) That one of your petitioners, George Ross, occupies, as a sheep-farmer, over two thousand acres in the Dunback district, adjoining the sheep-runs belonging to Sir F. D. Bell and Alfred Bell.

“(4.) That in the month of February last rabbits were numerous on the aforesaid farm of the said George Ross, and also on Bell's sheep-run, and rabbits were constantly passing from Bell's land to Ross's land and *vice versa*.