

1890.
NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC PETITIONS A TO L COMMITTEE

(REPORT OF)

ON THE PETITION (No. 225) OF MARTIN CHAPMAN AND OTHERS, OF WELLINGTON, RELATIVE TO
THE WANTON DESTRUCTION OF SEA-BIRDS ON ISLANDS ADJACENT TO NEW ZEALAND.

Report brought up 28th August, 1890, and ordered to be printed.

REPORT.

THE petitioners pray that the destruction of marine birds and their eggs, except for food, may be prohibited by law on all islands within the boundaries of New Zealand.

I am directed to report that, in the opinion of the Committee, legislative action ought immediately to be taken to control and limit the destruction of birds, seals, and other animals frequenting the islands named in the petition, as well as the Macquarie Islands, should these be transferred to the jurisdiction of New Zealand.

28th August, 1890.

A. P. SEYMOUR, Chairman.

PETITION No. 225, MARTIN CHAPMAN AND OTHERS.

To the Honourable the Members of the Legislative Council and the House
of Representatives.

THE HUMBLE PETITION OF THE UNDERSIGNED HUMBLY SHOWETH TO YOUR HONOURABLE HOUSES
AS FOLLOWS:—

1. It is known to your honourable Houses that certain outlying islands are included in the boundaries of the Colony of New Zealand. Your petitioners in particular specify the Chatham Islands, the Snares, the Lord Auckland Group, Campbell Island, Antipodes Island, and the Bounty Group, but in so specifying they do not desire to exclude other islands and parts of the colony to which this petition would apply.

2. The said islands are the home and breeding-resort of many kinds of sea-birds, among which your petitioners in particular specify the birds known as mutton-birds, penguins, terns, gulls, albatrosses of various species, petrels of various species.

3. Almost all of these birds are absolutely helpless when on land, and are unable to escape—and barely attempt to escape capture.

4. The penguins congregate in what are known as rookeries, where numbers varying from a few hundreds to many thousands are to be found. They lay their eggs on the bare ground. The nurture of their young keeps them about the land for the greater part of the year.

5. Mutton-birds and various kinds of petrel and other birds burrow in the soft ground, and there lay their eggs.

6. Albatrosses lay their eggs in easily accessible places on the hills. Each female bird lays one egg. Their young remain on shore for a year before they can fly.

7. In many countries in the Northern Hemisphere all sea-birds form an abundant and wholesome source of food supply to large numbers of people; your petitioners believe that there is no reason why this should not be the case at a future time in this hemisphere. At the present day mutton-birds are largely used for food.

8. Your petitioners are informed and believe that certain persons have commenced to capture the sea-birds at the said islands, and to boil them down to extract oil therefrom.

9. Your petitioners are informed that an estimate has been made of the numbers of the most numerous species of bird on the islands where they are most abundant, to wit, the penguins on the Bounty Group, and that the number probably does not exceed three millions. Your petitioners also believe that the penguins in all the islands your petitioners have named would not exceed twice the above number all gathered together as aforesaid in rookeries easily accessible from land or sea. A party of four or five men could, your petitioners believe, with ease, in one day capture every penguin on the Snares; in a few weeks every penguin on the whole Auckland Group; in two or three days every penguin on Campbell Island; in one day every penguin on the Antipodes Island; and in a fortnight every penguin on the Bounty Group. A short additional time would

suffice, virtually, to clear the sea in each case, as all the birds come on shore to breed. The amount of oil to be obtained by all this destruction would be insignificant, and your petitioners believe would not amount to one thousand tons.

10. Your petitioners believe that the persons aforesaid purpose visiting island after island for the purpose of boiling down all the penguins thereon, and that, if they are allowed so to do, these birds will shortly be virtually exterminated.

11. Your petitioners also believe that all such of the other kinds of birds named as can be obtained will be treated in like manner, and in particular the mutton-birds, which are already an important article of food.

12. Divers persons also are in the habit of visiting the nesting-grounds of the albatross and taking the eggs therefrom. Your petitioners believe that if this be allowed these birds will cease to visit the islands. Your petitioners say that it is highly desirable that the albatross should not be driven to forsake the islands, because the eggs and young birds may at any time be the only provision of food for castaways at these islands. If at any time passengers and crew of a homeward-bound ship were cast away on one of these islands, the provision of food at the dépôts would soon be exhausted, and the castaways would be driven to depend on eggs and sea-birds for their subsistence. The eggs and young of the albatross would be at certain seasons the only available, and at all seasons an important, means of support.

Most of your petitioners' statements apply with equal force to the breeding-places of sea-birds on the main islands. Your petitioners further submit that the beauty and interest of these birds also merit consideration.

Your petitioners, therefore, humbly pray as follows:—

That your honourable Houses will pass an Act regulating the capture and destruction of sea-birds on the main and outlying islands of New Zealand, and in particular submit—

1. That the capture of sea-birds for the purpose of extracting oil be prohibited;

2. That the taking of the eggs, except for food, and the capture of sea-birds at the breeding-places for their skins and feathers, be prohibited.

And your petitioners will ever pray, &c.

MARTIN CHAPMAN AND 21 OTHERS.

TUESDAY, 26TH AUGUST, 1890.

Captain FAIRCHILD in attendance and examined.

Petition of Martin Chapman and others, on the subject of the wanton destruction of sea-birds on islands adjacent to New Zealand, read.

1. *The Chairman.*] You have heard that petition read and you see what the petitioners want. We shall be glad if you can tell us what you may know as to the correctness of the allegations in that petition; if correct, as to the possibility of providing some remedy for the evil complained of, and to prevent the wholesale destruction of sea-birds that is said to be going on?—With regard to the number of sea-birds destroyed, as indicated in the petition, I think it might be multiplied by one hundred to get the correct number. As to the time it would take to destroy the rest, I think the statement in the petition is out altogether; you would want as many weeks for it as days are mentioned there.

2. As to the quantity of oil to be got from them, can you tell us anything about that?—About 6d. a bird for penguins. No doubt they could all be very soon destroyed if boiled down, they are so easily caught; they are so helpless, they will not run away.

3. Are they being taken irrespectively of breeding time?—Yes, that is not studied at all. I think they ought not to be destroyed merely for their skin and oil.

4. Are they being destroyed in large numbers?—They are being destroyed on the Tasmanian islands, which we have no control over, but the New Zealand islands are to be visited next for the destruction of these birds.

5. Which islands?—The Bounty, the Antipodes, the Snares, the Auckland, and Campbell Islands; these five belong to New Zealand.

6. You say they are not destroying them on these islands?—On the Macquarie Islands they are destroying them, but those islands are under the Tasmanian Government; they will work the birds out there in about five years. After they have worked them out there I know it is intended to take the birds on our islands.

7. Then, do you think that if New Zealand were to put her foot down now to prevent the further growth of this evil it would save them?—Except for scientific purposes, considering the very little that is to be got by killing these birds, the wholesale destruction of them should be stopped.

8. *Mr. Blake.*] You think that could easily be done?—I cannot say.

9. Do you know who the people are that are boiling down these birds on the Macquaries?—I only know of one gentleman who is concerned in it; he is an Invercargill gentleman. I dare say some of the members of the Committee may know him. He makes no secret of the matter himself. I mean Mr. Joseph Hatch.

9A. He is likely, do you think, to come to our islands when he has done with the Macquaries?—I know that he reckons on 70 tons from the Macquaries this year. If he gets 70 tons—but I doubt it—he would be likely to try the New Zealand islands. I do not think he will get the 70 tons he reckons on—that is, not in one year. I visit the place very often, and have been over all the breeding-grounds. Mr. Chapman, one of the petitioners, has only visited the places once. He did not have a chance to ascertain the numbers very correctly.

9B. But it was his visiting there that brought up this petition?—Yes; and what he heard was going on at the Macquarie Islands. The birds will certainly be wiped out there in a few years;

and they would certainly, in course of time, be wiped out from all our New Zealand islands which these birds inhabit if the boiling-down system should be practised.

10. Does that apply to all birds, or only to penguins?—Chiefly to penguins and albatrosses. These birds are so helpless on land that they make no attempt to get away from pursuit, either to walk or fly. If you were to put your boiling-down machine beside their rookeries you could catch as many as you like of them without effort.

11. *Sir George Grey.*] I should like Captain Fairchild to make some statement as regards the seals to be found on the islands?—As for the fur-seals, they are almost gone altogether; they are hardly worth thinking about now.

12. *The Chairman.*] Do you mean through the action of hunters?—Yes; a good many were killed a short time ago; but we never had many rookeries of them among the New Zealand islands—altogether, not more than about a dozen. But even from the few that are left the fur-seals have almost disappeared. They have gone, possibly, to some more southern land; but in places where there were large numbers of them to be seen, scarcely one is to be seen now. Sealers have been working them out from time to time; but they are nearly worked out in most of the places to which they used to resort.

13. Was that before stopping the practice by Act, or since?—Since the stopping by Act; they have been worked for several years since the passing of the Act. The persons concerned knew that to prevent them there would have to be a special vessel sent to watch them; and that was not done; so they worked the fur-seal until they worked him out almost altogether. But the sea-lion is numerous everywhere through the islands. They are not very valuable. They are worth about £1 each for skin and oil together.

14. Do they breed more frequently?—They do not breed fast. It has not been thought worth any one's while to kill the sea-lions. Besides, they are not so easy to kill as the fur-seal. When going after the fur-seal you need not take anything but your knife and a club. You could not destroy a sea-lion so easily. There are millions of them on the islands at one time of the year. They are as thick as sheep in a paddock at that particular season. You cannot walk over the grass in safety without clearing them out of your way. You must carry a stick with you to clear them out of your road. There is, however, one island off Westport where the fur-seal is still pretty numerous. People did not go to kill seals there when the law protected them. Those who would have done so were aware that they would be in sight of the people of the town of Westport and of the Cape Foulwind Lighthouse near there. There the seals are breeding fast. I counted fifty-four there last February. That is the only island that I know of where they are left in any considerable number. They are breeding there middling fast.

15. Could anything be done in the way of removing some of them to restock the other places?—That could be done, but I believe that, from the history of the seal, it is known he will not live in any place except where he is bred. He is known to go home very long distances. I am afraid that if you removed him he would come back again. As to those that have left the other islands, they were frightened away, and they are not likely ever to come home again. The smaller islands are pretty well depopulated so far as the fur-seal is concerned.

16. Would there be any probability of their stopping on D'Urville's Island if a number of them were brought there?—The fur-seal will not come near where people are: it is such a shy animal that wherever man lives he will not go; even where they are not molested, they do not care to live if men live near the place. With the sea-lion it is different: he will live in your garden if you let him alone. But the fur-seal—the moment he smells your presence he is like a wild animal—he is off like a shot. He does not care about coming back to that place if people are living beside him.

17. Do you think that temperature has anything to do with it?—Yes, I think that has something to do with it. I believe the fur-seal lived as far north as New Plymouth in the early days; but he will not live where people are living if he can help it.

18. What is the value of the fur-seal's skin?—About £3 for the undressed skin in London; but I believe the price has fallen to £2, and even £1 the last few years; £1 5s. is paid for dressing. The reason of the fall in price is because so many rabbit-skins have taken their place.

19. *Sir George Grey.*] Do you know anything of the sea-elephant?—The sea-elephants, if they are not protected, will soon be worked out. We have none of them, but on the Tasmanian islands they are to be found in thousands. We have sea-leopards, sea-lions, fur-seals, but not one sea-elephant. The Maquaries are full of sea-elephants. But the sea-elephants are more helpless than any other. You have nothing to do but go along and lance as many as you wish in a day: you may kill as many in a day as would take you three or four days to remove. In many places they are not as numerous as they were; and in these places, I believe, people engaged in this business are trying on with the penguins, because the sea-elephants have become scarce. It is a pity that Tasmania does not protect them. If not protected they must soon be wiped out altogether. There is one place on the west side of Macquarie Island where they reckoned upon 200 tons of sea-elephant oil if they could land there to take it; but they did not succeed, because they were not able to put down their launch. When the people engaged in this trade have exhausted the Maquaries there is little doubt they will try the islands belonging to New Zealand for penguins and albatrosses. If the boiling-down system is adopted, in a few years after that these birds will be wiped out altogether.

20. Is the Tasmanian Government taking no steps towards the protection of these animals?—I do not know, but it is no secret that Mr. Hatch, of Invercargill, is concerned in this business. In fact, he told me himself that he was going to give them a rest this year—he was going to give the sea-elephants a rest, and then going in for penguins.

21. What does he do with this oil?—He sells it; it is very good oil for some purposes—for machines for instance; machine-workers are very glad to get it.

22. You say the sea-elephants are more numerous at one time of year than another?—Yes, about every six months they come and go.

23. *Mr. Marchant.*] What is the size of the sea-elephant?—Oh, some of them are 25ft. long; they are pretty nearly as big as black fish, but they are very helpless; they can hardly move; it will take ten minutes for one of them to go a chain; they are easily destroyed.

24. How many men does this so-called industry give employment to?—About fourteen; if you include the men that sail the vessel to bring the oil to New Zealand it would be about twenty. The oil has to be refined; it is not fit for use when taken from the animal. I think there are about twenty men employed in connection with the business altogether. I am speaking of the Tasmanian islands. There has been no attempt as yet, so far as I know, to get oil from our islands.

MEMORANDUM by Captain FAIRCHILD.

The sea-leopards are very numerous on the Macquarie Islands, and there are a few to be found on the Auckland and Campbell Islands. Their only value would be their skin and oil. They are much smaller than the sea-lions, and would not be worth more than 10s. or 11s. each. They would very soon become extinct if they were treated as the sea-elephants have been treated on the Macquaries during the last ten years—by being boiled down for their oil.

[*Approximate Cost of Paper.*—Preparation, nil; printing (1,300 copies), £2 3s. 6d.]

By Authority : GEORGE DIDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1890.