

9. *The Chairman.*] You do not mean by that that the Government should extend the present lease?—The leases are put up by auction, and I expect to get mine again. I think the distance of the fence erected is something about twenty-eight or thirty miles, and I think that the lighter style of fence that McArthur and myself propose to erect would not come to over £120 to £130 a mile. I am quite satisfied in my own mind, if I am able to carry out my proposal, that Canterbury will be comparatively safe for some years unless the rabbits come through at the West Coast side, and come down that way.

10. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Roughly, what acreage of Government land have you under lease? I suppose it lies between the Boyle and the Waiau?—It runs round Steyning Creek. I have only 8,600 acres, and such very poor land that it takes about six acres to the sheep.

11. Is all that in the midland area?—I suppose so; and there is no danger of any one buying it, because 10s. an acre is too dear.

Mr. McARTHUR examined.

*Witness:* Mr. Chairman, I think, after what Mr. Rutherford has said, I have nothing to say. I am exactly in the same position as he is. It is simply a continuation of the fence from Mr. Rutherford's boundary to where the present fence joins the Clarence fence in the Waiau Valley. There may be a better place five miles nearer, but we must explore that. This fence only protects about one-third of my run. I am prepared, in exactly the same way as Mr. Rutherford, to pay pound for pound. But I think in my case the Government should do a little more, considering one-third of my land is only protected by the proposed fence. Of course, I am prepared to do what Mr. Rutherford is doing in any case; but I think when two-thirds of the land is thrown out of this proposed fence probably the Government will give me a little more then. I do not think there is anything else I have got to say; Mr. Rutherford has already shown the points of the case.

12. *Mr. Buchanan.*] When you say the fence would only protect one-third of your land, you mean two-thirds are out of the proposed fence?—It is. It cost me about £500 to kill these rabbits, because it costs about three or four shillings a piece to have them killed.

13. The present fence ends in the main bush?—Yes; it ends in a dense bush at the end of the Waiau River, and I think it would be possible, with great care and watchfulness, to keep them out at that end. It ends in a precipice of bare, barren rock. Of course, it is hard to say where rabbits will go, but as yet there is no sign of them working round, and we watch them very carefully. If the rabbits get round there, then there is a place about four or five miles lower down where we should run a fence in to the West Coast. However, the upper end would have to be taken down and run into this valley, and then across the saddle, at a height of 3,000ft.

14. *Mr. Duncan.*] Has anything been done to make this fence at Waiau?—No.

15. Then, does the Committee understand you to say that you want more concession than Mr. Rutherford with regard to the erection of this fence?—I did not say I wanted it; I only pointed out that this fence only protects one-third of my land.

16. What area is that one-third?—I think from about 20,000 to 25,000 acres.

Mr. McFARLANE examined.

*Witness:* I do not think I have anything to say except to back Mr. McRae up and in supporting these gentlemen in petitioning the Government. Of course, I represent the freehold interest in the district entirely. I will show you, pretty roughly, what we have already done in the way of fencing. On the freehold there are forty-five miles erected; on the leasehold, through Crown lands, thirty-two miles. The freehold cost £6,200 and the leasehold cost about £8,000—that is, £2,000 more than the freehold fencing has cost us. The wages for maintenance in the freehold are £387 a year, and on the leasehold it is about £705. Freeholders have been paying pound for pound with the Government, and they do not feel disposed now to do anything further on the Crown lands in the way of fencing, and they are simply backing up Mr. McArthur and Mr. Rutherford in their proposition to the Government. The Rabbit Board is rated up to the full amount, and they are not disposed to rate themselves any further.

17. *The Chairman.*] I suppose we may take you to be an absolutely disinterested witness so far as the leasing of Crown land is concerned?—Yes.

18. And your evidence, in consequence, will be more valuable. Do you think it will at a future time enhance the value of Crown lands, when the present leases expire?—Yes. If the country is left as it is at present it will be overrun with rabbits in a few years, and the leases will become valueless.

19. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Your property is a good deal away from this?—Yes; but I am acquainted with this country.

20. You have no personal interest?—No; no personal interest whatever. No more than that supposing this fencing is not done the whole of the Crown lands will become infested with rabbits, and will become a menace to the whole of Canterbury.

21. *Mr. Duncan.*] I suppose you are well acquainted with this country that the fence runs through?—I am fairly well acquainted with it. I have seen the most of it.

22. Then, would you suppose, or do you suppose, that it is a right thing for the Government to do to spend this money in erecting this fence?—Yes, I think it is a perfectly legitimate thing for them to do, considering they are acting in the position of landlords, and it is through their own property, and that it is right for the Government of the country to protect their own interests.

23. Would the railway company not necessarily benefit by the erection of this fence?—I should take it that that would be a matter between the Government and the railway company.

*Mr. McRae:* I might state, gentlemen, that unless the fence is put up, in my opinion, the country will neither be good for the Government or the Midland Railway Company. If the rabbits get on to it it will be perfectly useless for anybody.