

SESS. II.—1891.
NEW ZEALAND.

HURUNUI RABBIT BOARD'S FENCE, NORTH CANTERBURY

(REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED TO INSPECT THE).

Laid on the Table by the Hon. J. McKenzie, with the Leave of the House.

The RABBIT-FENCE COMMISSIONERS to the Hon. J. MCKENZIE.

SIR,—

Christchurch, 10th April, 1891.

We have the honour to forward our report of the inspection of the Hurunui Rabbit Board's fence, in accordance with your request. We examined the whole length of about eighty-four miles (in the same careful manner as we did the South Canterbury fence), from near the head of the River Waiau to the sea, at the mouth of that river.

The section starting from the inland terminus up the Waiau to the south side of the Hanmer Plains we found had been strengthened along the parts of the fence where rabbits were feared to be numerous by having a ribbon-netting of 1in. mesh and 18in. wide fastened along the bottom of the original fence. This was erected by the Board for the purpose of preventing small rabbits from going through the 1½in.-mesh netting. We consider this a matter of assistance to the efficacy of the fence, so long as it is placed a sufficient distance in the ground, or pegged down, to stop the small rabbits from getting underneath, and extra ties be fixed wherever the two nettings are apart on the upper edge of the ribbon, otherwise when the ribbon separates it makes a good footing for rabbits climbing over.

Along the whole line we found the manufacture of the netting faulty, a great many of the meshes being of unequal size and large enough to let small rabbits through; but, in justice to the supervision, we must add that most of these faults had been repaired. Consequently, owing to this imperfection in the manufacture, the Board would, in our opinion, be acting wisely by continuing the erection of this ribbon-netting throughout. Portions of the netting on this section were considerably below the standard height, and in such places it would be advisable that the height be raised to at least 3ft. from the ground. The line of fence has been well chosen, running as it does (with the exception of Maling's Pass) from St. James's to Lake Tennyson, and again from the crossing of the Waiau River to the terminus of the fence along the south side of a river at a short distance, and in this manner affording every reasonable expectation that all rabbits which cross the river may be easily dealt with. The inland terminus, near the head of the Waiau, which runs a short distance into the bush, is not, in our opinion, a satisfactory ending, as there is at present no barrier to stop rabbits getting round the end where it is carried into the bush.

The portion from St. James's to the south side of the Hanmer Plains is in good order, with the exception of a short piece on the range between St. James's homestead and the Dillon River, where the netting shows signs of having suffered from the snow; but we believe the Board is taking steps to alter the line to a safer place.

The section from Leslie Hills Bridge to Mount Palm was in good order considering the faulty manufacture. On this section, wherever the fence runs near a suitable river-bluff, wing-fences and traps should be erected.

On the section from Mount Palm to the sea the fence is carried for the greater portion of its length over two rough and difficult ranges. It appears to be in good order, but careful inspection of netting near the ground in many places (such as the Leamington Flat) is next to impossible owing to the length of grass. The same remark in the last paragraph as to wing-fences and traps applies here. Ample evidence exists on this section to show that the fence is endangered by cattle being allowed to run on both sides of the fence. The terminus at the sea cannot be looked upon as thoroughly satisfactory until provision has been made to cope with rabbits that get upon the shingle-bed and bank between the present ending and the sea. It is to be hoped that the Board will take prompt action to remedy this defect, and obtain such a terminus as will be practically secure.

It was noticed by us that few wire-netting traps had been erected along the fence, and these were of no practical value. We consider it is most important that at all suitable angles short wing-fences should be erected for the purpose of leading rabbits into properly-constructed traps, especially as most of the line offers natural facilities for the erection of such traps; but in no case whatever should any openings be made in the main fence in connection with traps.

We were pleased to find that in most cases the gates were of iron, well constructed and well hung; but it would be desirable to substitute iron gates for the few wooden gates that now exist, so as to better insure the fence.

The floodgates as a rule are good, but where constructed of wood they should in every case be backed with wire netting.

It is satisfactory to note that the Board under its regulations insists upon careful maintenance by the caretakers, and provides regular inspection by the Board's Inspector, Mr. Lance. We trust, however, that the advantages to be gained by periodical inspection of the whole of the fence by members of the Board will not be lost sight of. In this way the Board will be always able to judge for itself of the satisfactory condition of the fence, and so be thoroughly independent of outside rumour.

We have thought it our duty to draw attention to the few points on which the fence was deficient, but we are happy to be able to report that we believe the fence to be carrying out the work for which it was erected, so long as it is carefully maintained and improved in such manner as experience proves necessary.

So far as we were able to see, very few rabbits or scratchings were to be found on either side of the fence; still we are glad to learn that, as a further precaution, a second line of fence is to be erected from the Upper Waiau Bridge up the south side of the Waiau, as undoubtedly some few rabbits exist on the high country south of the present Clarence line and the River Waiau.

It is also a matter of encouragement to the Board to observe that their work is being materially assisted by the erection of so many private rabbit-proof fences adjacent to the Board's fence.

In conclusion, we desire to record our thanks to the Board and to their Inspector for the kindness shown in assisting us towards the performance of our duties.

We have, &c.,

THOS. DUNCAN, M.H.R.,	} Rabbit-fence Commissioners.
J. S. RUTHERFORD,	
W. C. WALKER,	
J. T. SHAW,	

The Hon. J. McKenzie,
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