

has been $6\frac{3}{4}$ per cent.; and, of course, it is only fair that I should allow for an average death-rate on that 17,679. That comes to 1,183 head, leaving a loss attributable to the snowstorm of 6,105 head. In 1903 there were 5,413 ewes put to the ram. On that number I have allowed an average death-rate of $6\frac{3}{4}$ per cent.—365—leaving 5,048. The average lambing for seven or eight years has been $64\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., so that from the 5,048 ewes I ought to have had 3,255 lambs. From this number I have deducted the number of lambs marked—namely, 1,415—leaving the loss attributable to the snowstorm at 1,840 lambs. Then, with regard to the values, I have put down the 6,105 sheep at 13s. each, the fleeces (6,105) at 4s. each, and the 1,840 lambs at 7s. 3d. Those items come to £5,856, and from that I deduct the value of 4,300 skins picked up, at 1s. 9d. each, £376, leaving a loss of £5,480. In connection with those values I would like to say that the 13s. per sheep for the shorn sheep is arrived at on the basis of sales which have taken place in my own neighbourhood. I have submitted them to the agents, who say they think those prices are fair and reasonable. The price of 7s. 3d. per head for lambs was realised at a neighbouring station when the lambs were sold—I refer to the Patearua Run. Of course, the process of stocking up is necessarily a very slow one. Of late years we have been losing a lot of lambing country, and the average is not a high one; and by the time the very old culls, which must be sold, and the sheep required for food are deducted, the increase, as you will see at once, must naturally be a very slow one; and so it takes a number of years to bring the number of sheep up to the former carrying-capacity again. The 17,600 sheep referred to was a little below my usual number, but after we got an extension of lease in 1895 under the Pastoral Tenants' Relief Act I reduced the stocking of the run by about four thousand. I saw the necessity of giving the grass an opportunity of recovering, and I reduced the stock accordingly.

76. *Mr. Wood.*] What is the greatest number of sheep you have carried on the run?—A little over 36,000.

77. What number do you carry now?—I will carry from 18,000 to 20,000 after this.

78. What number do you carry now?—A little over 11,000 at present. I gave you the figures which account for that reduction. When we first took up the run there was a commonage which we had the use of for about eighteen months or two years, and we lost a 7,000-acre block on the flat by the expiry of the lease. Then, some years ago the Government gave notice of resumption and took another 7,000-acre block. So all the low country has been docked off us.

79. How many sheep did you shear last year?—10,391.

80. The value you set down at 13s.: was that without wool?—Yes.

81. Four shillings, you say, for the wool?—Yes.

82. That makes 17s. a head?—I may say that a number of ewes have been sold in the district at the following prices: At Puketoi, practically a neighbouring run, 15s.; at Linnburn, 14s.; and at Ida Valley, 14s. 10d. So I think my figures are not too high.

83. Do you think that is a fair average price, taking culls in?—I think it is a very fair average price. I could not possibly have replaced them at that price. Those were the prices that were given for old culls—cull ewes. My losses were pretty even right through. The loss was pretty heavy amongst the younger sheep, but was fairly even right throughout.

84. *Mr. Harding.*] Have you experienced the same difficulty as Mr. Sutherland with regard to the diminution of the natural grasses?—Yes. No doubt central Otago is going back.

85. Have none of you taken any steps to try to acclimatise suitable grasses?—Until we got extensions of lease in 1895 we did not know who was to own the runs. About every two years we were brought into the market and had to fight for our very existence for subdivisions of the run, and these subdivisions were only put up for two, three, four, and five years. So I have done nothing in the way of sowing grasses on the run.

86. *Mr. Jennings.*] With regard to these recurring leases, yours is the second, is it not?—Yes; we bought in 1883.

87. You said that the country is becoming of less value owing to the grasses going back, and so forth. I see that the petition merely asks that a similar Bill to that of 1895 be passed, giving relief. If the country is going back, as you and Mr. Sutherland say, is there any other remedy that you can suggest besides passing a Relief Bill?—Nature might come to our assistance. The last five seasons have been very dry in central Otago. I may say that I have repeatedly mentioned to the former Commissioner of Crown Lands, Mr. Maitland, and other members of the Land Board, that I thought they ought to grant a rebate of rent and satisfy themselves that the money was spent in sowing suitable grasses throughout the country.

88. Have any experiments been made in regard to what may be termed "suitable" grasses?—I have never done so; but within some miles of me—at Earnscliffe—the Government took over a run, and I suppose the Hon. Mr. Duncan could tell you what the experience was there. They were sowing grasses for weeks and months, but what the result was I cannot say.

89. *Mr. Harding.*] It was not very striking, anyhow?—I did not see it myself.

90. *Mr. EU.*] What is it that you want the Committee to do in the way of recommendation?—I suggest an extension of lease, to give us time to recoup our losses, as I am given to understand that financial assistance would not be entertained.

91. What is the term of your lease now?—It expires in 1910.

92. And then the lease will be placed on the open market, and you will run the risk of losing it?—Yes.

93. Is it on account of uncertainty that you do not feel inclined to do much in the way of grassing?—By the time the grasses began to establish themselves you would run the risk of being outbid; and the runholder is the shy-cock of any man who wants to go for him. He knows that the runholder must have a certain subdivision. Such a case happened with us. One of our subdivisions was put up, and a man with whom I had had a little difference ran it up to an exorbitant figure and bought the lease, and we had to buy it off him again. But Sir John McKenzie accepted