

120. In your opinion, would that lead to very desirable improvements being carried out?—Yes, without doubt it would.

121. Especially towards the termination of the leases?—I think it would be better if you could make a start at the beginning and have the benefit of the improvements right through. I think that the sooner the grassing could be proceeded with the better.

122. What you say is that owing to the limitation of the amount allowed for improvements at the termination of the lease the land is not being applied to the use to which it might be put?—Owing to the limitation and the fact that one has to fight for subdivisions of his run continuously at present. That is one of our great grievances. The authorities have no right to ask a man to go and fight for his homestead every few years, and that is practically what we have to do down there.

123. What has been your experience of the rabbit nuisance? Has that been well got under?—Yes; it has given me no trouble until this last spring. The rabbits would not touch the pollard, and I had to have recourse to trapping again. This spring they may take the pollard quite as readily as ever. Last spring and autumn was the only failure I have had with the pollard.

124. Then, you have nothing to apprehend with regard to the rabbit nuisance?—No, I am not afraid of the rabbit pest. I may say that I ran out the average for the last twelve years, and it comes to £424—practically another rent in rabbiting.

125. *Mr. Harding.*] That is net?—Yes.

126. *Mr. Witty.*] What is the length of your lease?—It expires in 1910.

127. What is the length—twenty-one years?—No. Under the Pastoral Tenants' Relief Act of 1895 we got fourteen years' lease from that time for the bulk of the run, and the lease of one low subdivision for seven years with the right of resumption. It was resumed, but we arranged with the Board to get it back, and we got it. The high country was no good without that block.

128. You say that the Department should allow compensation for any grassing-down, but at the same time you say you have never tried it at all?—I suggest that the Government ought to grant us a rebate of a certain portion of the rent, to sow grass. That would be very much enhancing the public estate.

129. It seems a pity that grass-sowing has not been tried?—There was no use in trying it. A person doing it may not derive the benefit.

130. With a fourteen-years lease it would surely pay to try it, even if the trial was only on a small scale?—I applied for permission to plough up some ground to sow down, but it was refused. I wanted to turn up the ground, and, of course, I would have sown down grass, but they would not allow me to break the surface.

131. *Mr. Jennings.*] You said that if you had a longer term of lease you would nurse the land more—that is, you would not take so much out of it?—I would see that it was not taxed to its utmost capacity.

132. If the land were freehold you would still further nurse it?—Not with a secured tenure. With the secured tenure it would be as good as freehold.

133. Then, it is simply a question with you of the term of the lease?—Of the term of the lease. The Government is to blame, on account of treating us in the manner they have with the short lease, for some of the country being in its present state.

134. *Hon. Mr. Duncan.*] Would the improvement of the grasses be any protection against a snowstorm when it came?—I do not know whether it would be a very material protection against a snowstorm. There would be this protection: that the sheep would be in better order, and would stand the pinch better.

135. They might not if you increased the number?—I never said I would increase the number.

JAMES SUTHERLAND, Manager of Benmore Station for Messrs. Robert Campbell and Sons,
examined. (No. 6.)

136. *The Chairman.*] Will you make your statement now, Mr. Sutherland?—I have not much of a statement to make, Mr. Chairman. Our losses are shown in the petition, and of the number twenty-five thousand were lost on Benmore Station, which I manage, and of which I can speak with knowledge. The total loss of sheep on Benmore was thirty-four thousand, but I deduct the average death-rate of nine thousand. The average death-rate on the station over a number of years has been 10 per cent.—that is, with the exception of the two bad years. In ordinary winters the death-rate averages 10 per cent., and deducting the ordinary death-rate we get a total loss through the snowstorm of twenty-five thousand in round numbers. The lambing average is about 65 per cent. In 1903 the lambing was 30 per cent., showing a shrinkage of about 35 per cent., which I attribute to the snow. Then, the wool-clip was much lighter in consequence, and the quality of the wool was inferior. With regard to the rabbits, I can only say that the remarks made by Mr. D. Sutherland as to the expense of keeping down the rabbits I agree with. I might mention that in 1894—previous to the winter of 1895—the station was at its full carrying-capacity, there being, in round numbers, 90,000 sheep on the place. During the ten years since then there have been 160,000 lambs bred, in round numbers; we have bought about 25,000 sheep for stocking-up purposes; we have sold sheep which it was absolutely necessary to sell to the number of some 50,000; and there are at present on the station 54,000 head. The total deaths—including the sheep killed for station use—during the ten years are thus shown to be 171,000 sheep.

137. *Mr. Harding.*] Are your principals or employers resident in New Zealand?—No; at Home.

138. Could you give us any idea as to your net returns over a period of, say, five years?—No, I could not.

139. Does the country suffer much from high winds?—Yes, considerably sometimes.

140. What I want to get at is as to whether there is any country suitable for breaking up?—