

Your Committee having, in concert with a Committee of the other branch of the Legislature, obtained a great amount of information on the subject of the rabbit nuisance from many persons, and from various parts of the colony, has agreed that a measure calculated to deal more effectually with the nuisance is urgently required, and therefore recommends that a Bill be introduced in this session to deal with the question, which shall provide that its administration shall be conducted by officers of the Government on a principle similar to that by which the provisions of "The Sheep Act, 1878," are enforced; and that all unoccupied Crown land, also Native or reserved land, as well as private land, should bear their proportionate share of the expenses of administering the Act.

The Committee desires to impress upon Parliament its conviction that immediate and energetic action is essential in order to arrest the further extension of, and to suppress, this pest; otherwise the result will be ruinous.

Mr. Bastings moved, and the question was proposed, That the report as read be adopted.

Mr. Beetham moved to amend the report by inserting the words, "the cost of destroying rabbits and," after "share of," in line 13.—Agreed to.

Another amendment proposed by Mr. Beetham to add the words, "and that provision should be made therein for the protection of the natural enemies of the rabbit," after "Act," in line 14.

The question being put, Mr. Thomson moved, That the words "at present in the colony" be added to the proposed amendment.—Agreed to.

And the question as amended being put, it was resolved in the affirmative.

Resolved, That the report as amended be agreed to, and brought up this day

On motion of Hon. Mr. Menzies, *Resolved*, That the Chairmen of the Committees appointed to consider the Rabbit Nuisance be requested to communicate with the Government to urge upon them the necessity of bringing in a Bill without delay; failing which, that the Chairman aforesaid prepare a Bill to embody the suggestions contained in the report.

The Committee then adjourned.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

APPENDIX A.

FRIDAY, 8TH JULY, 1881.

Mr. FRASER, of Earnsclough, Otago, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] You occupy pastoral country in the Middle Island?—Yes; and freehold as well.

2. About what extent?—70,000 acres of leasehold in Otago.

3. What experience have you had of the rabbit pest?—I have been endeavouring to destroy rabbits for the last seven or eight years, but I have had them on the property for a much longer time.

4. What means have you employed for abating the nuisance?—During the first few years I employed men with guns and dogs, but found that even thirty men did not effect any permanent reduction in the number of rabbits; since then I have used grain poisoned with phosphorus. I have also used bisulphate of carbon, as well as all other means known.

5. Which do you consider of all the most effectual?—Poison is the only one to have any effect at all.

6. Has your district been under the Rabbit Nuisance Act?—Yes, it has, for the last eighteen months or two years.

7. Does the Act work satisfactorily or otherwise?—It does not work satisfactorily

8. Can you suggest any improvement in the present Act?—If the present Act is to remain in force, and to be administered by elective bodies, certain amendments are absolutely necessary. The words "landowner," "owner," "occupier," or "resident agent," are found in the various clauses of the Act, sometimes singly, sometimes collectively in the penal clause, section 18, the word "occupier" alone is used. Hence, an owner of property, who was not the occupier, could not be summoned under this clause. These terms should be held to be synonymous. I know of an instance in the Vincent Rabbit District, of which I am Chairman, where the owner, not being the occupier of the run, our solicitor advised us that an action would not lie against said owner. The occupier was a man of straw, had no stock on the run, indeed had nothing but rabbits, so it was of no use proceeding against him. As the nuisance to the adjoining properties was becoming very serious, the Trustees at length resolved to put men on to clear off the rabbits, but this course is not nearly so satisfactory as compelling the owner or occupier to do the work himself. In short, unless it is desired to see the whole country overrun with rabbits, every owner or occupier of property on which rabbits are numerous should be treated as the owner of scabby sheep is treated, namely, compelled to abate the nuisance, or be severely fined. Under the Act, the onus of proof that efficient steps are not being taken to destroy rabbits is thrown on the body administering the Act. A little reflection will convince any one how difficult, and in many instances how impossible, it would be to prove a negative. The onus of proof should clearly lie with the owner or occupier of the property. The Trustees or other body administering the Act should have the power to delegate their authority to their Inspector, or to one or more of their own number. In large districts it may and does happen that the Trustees reside twenty or thirty miles apart, and it is too great a tax on their time to insist on their meeting so frequently as it is sometimes at present necessary that they should do. If they had the power I suggest, even were such delegation to hold good only from meeting to meeting, their Inspector could deal with cases as they arose, and thus enable the Act to be promptly and efficiently administered. This is of great importance. I have had practical experience of the inconvenience arising from the absence of this power.

9. Can their powers not be delegated to the Inspector?—No; there is no such person mentioned in the Act: merely a collector, and he has no power.