

10. Is not power vested in the Sheep Inspector?—Not so long as the Trust exists.

11. Are there any other improvements you can think of so as to make the Act more workable?—No. The Act should be less cumbersome in the matter of elections, power should be given to delegate authority, and an alteration should be made in the interpretation of “landowner,” “owner,” or “occupier.” If elective bodies are to continue to administer the Act it can be rendered more workable by the adoption of the foregoing suggestions. It is also somewhat cumbersome to be compelled to follow all the provisions of the regulation of the the Local Elections Act, and also of the Rating Act. No valuation roll is necessary, as the rate is on the acreage, not on the value of the property. Occasionally, through having to follow the elaborate machinery of these Acts, difficulties arise. Thus, in one rabbit district, the Trustees, having a slight confusion in their minds as to the terms “making a rate,” and “striking a rate,” found themselves unable eventually to levy the rate. They had incurred certain liabilities, and could not raise any money to defray them. Eventually the County Council, by resolution, abolished the Trust, but several months had elapsed during which time nothing was done to enforce the efficient destruction of rabbits within the district.

12. *Mr. Beetham.*] Do you consider the ratepayers' roll satisfactory?—I do not attach much importance to the limitation of the area.

13. Do you approve of clause 19?—I do not. The persons one would prefer to see acting as trustees are not likely, as a rule, to accept office if they are liable to be dismissed summarily at the will of a majority of the County Council of their district.

*The Chairman:* It might be as well, when we have an important subject before us, that honorable members should, before we pass on to another subject, ask any questions relevant to the one under consideration. From my personal knowledge of the working of the Act I am confident that the rabbit nuisance will never be properly dealt with till the Government assumes the administration of the Act. In my opinion no elective body is competent to deal effectively with this nuisance, as they would not enforce the penal clauses strictly and impartially. Only Inspectors entirely independent of local influence can be depended upon to do this. Scab would never have been stamped out if the Scab Act had been administered by elective bodies.

15. Have you not found in your experience that some of the Trustees have failed to administer the Act in their own case?—No, not within my experience. The Trustees in our district are the ones who have made the most strenuous efforts to destroy the rabbits. I have heard that what you state has occurred in other parts of the country, and I can quite conceive it would be very possible. This question of administration is one which does not affect only one or two districts but the whole colony, because, from my experience, the rabbits during the last few years have spread over an enormous area of country, and the evil is an increasing one. A few years ago the runholders on the Maniototo Plains rather laughed at the idea of rabbits becoming a nuisance; that is, four or five years ago. Now, however, they find the evil becoming nearly as great as with us. In the Waitaki District the people laughed at the rabbit question, and held the theory that rabbits would not thrive at all in their part of the country. I felt satisfied it was only a question of time, and now in some runs in the Waitaki they are nearly as bad as in our district. From Waitaki to Foveaux Strait the whole country is more or less infested with rabbits. In South Canterbury they are on the increase. Only the other day I was speaking to some persons in South Canterbury, who asked if anything was likely to be done to check the evil. They mentioned that rabbits were coming over from the Mackenzie Country to the vicinity of the freehold lands. They desired that something might be done to prevent their properties being destroyed.

16. But, in addition to private persons not taking any steps to clean their runs, has the Government taken any steps?—No, none whatever. It is greatly owing, in many parts of the country, to the enormous numbers of rabbits upon unoccupied Crown lands that all the efforts of large and small holders have been quite futile. The work is a never-ending one. I can instance my own case. During the last two or three years I got the rabbits pretty well down till the spring-time, when they came in again in thousands on to the run. Messrs. Cargill and Anderson, my neighbours, whose property is bounded by unoccupied Crown lands and commonage, began to poison last year, and did splendid work. They must have killed about 500,000 rabbits. Last spring their place was in as bad a state as if they had never put poison down. Another instance in regard to the Mount Benger freeholders. The Government sold a portion of this run under the pastoral deferred-payment system. There were four sections of from 1,000 to 1,200 acres each, and right across these is the Benger commonage. This place is swarming with rabbits, and nothing has ever been done to destroy them. The holders of the sections cleared their properties two or three times, but they have been nearly ruined, and are talking now of abandoning their holdings, as they feel it to be perfectly hopeless work.

17. Have many Government runs been abandoned during the last few years in consequence of rabbits?—A good many. I have heard of an area of land in Southland, which formerly used to carry a large number of sheep, having been let lately for a few pounds, evidently with a hope or desire of evading their responsibility. That is a mistaken policy, because they can never carry out their desire. To let lands to persons who will take them at a nominal figure will never effect the destruction of rabbits, as these persons will only kill the rabbits while it pays them to do so; and when the body administering the Act became too oppressive they would throw up the land, and the penal clause could not be enforced against them, as there would be nothing to recover against.

18. Did you observe some time ago about fifteen or twenty runs advertised to be let by auction?—Yes; but nobody offered for them. For one of the runs the Government used to get £240 a year. When the lease expired the holder refused to have anything more to do with it, and the Government brought down the rent to £100, then to £60, and the other day it was offered for £30, and nobody would take it.

19. Did you observe 34,000 acres offered for £10 a year, and 37,000 acres offered for £20 a year?—The last is, I believe, the one I referred to. I am certain that the failure of the Government to take efficient steps to destroy the rabbits on the unoccupied Crown lands I have referred to will result in a considerable diminution in the letting value of the adjoining pastoral country.