

20. Supposing the Government do not clear these unoccupied lands, what would be the consequence to the Government and to the value of property?—A good deal of the country will be abandoned, and the area of unoccupied Crown lands will increase very considerably; it must do so. I am sure the only mode of dealing with the difficulty is by dealing with it the same as with scab, namely, by the Government administering the Act through their own Inspectors. It could be done by using the machinery of the Sheep Inspectors' Department. The funds could be obtained from the surplus arising from the sheep-tax, and any deficiency could be made up in some other manner. The way I should like to see it done would be by appointing the Sheep Inspectors inspectors under this Act. A number of other men would also have to be appointed as assistants, and they should have full power to administer the Act, and report every month to the Sheep Inspector of the district. This, however, is a matter of detail which is perhaps not worth going into at present. It would be absurd, however, to expect the present Sheep Department to overtake the duties required. If that is to be done, better to let the administration remain as at present. No one man would be competent to supervise effectively a large district, especially if it contained many small holdings, as the latter, from my experience, are much more troublesome to deal with than the large holdings.

21. *Mr. Thomson.*] You say the Act should be administered by the Government, and you say also that the Crown lands are very much affected by the rabbits. Do you not think the Inspector might have a delicacy sometimes in doing his duty, from the circumstance of the Government, owning so much Crown land, in enforcing the Act against the Government?—Not if you have the right person as Inspector. The Government would bear the responsibility eventually, because, if they brought pressure to bear upon an Inspector, they would have to account for it. I do not suppose the Government would attempt to evade their responsibility in that way, and, what is more, I think that, if the Government have to assume the responsibility of killing rabbits on unoccupied Crown lands, they would prefer to do so through their own officer rather than through an irresponsible elective body.

22. *Mr. Bastings.*] You are quite certain that the primary cause of the pest, up where you allude, is from the fact that on the Crown lands no means have been taken to destroy the rabbits?—In one portion of our district it is so.

23. Do you remember the year before last Mr. Kitchen had nearly a hundred men for four months, and thus cleared his land?—Yes, I am aware of it; they are worse than ever now. He has eighty-five men just now. Mr. Clark's agent, a short time ago, discussed with me the advisability of fencing with wire-netting the freehold from the leasehold land, and of abandoning the leasehold.

24. They did abandon one run?—Yes; that is the one they used to pay £240 a year for, and it has been since offered for £30. I would not take it as a gift.

25. You know Gall's run?—Yes. They suffered most terribly from the rabbits coming down upon them.

26. They employed an enormous number of hands, and found it impossible, from the vicinity of this breeding warren, to keep the land clear?—I know that. Every acre of unoccupied Crown land is nothing but a breeding warren. It would be quite easy for the Government Inspectors to employ gangs of men to clear the rabbits.

27. *The Chairman.*] Is that not the practice in Australia?—I understand it is in South Australia.

28. What does Mr. Clark do on his run now?—He has eighty-five men on. I have had twenty-five men on for seven months until recently. A neighbour has forty men, and another neighbour eighty or one hundred men, laying poison.

29. *Mr. De Lantour.*] Are not these commonages under the management of the County Councils now?—They are supposed to be: they derive revenue from them, but do not admit their entire responsibility. In our district the Vincent County Council did endeavour last year to destroy the rabbits in the Clyde and Cromwell commonages. This year, however, the rabbits are as numerous as ever, and the few men employed shooting are doing little or no good. The Mount Benger District is not in Vincent County, it is in Tuapeka County; but nothing has been done, nor is being done, to kill the rabbits, which are there in countless thousands.

30. *Mr. Bain.*] You say it is seven or eight years since the rabbits appeared?—No; since I began to kill them. The rabbits were introduced on my run by the miners resident thereon, who turned them out in the gullies in spite of my remonstrances. I had no power to stop them from doing it. The rabbits did not appear to make any great headway for some years. The first year I commenced to kill them systematically I got 5,000, next year 20,000, the next year 40,000, when I thought I had conquered them, but they came in on me from Southland; since which time I have killed from 80,000 to 160,000 a year. The 160,000 skins obtained last year would represent fully 400,000 rabbits destroyed, as great numbers die in their holes when poison is used.

31. Then how much will it cost you per annum now? What I want to ascertain is, whether the Government would be recouped if they undertook the work?—When the rabbits are very numerous the skins nearly clear expenses; as soon as they become scarcer then there is a loss. The rabbits must be very numerous before it would pay to kill them. At first it would cost the Government nothing; in fact, I believe, unless they want to let or sell the land, the mere cost of preventing the rabbits being a nuisance to other people would be next to nil.

32. When the bonus was paid upon skins it pretty well met the expense?—Yes; I consider that it did, taking the whole year round.

33. Then you think the system of bonuses acted well?—Yes.

34. *Mr. Collins.*] I should like to ask you if you have lost many sheep from eating poison. Is it necessary to move sheep off the part you poison?—Not at all; I do not know of half a dozen sheep having been lost by it on my run. I can quite conceive it possible to kill both sheep and cattle if the poison is laid in a reckless manner.

35. Then there would be some danger in allowing ignorant persons to lay poison?—Yes.

36. *Captain Russell.*] Has the rabbit pest been affected by the fact that the leases run out shortly?—Not at all. We are obliged to kill the rabbits in order to keep our sheep. Rabbits and sheep cannot live together.