

APPENDIX F

THURSDAY, 21ST JULY, 1881.

Mr. THOMAS FRANCIS HANKINSON (Hankinson Brothers, Te Anau Run, Otago), examined.

223. *The Chairman.*] What experience have you had of the pest?—About four years. Our run has been infested about four years.

224. What means have you employed for abating the nuisance?—Men, dogs, and guns, and finally phosphorized oats.

225. Which did you find most effectual?—The phosphorized oats.

226. Do the rabbits take the poison when feed is plentiful?—No; they take it about seven months of the year. In the hot months poison is not so successful.

227. Have you tried ferrets?—No.

228. From your own knowledge, how many sheep have been lost by poison? How many have you lost?—I do not think we have lost any by the use of poison. Our sheep are merinos, and I do not think merinos will take it.

229. Can you give any estimate of the cost of poisoning per 1,000 acres?—I have tried to get at it as near as I can. I think about 30s. This is only approximate, and would most likely be more. I have only estimated one day's work for two men at 8s. each, and it would likely take two days.

230. What percentage does the return from skins bear to the cost of keeping down the nuisance?

While the rabbits are plentiful it balances, but as soon as they get scarce it is expensive.

231. What do you think would be the effect of natural enemies being introduced, and which would you suggest?—Stoats and such animals might do if brought from cold countries, say Scotland. But they would perish in our mountainous country in winter unless they came from cold countries. I very much doubt if they would be successful. They might be. I know very little about stoats, ferrets, and weasels.

232. *Mr. Beetham.*] But have you had any experience? Do you know of any loss of ferrets or anything of that kind?—I have been on stations where ferrets have been used. Whether they were carelessly treated or not I do know, but they certainly died in winter.

233. *Mr. De Lantour.*] Were they domesticated?—Yes. I know nothing about their being turned out wild, none at all.

234. Has your district been under the Rabbit Act?—Yes.

235. Can you suggest any improvement in the Act?—I think the working of it should be put entirely in the hands of the General Government.

236. Have the Trustees in all cases performed their work satisfactorily?—Well, pretty well. I can only speak of own experience. They have told us what to do, and we have striven to follow it out.

237. On whom should the onus of proving efficient steps at remedying have been taken lie?—On the owners or occupiers.

238. But, provided the owner does not put down the pest himself, should the Inspector have the power to enter on private property and destroy rabbits?—If he refuses to do it himself, after due notice given, he must bear the consequences, certainly.

239. Would you increase the penalty for failure or refusal to take steps?—Yes, I would increase the minimum from £1 to £5. I think the maximum of £20 is pretty severe, because it can be imposed every fortnight.

240. Do you think repressive legislation would be best administered by the Government, by Trustees, or County Councils?—By the Government.

241. How would you abate the nuisance on Crown lands and reserves?—The Government should take it in hand, and use the best means at their disposal, exactly the same as private individuals.

242. How do you think Native lands should be dealt with?—I have had no experience of Native lands.

243. Should power be given to compel governing bodies to put the Act in force by *mandamus* or otherwise?—I should leave it in the hands of the Government.

244. How has the carrying capacity of your district been affected by rabbits. Our run is 74,000 acres. When the rabbits became a pest we had 28,000 sheep, and we finished with 15,500.

245. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] And they not very good?—By using poison pretty plentifully we have a good show of grass this year, and the sheep are now looking very well. We stopped poisoning for a short time, and the result was very perceptible. After the rabbits have been cleared I consider the lands are decidedly improved by their having been there, by the droppings, etcetera, of the rabbits. I have seen a run perfectly bare, and after the rabbits have been cleared for, say, six months there would be a fine show of grass upon it.

246. Has the natural pasture been permanently injured by the rabbits?—I do not think so. I may add that the number of skins from our run in 1878–79 was 68,860; for 1879–80, 57,860; for 1880–81, to April, 64,620. The skins for the last period were principally from poisoned rabbits. These numbers only represent a tithe of rabbits destroyed on the run.

247. *Mr. Bain.*] You said the cost of poisoning per 1,000 acres was 30s., as near as you could make it: was that for laying the poison alone?—That is, for the poison, the oats, the carriage, the men's wages, and the machinery. That is supposed to cover all.

248. *Hon. Mr. Martin.*] That is deducting the return from the skins?—Yes. I may be far wrong; it is very likely to be more. When rabbits are plentiful the skins about pay, but when they get scarce it is a very different thing: then you may have to give 2d. or 3d. a rabbit.

249. *Hon. Mr. Menzies.*] Do you mean the cost is 30s. exclusive of the value of the skins, or that the absolute cost would be 30s.?—As I said, it would cost that to do it. What the skins would yield would be quite another thing altogether. That is to be deducted from the 30s.: 30s. is about it. Of course you may get more skins from one 1,000 acres than from another. If it took two men two days to lay 100 lb., it would cost say £2 5s. approximate.