cannot compel his neighbour to pay half the cost of fencing. I am certain that the more the matter is looked into the more necessary will it be found to take action. I am not going to offer any opinion upon the question of the administration of the waste lands, that is a matter for the Government. However, I may say that I have seen the Government proposals, and I think that if administered properly they will conduce to the settlement of the country

207 *The Chairman.*] You think they will conduce to the settlement of the country?—I believe they will if administered properly There is another point which I hope will be given effect to—in whatever way it may be done—namely, that the proprietorship of every acre of land in the country should be fixed in some one, either by sale or by lease. I am influenced to make this recommendation particularly by the existence of the rabbit pest, of which I have had painful experience. Unless you fix the proprietorship of every acre upon some one, you will find enormous difficulty in dealing with this question. Every commonage and every piece of Crown lands left unoccupied in this country is only another name for a rabbit warren, and while rabbits are allowed to increase without check upon such lands this nuisance will be perpetuated indefinitely

208. There ought to be no unoccupied strips, you think?—None. It may be advisable, of course, in some instances, in order to promote the interests of small settlements, not to adhere strictly to such a plan; but this should be an exception. I am urging the adoption of a general rule.

209. Mining reserves—could no one be held to occupy them?—I do not see why mining reserves should not be occupied. They can be leased. There is nothing to prevent mining reserves having, for the purpose of dealing with this question, an owner. The operation of commonages throughout the country has been most mischievous. They have not benefited those for whom they were created.

210. As to responsibility over hundreds?—It might not be inadvisable to have a system of hundreds operating in some localities; still, I say, it should be avoided, if possible, for the reason stated. Moreover, the cutting up of the pastoral country should be done in such a manner that every portion of it should be occupied. If you so cut it up that there are portions liable not to be applied for, and which will not be taken up, then, I say, you will do that which will be productive of very great evil, and result in serious loss to the country I am satisfied that the opinion I hold upon this subject is held by large and small holders alike in the interior. Many small holders have spoken to me very feelingly about the loss to themselves from their proximity to unoccupied Crown lands. I know some of these men have had to abandon their holdings: they could not keep the rabbits down upon them simply because of their proximity to unoccupied Crown lands. I need go no further upon that point, having indicated my views upon it generally The next question I will refer to is that of the time to be given to runholders to dispose of their stock. I have heard it rumoured that it is the intention of the Government to evade the law as it stands, by giving notice that it is not their intention to re-lease. The 115th clause of the Land Act provides that Government, in the event of their resolving to re-lease the whole or any portion of a run, shall sell the new leases twelve months prior to the expiration of leases now existing: the Act is very clear upon that point. I wish to point out to the Committee what would be the effect of throwing, in a limited period, into the market the whole of the stock now depasturing upon the country about to be dealt with. I believe it has been assumed that the difficulty can be got over by giving notice to present holders that it is not the intention of the Government to re-lease the country, Government having, at the same time, full intention to re-lease it at some period prior to the expiry of the lease. I can only say that any one—except a Government—proposing to do such a thing would be characterized in a peculiar manner. It is asserted that little or no hardship would accrue to present holders of stock by selling the leases at a date much nearer the expiry of existing leases. I have seen it advocated that they would necessarily keep their stock on the runs till the expiry of their lease, whatever might be the date of sale, and that therefore a few months' notice would be ample. I am certain that any one taking a sensible view of the question will see the absurdity of such a statement. In the first place, upon many of the runs in the interior of Otago, mustering is not a question of days or even of weeks; it sometimes takes more than a couple of months to accomplish. This would mean that the runholder—the present occupier—must dispose of the whole of his stock off the shears, because he would not care to let them go back on the country again—at least he would not let his dry stock go. As shearing-time extends from November till the middle of January—a period of three months—he would require to have the most of his stock off the country three months before the lease was up. I would point out that, until the country is disposed of in some manner or another, there will be no purchasers for stock. Until you have fixed the proprietorship of the land in some person, no one can buy stock; no one will buy it. Therefore, by giving notice that you do not intend to re-lease the country, you say to the runholder, "You must dispose of your stock. We will not tell you the date on which we will sell the country, or who will occupy it next, and yet you must provide a purchaser for your stock." I am certain, if this twelve months' notice is not given, that it will not only effect the value of leaseholders' stock, but also the value of stock upon freeholds. It would disorganize the whole stock-market for that year, and virtually mean the confiscation of the property of present holders. Assuming that twelve months' notice be given, the hardship upon the incoming tenant would be very small. For, after all, what does that mean but that he shall pay six months' rent twelve months in advance. This means that he loses the interest merely on six months' rent, which, surely, if he has sufficient means of going upon this country and of stocking it, would not deter him from bidding for it. That is all I wish to point out upon that subject.

211. *Mr. De Lautour*]. Who do you consider is your neighbour, regarding yourself as a runholder—you say your neighbour is not compelled to fence?—I referred particularly to leaseholders, but my remarks would also apply to freeholders and leaseholders.

212. Is it not a fact that all the runs are fenced now?—Yes; but I understand the country is to be subdivided, and it does not follow that these subdivisions will be fenced unless they follow existing fences.

213. You have fences between you now as leaseholders?—Yes.

214. Then why do you suppose that the same law of nature, which compels you to fence between yourself and the adjoining leaseholder, would not compel the putting up of fences between smaller