

1884.
NEW ZEALAND.

THE ANNUAL SHEEP RETURNS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MAY, 1883.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

Mr. B. P. BAYLY to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

Colonial Secretary's Office (Stock Branch), Wellington, 6th June, 1884.

I have the honour to lay before you the annual sheep returns for the year ending 31st May, 1883.

The total number of sheep in the colony on that date was 13,306,329, the previous year being 12,408,106, showing an increase of 898,223 in the twelve months. Of this increase, Canterbury and Napier contribute over 542,000; Wellington and Marlborough, 290,000; Auckland, stationary; Nelson, a slight increase; whilst for Otago, which last year showed a decrease, I am able to report that the returns this year show an increase of more than 42,000.

The classification of sheep can approximately be taken as follows: Merino, males, 3,250,733; females, 4,064,499. Long-wool, males, 432,322; females, 769,417. Cross-bred, males, 1,837,502; females, 2,951,856. Total, males, 5,520,557; females, 7,785,772: making a grand total of 13,306,329.

The exports have amounted to 250,154: of these, 2,382 were shipped alive; the balance, 247,772, being shipped in a frozen state, Port Chalmers contributing 86,781; Lyttelton, 80,920; Wellington, 46,803; Bluff, 16,297; Napier, 9,003; and Auckland, 7,968.

The boiling-down establishments have treated 54,873, of which Napier has furnished the greater portion. For meat-preserving purposes 91,490 were used, chiefly in Napier and Canterbury.

The imports have amounted to 1,020; Australia supplying 423; England, 357; Chatham Islands, 171; and Tasmania 69.

Tabulated form B, attached, shows the number of sheep in each county on the 31st May, 1883, together with the number of infected sheep in each district on the 31st March, 1884.

It will be seen that there is, unfortunately, an increase of 107,354 infected sheep for the year. This has taken place principally on the east coast of the North Island, and in the Marlborough District: in both cases the effect was caused through wild sheep having mixed with clean flocks. This occurred in late winter or early spring, which, being succeeded by a season of unprecedented severity, precluded the owners from employing measures for the treatment of their stock with the same promptness as otherwise might have been done. Fencing, in the first case, and a thorough scouring of the unoccupied country in Marlborough, together with the destruction of all wild sheep found thereon, will, I hope, prevent a recurrence of infection from this cause.

Since the weather has settled, and continuous work carried out, I am happy to state a great reduction in the number has been effected. From March quarter to the present date about 120,000 have been taken off the infected list, and I trust to see a still further reduction by the end of the June quarter.

Another serious drawback to the extermination of the disease is caused by many owners persisting in using patent dipping fluids, not one of which, in my experience, being thoroughly reliable as a curative for scab. For lice and ticks they may be serviceable, but for scab the sulphur and lime dip is always thoroughly effective, nor do I think any other treatment should be recognized by the department as satisfactory when dealing with that disease. Few, if any, of the patent dips can be used at a sufficient heat to be efficacious, and without heat dipping is very uncertain in its effect. The composition of these patent dipping fluids often varies, which renders the result most unsatisfactory.

The Kaikoura Subdivision still contains the largest number of infected sheep. Since last year's report two of the infected runs in that subdivision have changed ownership. Fencing is now being proceeded with, and there is every likelihood of scab being eradicated. It is but fair to state that the last season has been specially hard upon these owners: having high mountainous and part bush country to deal with, severe weather is felt more than on lower country. I still retain the opinion I held last year, that on portions of this country the only solution of the difficulty will be in fencing off the rough and timbered portions, and destroying all sheep that may be found thereon.

During the past twelve months several convictions have been obtained against the owners of scabby sheep, and, although severe penalties have been inflicted, their flocks are still infected. Had the same steps been taken three years since that are now being followed by the owners a different state of affairs would exist, and it becomes a question whether the estreating of these heavy fines will tend to clean the country any more expeditiously.