

gentleman's return, we find him hoisted into this position. He is a Sub-Inspector at the present time. I have asked the Government to remove him, for the whole district is up in arms. That is not an isolated case; but that has created a prejudice against the department. Now that this pest has been twelve years among us, the people there see the necessity for exertion to keep it within bounds. If the department were efficiently filled, the difficulty would be easily kept in check. My view is that the conduct of the department should be vested in the local body. I believe that, if the counties had the supervision of the conduct of the persons employed under the Rabbit Act, a state of greater satisfaction with the results would have been brought about, for local knowledge and local influence upon the conduct of its officers would be brought to bear very much more quickly than under the present system. We feel very much that the power from which action is to be looked for is centred so far away. I think it could be so arranged: if the control could be given to the local body, to the country the result would be more satisfactory.

460. Then, you would separate the two departments—the Sheep Department and the Rabbit Department?—Yes; I would have them quite distinct.

461. Is that because you think there is too much work devolving upon the staff, so that they cannot perform the two duties: or is it simply that you would make the supervision of the Rabbit Department a local concern?—I have no objection to the conduct of the Sheep Department. I think it is well managed; but to bring about a better state of the Rabbit Department I would have the management localized. There is no reason why the Sheep Department should not be embodied in it; but I have no objection to the Sheep Department.

462. Will you tell the Committee your experience in killing rabbits?—Nothing succeeds so well as phosphorized oats.

463. Have you tried the natural enemies?—I introduced weasels and ferrets.

464. Did you turn many out?—I landed sixteen ferrets and three weasels, and put them out on my own property. Now the country has been overrun with ferrets. Nothing has been seen of the weasels.

465. Have you any reason to complain of ferrets on the ground of sheep being attacked?—Not the slightest.

466. *Hon. Mr. Waterhouse.*] Do they breed?—Yes.

467. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Are the rabbits decreased in number?—They are not increasing; we have managed to keep them at about the same number for several years.

468. Has the feed much diminished in consequence of the pest?—The power of carrying sheep has much diminished, but there is now an apparent improvement.

469. Is that in the neighbourhood occupied by you?—Yes.

470. Are your neighbours killing them?—All are doing their utmost, but they can only just keep them down to the same point. The summer makes-up for the number reduced in the winter.

471. Can they not take the poison in summer?—We find they do not.

472. We have had evidence from the North Island that rabbits will take the poison in summer as well as winter?—We do not find it so.

473. If true, would not that be a considerable gain?—That probably is in turning over a sod to attract the rabbits.

474. *Hon. Mr. Williamson.*] Would you lay the poison on the sod or under the sod?—On the sod: it is the newly turned-up ground that attracts the rabbits.

475. I suppose the unoccupied Crown lands in Southland are one great source of the rabbit pest?—Yes; a very great source of the pest; but it is not so menacing now as it was some years ago.

476. Suppose the Rabbit Act were administered locally, how would you arrange as to the Government lands?—It appears to me that there is more difficulty with regard to occupied land. Crown lands can be treated much more easily than some time ago. For it should not be forgotten that the snow is an immense factor in reducing the number of rabbits. Originally the rabbits thrived at the bottom of the snow, but after a few years' close eating the roughness has disappeared, and they are now starved above the snow-line.

477. In summer do they go back?—If you poison the ground in winter below the snow-line there is every reason to believe they will be kept within reasonable bounds.

478. *Hon. Captain Fraser.*] I remember an occasion when we sent a man up to an altitude of 5,000 feet, and he found the rabbits all dead. It is a fact that just below the snow-line you will clear them very much quicker. The very best rabbits were to be found high up on the mountains; but now they cannot live there.

479. *Hon. the Chairman.*] We have heard a great deal about the Inspectors compelling persons to put on rabbiters with dogs: is that a good method?—No; it is the worst.

480. Then you would recommend simply using poison and the natural enemies?—Yes; ferrets in particular.

481. *Hon. Mr. Williamson.*] It seems to be your opinion that, as it is, the pest has been got so much under that very much less expenditure in this department may serve the purpose?—Yes; a very much smaller expenditure. Yes; if there is a good Inspector to go over the ground, seeing that people are doing their duty in this matter—so long as local influence were brought to bear on that Inspector; this would be an essential part of the arrangement.

482. If he were appointed by the department, and it were known that he was appointed for this special purpose, having so great an interest in clearing the country of rabbits, they would look after him, and see that he did his duty?—Yes; so long as he had power to select suitable men to assist him. We had very suitable men in the district, but now the riff-raff of the country are foisted upon the Inspector to act as his substitutes.

483. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Are these the rabbit agents?—Yes.

484. They call them also Sub-Inspectors?—I believe so.

485. *Hon. Mr. Waterhouse.*] You have complained of political influence being brought to bear in