

50. Is the smaller carrying-capacity of the runs solely attributable to the rabbit pest?—Mainly so, but it is due also in a great measure to the short and uncertain tenures which the lessees used to have. They had no inducement to improve the country; hence there was no fencing in and saving of country at the proper season. But the restorative influences are now at work from giving longer leases.

51. Then, in regard to those properties which have got lengthened tenures, the applications for reductions of rent are not so common?—That is so. The department had great difficulty in educating the Legislature up to that point, but we have succeeded; and it has had a most beneficial effect upon the public estate, giving these long tenures.

52. *Mr. Kerr.*] You are aware that rabbits are coming in in great numbers from the Amuri to the Clarence District?—I have just heard rumours to that effect.

53. Do you think there is a suitable place to erect a fence so as to keep them back for a time?—Yes, I think so. It would be a question of expense. It would be a very costly thing to fence off such a large extent of boundary.

54. Would it be cheaper to keep them off than to kill them when they come on?—To fence would be the best.

55. *Hon. Mr. Peter.*] Have the Government made any attempt to kill the rabbits on the high mountains?—They have made no systematic attempt.

56. Have they made any attempt whatever?—Oh, yes; in Otago they have. They have made arrangements in some cases with the adjacent runholders to kill them off.

57. But they have taken no steps themselves except that?—They were responsible for the expenditure. On the west side of Lake Wakatipu the Government arranged with Mr. Cuthbertson, the manager of a run there, who undertook to poison that country, and spent a good deal of money with a great deal of effect, and that country is now let on one of those long leases that I spoke of, and we do not hear anything about it now.

58. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Have the Crown Lands Rangers any instructions on the head of rabbits?—No.

59. So that the Crown land which the Government may be anxious to get occupied, either by lease or by putting it into the market for sale, may be infested with rabbits, and may be placed in the market with that disadvantage?—Yes, that is so.

60. And there is nothing in operation except representations from the Rabbit Department or the Lands Department which would call your attention to the land being infested with rabbits?—No organized agency except that.

61. And, as a matter of fact, does the Rabbit Department periodically make such representations?—They do so whenever they think that the Land Department can assist them in any way. There are frequent representations from one department to the other, more verbal than official.

62. In the case which you have mentioned at Lake Wakatipu what would be the process of setting in motion this work of destruction?—The land would run through several hands, who would throw it up utterly discouraged by the incursions of the rabbits from the mountains behind; and then the Land Department would communicate with the Rabbit Department, and in this case they made arrangements with Mr. Cuthbertson to carry out the work of poisoning.

63. Authorized as to funds by the Lands Department?—No; by the Rabbit Department.

64. *Captain Russell.*] I understood you to say that you believed the control of the Rabbit Department should remain in the hands of the Government?—Decidedly.

65. At the same time I heard you say that you thought the people of Hawke's Bay had been a little too late in erecting their fence to prevent the incursions from the south?—A month ago I saw rabbits on the north side of it.

66. Are you not aware that the Hawke's Bay settlers laboured under disadvantages because they could not get anything done by the department, whereas if they had been able to get assistance the fence would have been put up two years ago?—We surveyed the line of fence at the expense of the Survey Department as soon as wanted. I do not know what application had been made to the Rabbit Department.

67. If there had been local administration when local knowledge was available do you not think that more rapidity would have been exercised in the erection of the fence?—No, I think not. There was a great deal of bother about who was to pay for this fence, and there were frequent meetings of those interested and adjournments of those meetings, all of which were characterized by a desire to get the Government to bear the expense.

69. I may remind you that I am the Chairman of the Rabbit Prevention Committee.—No doubt you can correct me if I am wrong, but I think I am right in saying that the reason why action was not taken earlier was the question as to who should bear the expense. I happen to know that, because strong representations were made to the Lands Department that they should bear the expense because of the large extent of Crown territory there.

70. But that difficulty arose because there was no local administration, and no power to create a local administration which was ready and willing to deal with the matter. Do you think that the infinite variety of circumstances under which rabbits spread can be dealt with by a central authority?—That is the very reason why I think that a central body should have the administration, so that there shall be concerted action taken suitable to the circumstances of each district.

71. The Hawke's Bay District have been unable to do anything until recently. Would that have been the case if there had been local administration?—I do not know.

72. What did they wish to do?—They wished to rate themselves, or to get hold of their own rates, or to get money by some means or other.

73. Is there any objection to creating rabbit districts, with local government to be elected by the ratepayers?—None whatever; but these local districts should be under the control of one authority. I had something to do with the Rabbit Act a few years ago, when the control was taken