

665. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you not think it is necessary that such power should be provided?

*Hon. Mr. Buckley :* Very likely we may ask for such provision this session.

666. *Hon. the Chairman* [to witness]. Scab is much reduced in the colony?—Yes, it is almost exterminated.

667. Have you still as great a staff of Inspectors under the Sheep Act as you had for sheep purposes?—Pretty nearly.

668. Do you think it is necessary to keep up that staff?—No; I think we shall soon be able to reduce it very considerably.

669. Of course the question then arises as to what you propose to do in reference to the rabbits. I understand that a Sheep Inspector at present is also a Rabbit Inspector?—Yes.

670. If, therefore, you abolish Sheep Inspectors, provision would have to be made for Rabbit Inspectors?—I may modify the answer I gave just now. In the South Island, on account of the rabbits, the staff will hardly be capable of reduction at all, and probably we may have to increase the department; but in the North Island I think reductions could be made.

671. How will you be able to diminish the sheep expenditure and, at the same time, carry on the destruction of rabbits?—In regard to rabbits, the expenditure must go on, and the officers must be paid so long as the present system continues.

672. Do you think the present system is the best that could be adopted?—I am not quite sure. I think there is something in a suggestion I have heard made to the effect that local Boards should be appointed to administer the Rabbit Act in certain districts in the Middle Island; but those Boards should not be elective, but nominated, because if members are elected they are sure to be partial, and the Act will not be enforced, whereas, if nominated, no man can threaten them with his vote or those of his neighbours, and they could properly carry out the provisions of the Act. It has been found in practice that the elected Boards were an absolute failure.

673. That is, in past years?—Yes.

674. By whom should they be nominated?—By the Government, I suppose. One would have to consider that question very carefully.

675. Do you mean that these districts should be what are termed subject to trustees, who should have the power of levying rates for the purpose of carrying out the Act?—Either that or give them the sheep-rate.

676. You would not expect that the district should raise another rate for the purpose of killing rabbits while paying heavily for sheep?—I should hand over the sheep-rate to the trustees, or abolish that, and let them levy a rabbit-rate.

677. You do not think it would answer to make use of the present local Boards, such as County Councils and Road Boards?—No; they would not be likely to administer the Act properly.

678. *Hon. Mr. Holmes.*] Do you not think it desirable that, whatever body may administer the Act, settlers should have the power of compelling that body to perform its duties and administer the Act without favour or affection?—No doubt.

679. At present it is not the case?—At present the settlers have no right to say anything.

680. And the Act is administered partially?—It is said so. I am not sure that it is so. I am not prepared to admit that.

681. *Captain Russell.*] Do you not think there might be smaller districts under direct Rabbit control, reporting to the central Board: for this reason—from the report that was read by the Chairman this morning apparently there was no notice taken of a large part of Otago where rabbits are said to exist?—The report which has just been read is the report of the Chief Inspector for the whole of the District of Otago. In a large district there are a considerable number of Inspectors who have each a district of their own. That report is only a digest of the reports of these officers.

682. And do they report?—They are supposed to report to the Chief Inspector of their district. They send monthly diaries always.

683. You think that administration by elected Boards has failed in the past. Those Boards, however, did not raise rates?—In some cases they did, but in many cases they did not do a thing.

683A. Do you happen to know whether in cases where they raised rates they administered efficiently?—I think they did in one or two cases—in Hawke's Bay, for instance.

684. Would it be different if you had local bodies elected for the express purpose of raising rates? Would they not see that the Act was carried out efficiently?—I think that it is probable that what did happen will happen again. That is to say, the people elected will in many instances be large holders of property, and they will not rate themselves. Speaking from memory, I believe there were only rates raised in the Counties of Vincent and Waipawa.

685. But is not the sheep-farming class much more alive to the danger of rabbits now than in those days?—They should be.

685A. And is it supposed that nominated bodies do their work and represent public opinion as thoroughly as elected bodies?—Probably not in some places, but in the administration of an Act like this I think they would.

686. Do you think it would be possible to create some separate official in the Colonial Secretary's department or other department in whom should centre all sheep and rabbit matters? In other words, are not your duties so multifarious that you cannot give undivided attention to this important branch?—You will understand that my work is only the correspondence. Mr. Bayly is the responsible head of the department for the carrying-out of the Act. He is over the heads of all the officers.

687. And you see no objection to all the correspondence remaining in your hands?—No: there are two separate clerks in the office performing the work of this branch under my general supervision.

688. Then you think it unnecessary to have a man in the Colonial Secretary's department whose time should be entirely devoted to sheep and agriculture?—There is now a separate Agricultural Department.