

in this respect. In fact, Inspectors had to use considerable discretion so as not to irritate settlers. They had ample powers, and he did not think they hesitated to exercise them. Many people thought the regulations arbitrary, but he thought the Rabbit Act here was administered with considerable discretion. As to fumigation, they found that bisulphide of carbon was a very good remedy, the burrows being covered up after its use. It would poison everything in the burrows. In his part of the country—in the South—they destroyed the rabbits and exported the skins, which proved a considerable source of revenue. The ordinary price this year was rather low, but an average rabbitskin was worth 2½d. for export to England. Many of the settlers down there were getting two or three rabbits to the acre, and it was marvellous to him how the country could support all the rabbits in addition to the sheep it sustained. But, though fumigation was productive of considerable good, especially in the summer time, when the rabbits were in great numbers, ferreting with large nets had been used with good effect, the nets having a 2½in. mesh. The rabbit banged into the net and remained there. He could give an instance where a little boy and girl, with a ferret and a stick, and with the use of a net, in two hours and a half came back with eighty-five rabbits. The rabbitskins brought from 2d. to 3d. each. They simply turned in the ferrets and watched.

Mr. TABART asked whether the rabbit-factories were not injurious to the country, and also what mode the Inspectors had of dealing with people when they took proceedings under the Rabbit Act. Were the cases brought before stipendiary Magistrates or Justices of the Peace? The difficulty in Tasmania was to obtain a conviction in many districts. He frequently instructed two of his Inspectors to visit the same district, so as to have corroborative evidence; but their testimony was often overbalanced by the blackguard rabbit-trappers, whose word was taken in preference, with the result that there were more dismissals than convictions.

The ACTING-CHAIRMAN said that Mr. Tabart had raised a very debatable point. If he asked Mr. Ritchie, that gentleman would say that the rabbit-factories and the trappers were the curse of the country; but he (Mr. Roberts) did not think they were quite the evil they were said to be. There was no doubt that they were the means of destroying a great number of rabbits which would otherwise not be killed. As long as the rabbits were a good size, they would find their way to the factories, because the rabbiters sometimes got as much as 6½d. a pair unskinned. He was rather inclined to believe that in the majority of cases the fact that the small-sized rabbits were not taken by the factories must conduce to the conserving of the pest. He thought seventy-five thousand rabbits had been sent to one factory. He did not think trapping added to the pest. On the whole, however, it was not an unmixed good. In reference to prosecutions, Justices of the Peace were never called in to deal with rabbit cases. The Inspectors knew too much for that, and generally had the summonses heard before a Resident Magistrate. The statement of the Inspector was final. If he said he saw a rabbit on any one else's land, the Magistrate would have no option but to fine the owner of the property. He (Mr. Roberts) had been fined several times himself, but did not feel very much aggrieved, and he supposed the Inspectors thought it was setting a good example to have a big man fined.

Mr. RITCHIE had supplied the members with copies of his annual report which dealt with this question. The report proved that fencing had been very effective. He believed in poisoning, if properly done. If people paid a little more attention, or paid some one to look after the poisoning, it would be thoroughly effective. Immediately after poisoning it was necessary to follow it up by other means, such as shooting, netting, ferreting, and the destruction of the burrows. Since the rabbit-factories had been started Inspectors had experienced difficulty in getting people to lay poison. Trapping was objectionable, because the rabbits immediately spread when a man began to trap. He had an instance of two neighbours, one of whom put up a rabbit-fence, cleared out the burrows, and filled them in, and there was not a single rabbit to be seen; while on the other side of the fence the rabbits were in hundreds and thousands. The men on the infected side were patiently waiting for the factory to be opened. He stated in his report that the factories did a certain amount of good; but for two or three months before they opened, in nine cases out of ten, people did very little to destroy the pest, because they wished to send the rabbits to the factory. The Stock Committee had carried a motion instructing the department to deal with the pest with the utmost stringency. The factories were all shut now, and he did not think they would be opened until February next. He would like the delegates from Australia, while in New Zealand, to go to Horsley Downs, where Mr. Lance had put up a rabbit-fence, which, he thought, was the specimen-fence of New Zealand. He should be glad to go up with them. The fence consisted of 1½ x ¾ standards, 2½ x 2½ x ½ strainers, 1½ x ¼ intermediates, three No. 4 wires, and barb-wire on top; 1½ x 42 x 14-gauge netting, with a narrow piece projecting from top of netting on outside, about 9in. wide, attached to small arms from each standard, and a barb wire on outside to prevent stock rubbing against it. The delegates could see the fence in a day from Christchurch. He believed it cost £230 a mile.

Mr. TABART said their fencing in Tasmania cost about £75 per mile.

Mr. RITCHIE said he thought the average was about £120 to £130 a mile in the back country. Mr. Lawry was asked by the Stock Committee to go down last year to Canterbury and report on the fence, and might be able to tell them something about it. When that fence was completed the whole of North Canterbury would be protected. There was some very good fencing in that district, and the only objection to it was the expense.

Mr. BRYDONE said his company had had some very considerable experience with the rabbits. On an average they collected and sold something like half a million skins on their two or three properties. On one alone they got about 250,000 skins, principally from winter poisoning, and in addition to that he thought they killed half as many more whose skins they did not get. Until the discovery was made of destroying rabbits by phosphorized oats they tried all the known remedies—shooting, trapping, netting, digging out the burrows, and all sorts of things; but the rabbits were gradually overcoming them year after year, and the sheep were getting fewer and