

which I am assured, but to a doubt as to whether such a provision might not easily be evaded. Other points on which I do not see my way to make definite recommendations, but with regard to which, if it were possible, some limitation should be made, are (1) the number of traps that any licensed trapper might use, and (2) the number of skins which he may take from any given bush. With regard to the first point, if the number of traps or snares, or both together, be limited it will be difficult to prevent the shooting of opossums by men having a license to trap; or poisoning might even be resorted to. The poisoning of opossums ought in all circumstances whatever to be rigidly forbidden, except perhaps in fruit districts. With regard to directly limiting the number of skins that a trapper may take in any one season, it is obvious that a trapper who had secured the maximum number would be able to make over his surplus skins to a trapper who had secured a smaller number. There would be a pooling of skins among all the licensed trappers in a given district.

The best recommendation I can make is one on lines suggested to me by Mr. H. H. Ostler, and is as follows: The license shall entitle a trapper to take up to 100 skins without further fee for license; for every twenty-five additional skins that he takes he shall, before offering the skins for sale, pay an additional fee of £1.

The proposal does not succeed in placing a limit on the number of skins that may be taken; but it may, in the case of any area, be very desirable to have the means of imposing such a limit. It is true that I have suggested that an open season should not be declared unless the ranger is satisfied that such a declaration is justified. But it is highly desirable to avoid depletion of the bushes to such an extent that an open season in the next year will be impossible. It seems certain that the fostering of a trade, particularly of an export trade, would depend much upon regularity of supply, and that is one of the most difficult problems, as it seems to me, that has to be solved. I do not know what the experience of the Australian States has been in this matter. It would be of the greatest service to have this information when deciding upon what steps are to be taken.

With regard to the amount of the license fee payable by a trapper I have been in some doubt. During the earlier part of my investigations on this subject I considered that a trapper, having a very lucrative occupation in virtue of his license, should pay a license fee of not less than £5, the amount to go towards defraying the cost of ranging; and I also thought that the registered dealer should pay a royalty on all skins which he bought. With regard to the first point, a discussion with Constable Heywood and Mr. John Calder, of Owaka, convinced me that a heavy license fee would lead to one man taking out a license and working in conjunction with perhaps a number of unlicensed men. I think that the objection is valid. I have therefore recommended the trapper shall pay £1 for his license, and that the Government should depend for the necessary contribution that the opossum trade should make to the revenue mainly on the sale of trapping-rights for trapping Crown lands, for which rights payment might, if it were desired, be made in skins.

The royalty which might be payable by the dealer is, I now think, inadvisable, seeing that no inducement whatever should be placed in the hands of dealers to give other than a perfectly honest statement of the number of skins they handle. On the other hand, Mr. E. C. Govan, of Te Anau, who has had much experience both as a trapper and as a fur-buyer, is strongly of opinion that no license fee should be charged to the trapper, and that no charge should be made for trapping-rights on Crown lands, but that dealers should pay a sufficient royalty on all skins they handle.

The possession of skins during the currency of a close season, except in the case of registered dealers, and, so far as the days of grace at the beginning of the close season are concerned, except in the case of licensed trappers, shall be held to justify prosecution if the police think that the circumstances warrant it; and the onus of proving that possession is not unlawful shall be upon the defendant.

*Registration of Dealers.*—The Otago Acclimatization Society in March, 1912, drew up proposed regulations with regard to the registration of dealers and to the licensing of trappers, so far as the Otago District was concerned. I base my proposal for the registration of dealers upon these regulations, a copy of which I append to this report. I recommend that all buyers and sellers of opossum-skins should be registered as dealers, the registration being without charge. Registration should involve the obligation to register all skins purchased, the name of the person from whom each purchase was made, and the number of his license. Further, the register should show correctly the number of skins imported from the Australian Commonwealth, the entry being made immediately on landing. The register should also show how all skins, whether imported or purchased locally, are dealt with. Police officers and officers of the acclimatization society charged with that duty should have at all times the right to inspect any register. Irrespective of any inspection, every registered dealer should within fourteen days of the close of an open season forward to the Hon. the Minister of Internal Affairs a copy of the entries in his register so far as opossum-skins are concerned for the preceding twelve months.

*Fruit Districts.*—In any district that has been declared a fruit district any resident may kill opossums at any time without penalty, on condition that he immediately report the killing to the local Postmaster on a form obtainable at any post-office. If he removes the skin to another fruit district he must in like manner report the possession of the skin to the Postmaster in that district. Any person found in possession of unreported skins should be liable to a heavy penalty upon conviction. Every Postmaster in a fruit district should, on the 1st day of each month, send to the Hon. the Minister of Internal Affairs a return showing the names of persons reporting the possession of skins during the previous month, and the number of skins that each person named in the return has reported. Skins from fruit districts should be sold only through the fruitgrowers' association of the district, and only then provided that that association registers as a fur-dealing organization under the provisions of the previous paragraph. A district in which opossums were troublesome might be proclaimed a fruit district even if fruitgrowing were not a principal occupation of the settlers.

The harbouring of opossums within a fruit district should be made punishable. A difficulty will certainly arise from the existence of unprotected fruit areas in proximity, in some cases, to protected forest areas. Mr. Tripp's suggestion to deal with this is by the issue of permits to kill, the skins being handed over to the local authorities or to the acclimatization society of the district. In my opinion, the owner of the land should have undisputed right to skins of opossums killed on his land. Difficulty