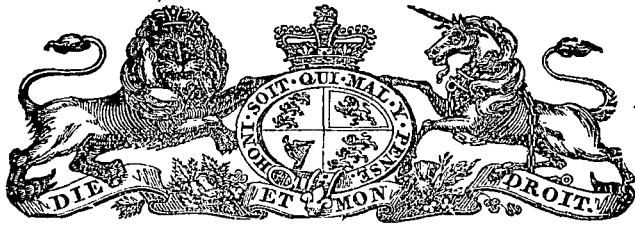


(No. 58.)



1898.

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

REPORT BY CHIEF INSPECTOR

On the working of "The Stock Act, 1889," "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1889," and "The Codlin Moth Act, 1888," for the Year 1897-8.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by His Excellency's Command.

Cost of printing—£3 3s.



“THE STOCK ACT, 1889.”

REPORT BY CHIEF INSPECTOR.

Hobart, 1st July, 1898.

SIR,

I HAVE the honour to present my Report upon “The Stock Act,” “The Rabbits Destruction Act,” and “The Codlin Moth Act,” for the year 1898.

“The Stock Act, 1889.”

I have to repeat, as has been the case since my appointment in 1885, that the sheep in the Colony still remain free from scab-disease.

During the past year the operation of the amended Act, which compelled the dipping of all sheep between the 1st of August in one year and 1st of April in the following year, came into force. From the popular reception it has received at the hands of sheep-owners, I assume that in the near future no difficulty will ensue in enforcing this law.

There are discrepancies in the Act which will require amendment to make it what is desired, and to effect the object for which it was framed.

First, the length of time within which sheep-owners shall dip their flocks is too long: from the 1st August to 1st February in the following year is, I consider, ample time in which to dip sheep. No sheep should be allowed to leave a secure paddock after shearing until dipped, the reason being that upon large and rough runs, when sheep are once turned out they are seldom again collected until the following shearing, so that a few sheep may remain to re-infect the dipped portion of the flock, making the trouble and labour of dipping futile.

Provision must be made for those who have sheep free from ticks; careless owners will not sufficiently immerse in a tick-destroying preparation to kill the tick, and, having once dipped, under the present Act are free to travel and market such sheep. If the Act is provided to eradicate ticks, a clause must be added giving power to compel the dipping, and a penalty for travelling sheep infected with ticks.

There is also need for amendment in the direction of issue of certificates of cleanness from ticks in a flock. The owner of the flock should make a declaration that his flock is free from tick.

The Inspector can then inspect and certify to the best of his belief that the flock is clean. It is morally impossible for an Inspector after shearing to find ticks in a flock of sheep; the owner should know the state of his flock, and the responsibility must fall upon him.

Again, no provision is made for the dipping of imported sheep. These should be accompanied by a certificate that they are free from ticks, but if upon inspection prove the reverse, they should be immediately dipped at the expense and risk of the importer before being sold.

On account of the very dry weather and poverty of the sheep, I suggested to the Government that the operation of the Act should be suspended for the current year, which met with approval.

It affords me gratification to report that the restrictions imposed upon sheep imported from New Zealand have been removed, and that sheep are admitted from that Colony into Tasmania upon the same terms as from Australasia.

The hot and dry weather has been responsible for great scarcity of grass and water, and I feel concerned for sheep-owners at their probable loss of stock when the cold and wet weather sets in. Poor lambs and old ewes must succumb.

I apprehend there will be a short crop of lambs during the coming spring, knowing that many owners are refraining from breeding this year on account of the poverty of ewes and want of feed.

There is an encouraging outlook for stud-breeders; the sales in Australasia are likely to be productive of good prices; larger consignments are booked for sale than has been the case for the past few years.

Importations of Shropshire sheep from England are still coming forward. The popularity of these sheep is now established; small as well as large breeders appreciate the symmetry, good flesh, also the prolific character of this black-faced breed.

I desire in this Report to refer to the attempts that are continually being made to reduce the quarantine periods by those who should support a safe quarantine, and are not responsible to the Government or Stock-owners if the innovation they might succeed in establishing should bring diseases into Tasmania that are not already here. I refer now to pleuro-pneumonia in cattle, and so long as I am Chief Inspector, guardian of stock-owners, and the adviser upon stock matters to the Government, I shall not recommend the reduction of quarantine upon cattle from Australia from six months to three, particularly when those desirous of importing milking breeds of cattle can accomplish their object from New Zealand, from which Colony cattle are only subjected to 30 days' quarantine.

The Interim Report of the Government Statistician, Mr. R. M. Johnston, is to hand, and shows the number of live stock in the Colony to be as follows:—

Live Stock.	1897.	1898.	Increase.	Decrease.
Horses.....	22,547	29,898	351	
Cattle.....	157,730	157,486	...	244
Sheep.....	1,650,567	1,588,611	...	61,956
Pigs.....	55,301	43,520	...	11,781

The following table shows the export trade in stud sheep to the adjoining Colonies since 1870 up to the 30th June of the present year, with the Custom House value thereon:—

Year.	Number.	Value.	Year.	Number.	Value.	Year.	Number.	Value.
		£			£			£
1870.....	807	4115	1880.....	—	—	1890*.....	4748	65,110
1871.....	998	4660	1881.....	1306	38,305	1891.....	6581	74,892
1872.....	2433	15,500	1882.....	1937	34,012	1892.....	5398	37,774
1873.....	2586	15,547	1883.....	2913	62,275	1893.....	7262	52,464
1874.....	1997	20,895	1884.....	3244	60,758	1894.....	3985	24,229
1875.....	1673	23,414	1885.....	2825	51,325	1895.....	4384	21,034
1876.....	1403	18,157	1886.....	2207	32,689	1896.....	3208	21,172
1877.....	1303	10,103	1887.....	4005	54,337	1897.....	3949	27,046
1878.....	651	8485	1888.....	4140	56,045	1898.....	5482	22,244
1879.....	1496	47,259	1889.....	4660	60,472			

* Owing to delay in the sailing of the vessel, 2816 of these sheep, valued at £44,455, were not shipped until early in July.

“ The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1889.”

Rabbits are still a source of expense to landholders, and will continue so until there is uniform and simultaneous action adopted throughout the whole of the Municipal Districts. In some districts the rabbits are more numerous than in others: the cause is apparent. My observations lead me to this remark, and as a comparison I will take the Campbell Town Municipality *versus* others.

The Inspector is not a Police officer, but appointed by the Council, and given a free hand to compel, not only landholders, but Councillors also, to destroy rabbits in all seasons regardless of the market price of the rabbit or his skin. The means adopted are various, viz., trapping, poisoning, hunting with dogs, and lastly, and largely responsible for the very satisfactory result, is the destruction of burrows and warrens. The Council is to be congratulated upon the successful decrease of the vermin. Other districts are not so free from rabbits as is desirable for the increase of stock and good crops. The pest in numbers does incalculable injury to both, and retards the prosperity of stockowners and agriculturalists. Where the Police act as Inspectors it is truly said by good authorities that they are only human, and cannot be expected to prosecute the Warden and Councillors. I look for a more satisfactory outcome when the centralization of the Police Bill becomes law; then a more likely solution will be established, and the rabbits will be killed in all seasons regardless of value as food or for fur, and prosecutions will be instituted without respect to the social status of the landholder who attempts to evade the Rabbit Act. This would be a progressive step to a central authority administering Pests Acts.

I quote from the New Zealand Department of Agriculture Report for 1897, which upholds my opinion in the administration of Pests Acts—viz., “The opinion is growing, and growing rapidly, that such Acts should be administered by the Central Government, for so only can uniform and simultaneous action for the control of farm pests be secured.”

Judging by Inspectors' monthly reports, the Crown Lands of the Colony are being looked after. The money set aside for this purpose has been increased by a sum of £70 per annum, which it is proposed to divide between those districts where rabbits exist on Crown lands and those from where complaints have been received that the amount hitherto expended is insufficient for the purpose.

A Conference of Delegates from Boards of Agriculture in the Westmorland District, consisting of Messrs. C. W. Allen (Westbury), H. Hingston (Cressy), R. Morrison and D. L. Swifte (Rosevale), J. J. Durand and P. Welch (Frankford), was held at Westbury on 1st April last, when the matter of rabbits' destruction was discussed at some length, and Resolutions on the subject were forwarded to the Government disapproving of the Bill of 1897.

These gentlemen do not, however, appear to have made themselves conversant with the Act at present in force, otherwise Resolutions 3 and 4 would not have been considered, being already provided for.

I give the Resolutions passed, with some remarks thereon:—

“1. That the Rabbits Destruction Bill of 1897 has not the sympathy of this Conference, and that it should not be allowed to become Law in its present form.”

“2. That poisoning shall be compulsory in all infested districts, and at certain times, to be appointed by the Governor in Council.”

Efforts have on several occasions been made to secure simultaneous and compulsory poisoning, but this has never met with the approval of Parliament.

“3. That poisoning be done on all Crown lands in infested districts by responsible residents in each district, and that they be paid for their labour out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund.”

The Crown lands have been dealt with in this way since the passing of the Act of 1893 by the Rabbit Boards under that Act.

“4. That the duty on wire netting for rabbit-proof fencing, and on all implements and materials for the destruction of rabbits, be removed.”

All such articles as those referred to used in rabbits' destruction have been admitted free of duty for some years past.

“5. That, on application by the occupier of lands in infested districts adjoining Crown lands, the Government pay half the expense of rabbit-proof fencing along the boundaries between such Crown lands and such private property. This clause to be read in conjunction with the Boundary Fences Act.”

Until there is a uniform system throughout the Colony for the erection of and payment for wire-netting fencing, I do not think the suggestion would be acceptable to the ratepayers or the Government.

“6. That this Act be administered as the present Act is administered.”

With this I do not agree, and have dealt with the subject in the early part of this Report.

Several proposals have from time to time been brought before the Government having in view the object of enabling settlers to obtain rabbit-proof wire fencing on easy terms, some of which are now under consideration. There are no methods by which the rabbit pest can so satisfactorily be dealt with as by the enclosure of land. This is the experience of landowners and practical men who have wire-netted their properties, and who speak most favourably of their ability to cope with the evil when limited to small areas.

The number and value of rabbit-skins exported from the Colony during the past five years, as per Customs Returns, are as follows :—

	No.	Value.
		£
1893	3,590,474	23,278
1894	3,541,464	16,194
1895	3,377,654	15,499
1896	3,716,126	17,182
1897	3,302,099	13,625

“ *The Codlin Moth Act, 1888.* ”

The Stringent enforcement of The Vegetables Diseases Act in the Australasian Colonies call for my remarks in making this Report, notably on account of the disastrous results it probably will have upon the Tasmanian fruit industry. I have no hesitation in asserting that had The Export Produce Bill brought before Parliament by the Government last Session been supported by orchardists and their representatives, and passed into law, the Government of the adjoining Colonies, then seeing that we were striving ourselves to prevent the export of diseased and infected fruit, would not now so imperatively insist that no apples affected with scale or codlin moth shall enter their Colonies. The wholesale condemnation and re-shipment of rejected fruit will in the future react most beneficially upon Tasmanian growers, demonstrating most unmistakably to them that they shall clean their orchards of pests; otherwise the expenditure of money and time in laying out orchards would be waste of energy and capital, with a vast depreciation in the value of their holdings.

From personal inspection of condemned and returned apples from New South Wales I consider that shippers in most cases are personally responsible; they know the law, and in defiance of it forward diseased fruit of a very pronounced character. It is now incumbent, from the severe action of New South Wales, to at once face the difficulty. In my opinion three modes of action can be advantageously discussed, viz :—

1st. Obtain concessions from New South Wales to admit sound marketable fruit, such fruit being of equal quality to that which the New South Wales Inspectors permit to be traded with in the Cumberland Fruit District, in which Sydney is located.

2nd. To establish central district packing-sheds overlooked by Government Inspectors, who shall inspect, brand, and give a certificate that such fruit is free from disease.

3rd. To have all fruit intended for export taken to a receiving store in Hobart for inspection for certificate at least 48 hours before sailing of vessel: this time to be allowed for not more than 2000 cases of fruit, and a corresponding increased time for a larger consignment.

The Codlin Moth is, I regret to say, gaining ground. Its destructive presence is now being felt in localities not previously reported for; instance, the Fruit District of Franklin is suddenly called into activity to combat the pest in 17 different orchards. The vigilance of its Inspector detected the infection and prosecuted orchardists. The determined decision of the Stipendiary Magistrate is to be commended for inflicting such penalties as will deter the negligent owner from disregarding the Codlin Moth Regulations. This action indicates that the Franklin bench at least intends to vigorously enforce the provisions of the Act.

One of the troubles under which the Colony is labouring is the system under which the Pest Acts are administered. My observations more than confirm my previously expressed opinions, that so long as local bodies administer the laws unquestionably the pests will increase. The past and present experience of increased infection of orchards is incontrovertible, and is largely due to the Board system. Centralization is the only reasonable mode of controlling pests, and I need only instance the successful and speedy eradication of scab from Tasmania under the last-named system.

A very objectionable feature observable in some orchards, and to which I have drawn District Surveyors' attention, is, that after the infected apples are picked and bagged they are not immediately removed and treated, but are tied and left for destruction at convenience, consequently the grubs escape from the bags and take refuge in any suitable hiding-place. In this manner hundreds of grubs that should be destroyed escape to perpetuate the pest.

One of the most essential observances under the Act that should be strictly enforced is the picking and removal of all infected fruit at its earliest appearance. District Inspectors should force compliance with the Regulations that give the necessary power, and not allow the infected fruit to remain upon the trees, thereby allowing numberless grubs to escape; this provision is an absolute factor in reducing the Codlin Moth.

It is regrettable that orchardists who are conversant with the provisions of the Act will annually have their names paraded before the public as law-breakers. This season has been a record one for suicidal infringement of the Act, but the English and Colonial consignments would have probably suffered but for the detection by Inspectors of infected fruit upon the wharves.

I purpose quoting two instances. First, 120 cases were placed upon the pier for shipment in the experimental boat the *Gulf of Bothnia*. 118 cases were found to contain infected fruit; these were destroyed, and the owner prosecuted in Hobart, and fined, for such a serious offence, 10s. and costs. The second instance was a number of cases of pears and apples placed upon the wharf for shipment to New South Wales, and were discovered to contain codlin moth. The inspector destroyed the fruit and cases. Proceedings were taken against the orchardist, who was fined the minimum penalty, 10s. and costs. This abuse of law is monstrous in the face of the difficulties that have arisen in New South Wales by the enforcement of their Vegetables Diseases Act.

It is to be regretted that our fruit industry should be jeopardised and ruined by such unscrupulous action on the part of those who know better, but would sacrifice the industry for the sake of a small present gain to themselves, forgetful of the dishonesty of disposing of cases of unsound and infected fruit reputed as sound and marketable produce.

In concluding my Report, I desire to express my appreciation of the work performed by my officers, whose duties were heavy during the early part of the year, caused by the coming into operation of "The Department of Agriculture Act," which entailed a large amount of correspondence to provide against any misdirection in the election of Members of the present Council, and the additional heavy duties during the period that relief was being given by the Government to sufferers by the destructive bush fires. The pressure of work necessitated further clerical assistance, which was provided from the Chief Secretary's Department, and was assiduously performed by the gentlemen deputed.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

THOMAS A. TABART, *Chief Inspector.*

The Right Honourable the Premier.