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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

“THE RABBITS DESTRUCTION ACT, 1889”:

REPORT BY CHIEF INSPECTOR.

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

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“THE RABBITS DESTRUCTION ACT, 1889.”

REPORT BY CHIEF INSPECTOR.

Council of Agriculture, Hobart, 1st July, 1896.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to forward my Report upon “The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1889,” for the year ending 30th June, 1896.

During the past year I have received monthly reports from the various Municipalities, with but few exceptions, regularly. Perusal of them clearly indicates that the work of destruction is not being performed in a way that any permanent benefit is likely to result. I make this remark advisedly, and my conclusions are arrived at as follows:—On the 1st of January, 1894, the amended Rabbit Act became law; since then reports received from one district give data of rabbits killed. I submit from their showing that my deduction is correct. The following extract from returns is explanatory of the position:—

Report for month of	Rabbits killed.
October, 1895.....	13,568
November „	9713
December „	8952
January, 1896	14,153
February „	14,089
April „	31,394

The above clearly shows that one of three abuses exist—either, 1st, landlords do not employ sufficient labour to keep rabbits from increasing during the summer months, for which labour they would have to pay; 2nd, trappers will not work during the summer time when the skins and carcases are less marketable; 3rd, or rabbits are being shepherded and allowed to increase for the profit of the trapper, who, during the winter months, will work without bonus when the carcase is in good demand for food, and the skin well furred and valuable. Therefore the whole question of rabbit destruction resolves itself into one of market value, and, unfortunately, so long as they carry a commercial value no relief can be expected to prevent the reduction of the agricultural output and the grazing capabilities of the land. The last of these is probably the gist of the whole argument. If the above returns are strictly analysed it will be observed that during the last months of 1895 little killing was done,—it may be argued because rabbits were scarce throughout the district; but if such was the fact, how can the take for April, 1896, (31,394) be reconciled, except in the manner I have propounded.

From my own observations I hold that rabbits are not being reduced by the increased supervision provided under the amended Act as should be expected, when the police officers of Municipalities occupy the position of inspectors to regulate the destruction of the pest. I have always urged that to deal with pests, a central head, having authority to compel action, is the only reliable and reasonable manner in which to cope with them.

It is manifestly unfair to expect the police to deal with offenders in an independent and stringent way, when it is considered that the administrators in a Municipality are as a rule large landed proprietors, and consequently suffer from the scourges of the pest, thereby becoming objects

for supervision by their own servants, who, in numerous instances, are not experts, and are absolutely ignorant of the principles which evidence the existence of the pest.

I have had occasion to draw the attention of Wardens in several Municipalities to the state of rabbits within their districts, and have had my observations questioned by Police Office Inspectors; finding this to be the case I at once desired either the Warden or Councillors to accompany me to verify my reports, but in no instance have I been successful in inducing the inspection, which I consider most unfair.

In the Richmond Municipality my observations extended over a period of three months; on two occasions I verbally interviewed the Warden, and three times addressed him officially; my communications received but scant courtesy from the Council. The comments made by the Warden at a Council meeting were most unfair, and at a subsequent meeting of the Council the burlesque was perpetuated of what should have been a business transaction. I cannot, with justice to the position I occupy as Chief Inspector under the Rabbits Destruction Act, refrain from making comment upon the Councillors' action, who so deliberately insulted the Government through me, and treated the official Report in so cavalier a manner, without satisfying themselves by personal inspection as to its substantial correctness or otherwise. The gentlemen composing the Council elected by the ratepayers to conduct the business of the district and administer "The Rabbits Destruction Act" undertake to carry out local supervision through their police; I consider it therefore incumbent upon them to give, at all events, passing consideration to reports of the Chief Inspector when intimation is given that the Law is not being enforced by their Officers and that the pest is numerous, thus injuring the resources of the district, besides making the Colony an object of ridicule when so ludicrous a position is taken up by a local body.

The occupiers who have erected at considerable expense wire netting fencing are feeling the benefit of the outlay, and although the first cost is heavy, the work, when well performed, is found to be most reproductive; this expenditure is, in my opinion, the primary step to rabbits' destruction, reducing the area to be operated upon, has most beneficial effects, enabling owners to work successfully under any method best adapted to the particular season of the year.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

THOMAS A. TABART, *Chief Inspector.*

The Hon. the Chief Secretary