

(No. 72)



1868.

T A S M A N I A.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

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**SELECT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURAL AND  
PASTORAL DEPRESSION.**

**PROGRESS REPORT AND EVIDENCE.**

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Brought up by Captain Langdon, and ordered by the Council to be printed,  
September 15, 1868.

AUGUST 21, 1868.

*Ordered*, That a Select Committee be appointed to enquire into the present depressed state of the Pastoral and Agricultural interests in this Colony, and for the purpose of recommending the adoption of such measures as they deem advisable to meet the difficulty.

Then the Committee was nominated, of—

Mr. Innes,  
Mr. Whyte,  
Mr. Archer,  
Mr. Maclanachan,  
Mr. Sherwin,  
Mr. Foster,  
Captain Langdon. (*Mover.*)

*Ordered*, That the Committee have power to send for Persons, Papers, and Records.

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#### PROCEEDINGS OF COMMITTEE.

- Tuesday, 25 August, 1868. *Members present*—Captain Langdon, Mr. Sherwin, Mr. Innes, Mr. Maclanachan, Mr. Whyte, Mr. Archer. *Ordered* that Captain Langdon do take the Chair. *Witnesses examined*—Messrs. W. Webb, J. Perkins. Committee adjourned.
- Friday, 28 August, 1868. *Members present*—Captain Langdon, Mr. Archer, Mr. Sherwin, Mr. Maclanachan, Mr. Whyte, Mr. Foster. *Witnesses examined*—Messrs. W. J. Rout, Blackwood, J. Bisdee, R. Jones. Committee adjourned.
- Tuesday, 1 September, 1868. *Members present*—Mr. Whyte, Mr. Foster, Mr. Archer, Mr. Maclanachan, Mr. Sherwin. Committee adjourned.
- Friday, 4 September, 1868. *Members present*—Captain Langdon, Mr. Innes, Mr. Foster, Mr. Maclanachan, Mr. Sherwin. *Witness examined*—Mr. A. Leake. Committee adjourned.
- Tuesday, 8 September, 1868. *Members present*—Captain Langdon, Mr. Whyte, Mr. Maclanachan, Mr. Sherwin, Mr. Archer. *Witness examined*—Mr. W. Nicholas. Committee adjourned.
- Wednesday, 9 September, 1868. *Members present*—Captain Langdon, Mr. Whyte, Mr. Sherwin, Mr. Foster, Mr. Maclanachan, Mr. Archer. *Witnesses examined*—Messrs. H. Nicholas, S. Page, E. Shoobridge. Committee adjourned.
- Friday, 11 September, 1868. *Members present*—Captain Langdon, Mr. Whyte, Mr. Sherwin, Mr. Archer, Mr. Maclanachan. *Witness examined*—Mr. P. T. Smith. Committee adjourned.
- Tuesday, 15 September, 1868. *Members present*—Captain Langdon, Mr. Whyte, Mr. Archer, Mr. Maclanachan. Draft Report brought up and adopted. Committee adjourned.
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*THE SELECT COMMITTEE appointed to enquire into the present depressed state of the Pastoral and Agricultural interests in this Colony, and for the purpose of recommending the adoption of such Measures as they deem advisable to meet the difficulty, have the honor to submit the following*

## PROGRESS REPORT.

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THE Committee considered that, to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion on the important question submitted to its consideration, it must seek for information from those engaged in Pastoral and Agricultural pursuits, and persons directly or indirectly interested in the prosperity or decadence of those interests.

Your Committee thereupon proceeded to examine the following Witnesses :—

Mr. W. Webb.  
Mr. J. Perkins.  
Mr. W. J. Rout.  
Mr. Blackwood.  
Mr. R. Jones.  
Mr. J. Bisdee.

Mr. W. Nicholas.  
Mr. E. Shoobridge.  
Mr. H. Nicholas.  
Mr. S. Page.  
Mr. P. T. Smith.  
Mr. A. Leake.

And their Evidence is hereunto appended.

The Witnesses examined all agree that the Pastoral and Agricultural interests of the Colony are in a very depressed condition at the present time, arising from various causes,—such as the disease in sheep commonly called Fluke, the uncertainty of markets, and the fluctuations in prices caused by the importation of sheep and cattle from Victoria and New South Wales.

Your Committee feel that the shortness of time it has had for enquiry has been totally inadequate for the purpose of obtaining that amount of information on which it would be justified in basing any Report containing recommendations or suggestions to remedy the evils which undoubtedly exist to an alarming extent; and as the Session of Parliament is about to close, your Committee must be content with bringing up a Progress Report, with a recommendation that an Address be presented to His Excellency the Governor, praying that he will be pleased to appoint a Commission to sit during the Recess, and continue the enquiry which your Committee has only been enabled to commence.

Your Committee is fully persuaded that the importance of the interests involved in this enquiry fully warrant the appointment of a Commission, composed of gentlemen of experience, who will collect such information as may possibly enable the Government to propose some measure to Parliament during the next Session that will tend to mitigate, if not altogether to remove, the depression which presses so heavily on the Pastoral and Agricultural interests.

W. LANGDON, *Chairman.*

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## EVIDENCE.

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MR. WILLIAM WEBB *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I am occupier of an Estate called Black Marsh, at Bothwell, which is stocked with sheep and cattle. The land near the Lakes is flukey. I expended £100 in draining the land last year. I think if the land were properly drained and fenced off it would prevent the Fluke. I used to cultivate 600 or 700 acres of land at Black Marsh, now I cultivate 50 acres. I think that roots cannot be grown profitably in the interior. I think the free importation of meat has materially affected the producers. I think that if a duty of one half-penny per pound were put upon imported meat it would induce the farmers here to produce more meat. I think this Colony could grow sufficient meat for its own consumption, if a tax of one half-penny per pound were levied on imported meat. I have known settlers to fatten stock and take it to market, and be compelled to take it back. I think 3d. or 4d. per pound for meat would be a fair price. I believe many of the runs in the Colony are overstocked. I think to stop the importation of sheep at certain times of the year would be a dangerous experiment. I have found it pay me better for some time past to keep my sheep for their wool than to send them to market. The present prices of meat would pay the producer if he could depend upon them. I consider that all classes of the community would benefit by a tax on imported meat. I believe the overstocking of runs has in a great measure caused the Fluke. I have a breeding flock on one of my runs. I consider the marshes in the Lake district could be very easily drained, and I think if the Government were to drain the Crown lands it would increase the value of them. The cost of drainage would depend upon the position of the land. I cannot cultivate unless there is an alteration in the labour market.

Mr. Webb withdrew.

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MR. JOHN PERKINS *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I have been an importer of mercantile goods for the last 30 years (25 in Hobart Town and 5 in Launceston). During the whole time I have been in business I do not remember the mercantile and trading interests being so much depressed as at present. I believe the decline has been going on for the last seven years. I think one cause of the decline has been the loss of our labouring population. I used to import all my goods direct from England: I only get part from England now, and the rest I get from Melbourne. I think that 1862 was the year in which the decline of the shipping interests commenced, caused by the imposition of the *Ad Valorem* Duties and changes in the Tariff. About the years 1848-50 Hobart Town supplied Melbourne with goods. The *Ad Valorem* Duties have had a very bad effect on trade in Melbourne. I think if there had been no *Ad Valorem* Duties all goods which were sent out would have come to a profitable market; and I believe those large supplies would have been continued. I consider the cause of the withdrawal of our labouring population is their being able to obtain higher wages in the other colonies; the gold-fields have also had the effect of withdrawing them. As far as the Trading community is concerned, it is more convenient to obtain goods from Melbourne than direct from England. When the Agricultural and Pastoral interests suffer the Mercantile community suffers also. I believe the small Farmers of this Colony are now in a most depressed state. One cause of the depression of our trade is the imperfect manner in which the goods (butter, bacon, cheese, &c.) are prepared for the market, and these causes prevent the exportation of the above articles.

Mr. Perkins withdrew.

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MR. W. J. ROUT *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I have been carrying on the ironmongery business for the last 32 years. My business is not half so extensive as it was 10 years ago; the decline has been gradual during the last seven or eight years. I think it is owing to more than one cause. I consider the depression of the Agricultural and Pastoral interests is the chief cause. There has been a very great falling off in the demand for agricultural implements during the last few years. The difficulty of procuring labour is also a cause of the falling off of my business. I think if a liberal land policy were adopted by the Government it would materially benefit the Colony. I think if the land were let on liberal terms to the Native Youth it would tend to keep them in the Colony, as they have a decided love for their native soil. I have been in Victoria. The land there might be worked more easily than the land here.

Mr. Rout withdrew.

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MR. BLACKWOOD *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I have resided in this Colony since January, 1857. I have three sons and three daughters; my eldest son is 27 years of age. My sons rent a farm at Cambridge. I have been occupying a farm ever since I came to the Colony. There has been a great depression in the Agricultural interests during the last few years. I think if the agricultural lands were let at a moderate rental the Native Youth would remain in the Colony, and in the course of a few years a useful agricultural population would grow up. I have never been in the Ringarooma district. Two of my sons intend to leave the Colony in about twelve months, unless some inducement is offered to keep them here. If I had required labour on my farm I could not have procured it. All the farms about where I live are the same as the one which I occupy.

Mr. Blackwood withdrew.

MR. JOHN BISDEE *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I am the proprietor of a large estate in the Municipality of Green Ponds. I do not rent much Crown land. I cultivate about 200 acres of land. I have a number of tenants who also cultivate largely. I have a flock of sheep. My sheep suffered slightly from Fluke last year. I cannot say where the sheep are likely to suffer most from Fluke. I believe the only means of preventing the Fluke to be draining the lands. I think it very desirable that the Government should drain the Crown lands, and if it is not done they will become useless. If the land were properly drained its value would be very much increased. I have a farm with river frontage, and on that farm the sheep have not suffered from Fluke. I believe the lands of the Colony could be drained at a very small expense. There is a very great depression in both the Agricultural and Pastoral interests just now, which may be attributed to the prevalence of Fluke and failure of the crops. I think it a duty of one half-penny per pound were levied on imported meat, it would have a very beneficial effect on the Mercantile and Mechanical as well as the Agricultural and Pastoral interests of the Colony, and would be the means of improving the present system of agriculture. I have known persons in the country to send fat stock to town, and have either had to take store price or drive them home. I believe every class of persons in the Colony would benefit by a tax on imported meat, because it would make the supply more regular. I believe this Colony could supply sufficient meat for its own consumption. I think if the flock-owners in the Lake district could obtain a long lease of the lands there, it would be a great inducement for them to drain them. They could be drained at a less expense by private persons than by the Government.

Mr. Bisdee withdrew.

MR. R. JONES *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I occupy a large quantity of land in Hamilton. I have purchased and rent a large tract of land from the Crown. A part of my land is in the new country. The whole of my purchased land is likely to become flukey. I have been paying about £800 a year for purchases and rent. I think if the land were thoroughly drained it would greatly increase its value. I do not cultivate largely. The Pastoral interests are very much depressed just now. I think the free importation of meat has, in a great measure, affected the Pastoral interests. I have frequently known persons to bring fat stock to town, and then have to take them back home again. I think if a moderate protective duty were levied on imported meat it would induce the farmers to grow sufficient meat for the consumption of the inhabitants at a moderate price. I believe a duty of one half-penny per pound would not affect the price of meat, and would be beneficial to all classes of the community.

Mr. Jones withdrew.

MR. A. LEAKE *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I am a landholder in the districts of Campbell Town and Ross. I do not occupy any Crown lands. The Fluke has come under my observation, but it is not prevalent in that part of the country in which my land is situated. The Fluke is prevalent in the Windfall Marshes. It is found in lands which are not properly drained. I believe a system of drainage is the only remedy that we can adopt. I have seen but one instance of the Cumberland disease in this Colony. I do not cultivate to any extent. I find a difficulty in procuring efficient agricultural labourers. I am aware that a great number of our best labourers have left the Colony. I attribute the cause of their leaving to the higher wages obtainable in the other Colonies. I do not think a tax on imported meat would benefit the Colony. I do not think it would pay to cultivate roots. I think the Native Youth would be induced to remain in the Colony if free grants were offered to them after a certain occupation. The settlers in the midland districts do not cultivate for profit. I do not believe this Colony could supply itself with meat under the present mode of raising it. I believe the sheep-runs throughout the Colony are overstocked. I have not known of the Fluke in the lands which I have mentioned till within the last two years.

Mr. Leake withdrew.

MR. W. NICHOLAS *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I occupy a considerable quantity of land in Bothwell. I occupy about 10,000 acres of Crown land. It is stocked chiefly with sheep. I consider a part of the land is flukey. One-half of it is marsh land which could be drained. If it were properly drained I would willingly give an increased rent, because it would carry half as many more sheep. I find a difficulty in procuring labour. I am aware that a number of agriculturists have left the Colony because they could not purchase land on advantageous terms. I have several times taken fat stock to market and been obliged to take them back, because I could not obtain a remunerative price for them, in consequence of the arrivals from the other Colonies. I think if the settlers were receiving a fair price for their stock they would be induced to grow roots and fatten stock and keep up a constant supply. I am sure that under present circumstances it would not pay settlers to fatten stock by artificial food. I think the tenants ought to drain the lands and obtain long leases from the Government, so that they might get the money back which they would expend in draining the land. I have drained some of my land, but not sufficiently to test its efficacy. I have heard of one case in which drainage has had the desired effect, as far as appearances go. I know of no other remedy than drainage for the Fluke. I believe this Colony could supply itself with meat. I think a tax on imported meat would have a very beneficial effect on agriculture, because it would induce settlers to grow roots.

Mr. Nicholas withdrew.

MR. HENRIC NICHOLAS *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I am proprietor of a large tract of land in Hamilton. I have occupied a considerable quantity of Crown land—20,000 acres. I have given up about 10,000 acres of it, chiefly in consequence of the loss of my sheep from Fluke. Fluke is caused by wet land: drainage would cure it. I have proof of it. I believe it is desirable that the Government should have the lands surveyed and drained. I gave about £10 per 1000 acres rent. I would willingly give double that amount if the lands were properly drained. The lands at Hamilton could be very easily drained. I do not cultivate to any extent. I find a great difficulty in procuring efficient labourers. The price of labour is not less than it has been for some years past. I do not grow artificials to fatten stock. I am sure that if the lands of the Colony were drained and stocked the Colony could supply itself with meat. The Government ought to drain the lands, for I consider that the Government could do it for less than the lessees could. To drain the lands effectually a thorough system of drainage ought to be carried out. If the marshes were properly drained they would keep about two sheep to the acre throughout the year, whereas they will now only keep one. Formerly marsh lands were of high value, and if they were drained they would not lose their value. I have a marsh of 10,000 acres (Victoria Valley) which was drained by the Government 25 years ago, and it is now perfectly free from Fluke, and the marshes all round it which were not drained are all flukey. There were less sheep shorn in Hamilton last year than there were for some years past; the cause of the decrease is the Fluke.

Mr. Nicholas withdrew.

MR. S. PAGE *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I am a landholder in Oatlands and other parts of the Colony. I also occupy about 10,000 acres of Crown land, for which I pay about £5 per 1000 acres rent. The land is situated on the road to Swanport. My Crown lands at the Eastern Marshes are flukey. The only disease I know of is the Fluke, and that I find only in the wet lands. All the Lake marshes are flukey. I have lost 2400 sheep by the Fluke at Lake Sorell. I lost about 800 of them last year. I grow wheat for sale: the year before last I grew about 3000 bushels. I do not grow green crops to fatten stock. I intend to give up the Crown lands I at present occupy if the Government do not have them drained. I would give an increased rent if they were properly drained.

Mr. Page withdrew.

MR. E. SHOBRIDGE *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I occupy lands in the district of New Norfolk. I cultivate hops largely. I do not occupy Crown lands. A portion of my land is flukey; it is marsh land with river frontage. If the land were properly drained I am satisfied it would cure the Fluke. I cultivate about 200 acres of land. I grow mangolds, carrots, and turnips; the latter I find is affected with the aphids. I find the improved system of agriculture pays me very well. I never had any difficulty in selling my stock. I am sure that we could supply ourselves with meat. I am in favour of a tax on imported meat, on a sliding scale, because I believe it would have a beneficial effect on agriculture. All sheep fattened on green crops averaging about 50 lbs. each would be worth from 10s. to 15s. each. I am aware that the flocks of the settlers occupying the Crown lands in the interior are suffering from Fluke. I have found a difficulty in procuring

healthy sheep. After getting the Fluke, sheep should never be allowed to go for more than two or three years before they are fattened and sold. I approve highly of carrots for finishing up fat stock. I believe if the Government would undertake a system of irrigation, on a small scale at first, it would be the salvation of the Colony. An impetus would be given to agriculture if the Government would offer prizes on a liberal scale for the best root crops.

Mr. Shoobridge withdrew.

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MR. P. T. SMITH *called in and examined.*

*By the Chairman.*—I own a large quantity of land in several districts throughout the Colony. I also occupy about 10,000 acres of Crown lands. I have reason to believe that the Crown lands are flukey, and I intend to give some of them up for that reason. I am aware that large tracts of land in the Lake district have been given up because they were flukey. I believe a thorough system of drainage would cure the Fluke, but I do not consider the Government should undertake improvements of this character, because they would be too costly. I think it would be better to let the lands at a nominal rent, and let the tenants drain them. I am aware there is a great depression in the Agricultural and Pastoral interests just now, the cause of which is the Fluke. I believe that when the Agricultural and Pastoral interests suffer all other interests suffer. I have fattened stock and taken them to market, and been obliged to take them back because a vessel had arrived with stock on board. I cultivate largely. I do not grow roots and artificials to any extent. I do not think it would pay in the present state of the labour market to grow roots and artificials. I do not think that the free importation of meat into this Colony is a bar to the success of the Agricultural and Pastoral interests. At present, were it not for the importations, the market could not be supplied with meat. I have a difficulty in procuring good agricultural labourers. I am aware that a great number of them have left the Colony during the last few years; no doubt the inducement was the prospect of higher wages in the other Colonies than here. The wages are now about the same prices as they have been for the last five or six years.

Mr. Smith withdrew.