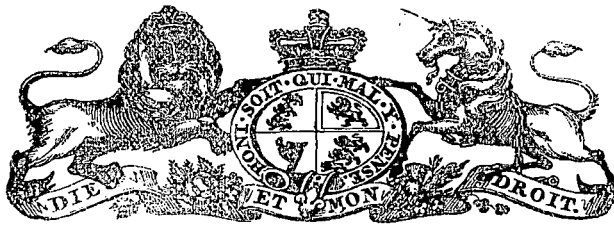


(No. 88.)



1885.

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

THE RABBITS DESTRUCTION ACT :

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR.

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



REPORT on the Working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1882," for the Year ending 30th June, 1885.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to submit a statement as to the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1882," for the year ending 30th June, 1885.

The districts declared infested still continue so, not any being free from the ravages of the pest. In agricultural districts,—as Sorell and Glenorchy,—Rabbits do not exist to any great extent. This is attributable to population, and agricultural farms of small extent.

This season the use of poisoned grain has, I am glad to say, attracted the attention of our practical landholders; the success following, in many instances, is most encouraging. Numbers object to the use of poison, complaining that the Rabbits destroyed cannot be found. Granted this is the case, the object is attained when you see Rabbits, with their signs, disappearing. It would astonish the most bigoted if actual numbers destroyed could be ascertained; the death-rate would be marvellous. Practical men and those who have depended upon this method assure me that not more than from 5 to 10 per cent. of those destroyed are found.

Trapping has, in some instances, been carried on with great vigour, showing certain results. I am not a convert to this method of destruction, although you see the Rabbits destroyed, and obtain the skins, which possibly makes the work reproductive, that is, so long as the skins are winter, well furred, and a good sample. This system is open to many abuses: trappers will liberate young and small rabbits for future profit; the natural enemy—tiger cats and domestic cats gone wild—are destroyed, and are likely to become extinct; also by this process Rabbits are driven on to country not previously occupied, instead of having them localised. Another and a more serious aspect attending the trapping question is the demoralising influence upon our rising labour, it being a notorious fact that lads from 10 to 18 years of age are those who usually follow this occupation for a livelihood, and who, having had two seasons of this work, will not, as a rule, look for or accept any other employment, being content to remain idle, living upon the proceeds of a few months' hunting.

Bisulphide of carbon is also used as a destroyer, but, from the information before the Department, no very great good has resulted from this system. I purpose making myself acquainted with its destroying powers.

There has been considerable difficulty in obtaining suitable persons to supervise laying poisoned grain on the unoccupied Crown lands, the rate offered being far below the remuneration asked. The duty to be performed is not ordinary work, as those employed have to carry the poisoned grain on their backs long distances, which, in rough country, renders the work difficult and tedious; consequently little good has been accomplished. I am convinced the work must be carried out as an incentive to the occupiers of private land, who, in most cases, use their best endeavour to comply with the Act, and, as a matter of course, object to have their properties overrun with rabbits from the Crown estate. In some instances poisoned grain has been provided by the Government to be laid upon the unoccupied Crown land by private persons without remuneration.

I am of opinion that Section 6 of the Rabbits Destruction Act should be repealed and a short amended Act made, with a clause making the use of poisoned grain compulsory and simultaneous from 1st January, 1886, and to be continued with other means to follow after the poisoning; and am satisfied that a great and beneficial good would result.

More power is required and should be conferred upon Inspectors under the Act. Provision should be made compelling negligent owners or occupiers to destroy rabbits after a notice has been served in the way prescribed by the Act. If the notice is disregarded for a given period, the District Inspector should have the power to employ men to destroy rabbits on such properties at the cost and risk of the owner or occupier.

On some runs Rabbits are allowed to breed without being molested during the summer months so that the runs may be let to trappers, who, in many instances, make a large profit. So long as this state of things is allowed to exist Rabbits will be plentiful.

I have lately taken a tour through the Northern districts, and observe that Section 7 of "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1883," applying to the destruction of briars and gorse, has resulted in great good. Acres of gorse have been destroyed in the Longford district, thus doing away with the cover for Rabbits, and increasing the value of land. I have given instructions to the Inspector to continue serving notices under this section. Notwithstanding the large expense, owners will eventually look with great satisfaction upon so reproductive an outlay.

It is needless to inform you that with the present inadequate supervision Inspectors cannot ascertain that the notices served upon occupiers to destroy their rabbits, as provided under Section 6, Rabbits Destruction Act, 1883, have been complied with, which is absolutely necessary.

The number of Rabbits destroyed, and means adopted, with the number of occupiers who have furnished the Department with the return "Schedule Report by Occupier," as required under Section 3, Rabbits Destruction Act, 1884, is as under.

The annexed table shows the various methods adopted by occupiers in the different districts:—

Total Number of Occupiers.	Number of Occupiers adopting the various modes of destruction specified.						Men employed.	Rabbits destroyed, as shown by Returns.	
	<i>Hunting and Shooting.</i>	<i>Trapping.</i>	<i>Digging out.</i>	<i>Poison.</i>	<i>Fumigating.</i>	<i>Bisulphide of Carbon.</i>			
Northern District	131	130	65	58	58	1	4	255	142,187
Midland District.....	170	59	78	31	85	6	9	668	1,273,098
Southern District	377	203	105	35	166	<i>Nil.</i>	9	802	1,426,626
	678	392	248	124	309	7	22	1725	2,841,911

The number of Rabbits destroyed, as shown by the 678 occupiers, is, I believe, far under the actual number killed, there being several large holders included in the above Return who could not keep any record, having depended solely upon poisoned grain as a means of destruction.

I purpose sending out at once for future information "Schedule Report by Occupier," as required to be furnished under the Act, and similar to those from which the above information is derived, making them returnable on the last day of December of this year.

The Custom House report shows the number and value of Rabbit Skins exported, as under:—

	<i>Rabbit Skins exported.</i>	<i>Value.</i>
1883	1,735,857	£20,367
1884	1,730,626	14,537

Since last year the Rabbit Preserving Company at Glenorchy has ceased operations.

The following table contains information furnished by Messrs. A. G. Webster & Son, and Mr. C. F. Pitt, of Campbell Town:—

	<i>Year.</i>	<i>Phosphorised Grain.</i>	<i>Bisulphide of Carbon.</i>	<i>Phosphorus.</i>	<i>Phosphorising Machines.</i>
Messrs. A. G. Webster and Son	1884	260 bushels	<i>Nil.</i>	800 lbs.	8
Ditto	1885	58½ ditto	170 lbs.	740 lbs.	<i>Nil.</i>
Mr. C. F. Pitt.....	1884	81½ ditto	196 lbs.	<i>Nil.</i>	<i>Nil.</i>
Ditto	1885	72½ ditto	672 lbs.	62 lbs.	<i>Nil.</i>

The quantity of oats supplied is small, in consequence of the number of Phosphorisers in the hands of private owners, who supply the poisoned grain to neighbours and others whose runs are rabbit-infested.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

THOMAS A. TABART, *Chief Inspector.*

The Honorable ADYE DOUGLAS, Chief Secretary.