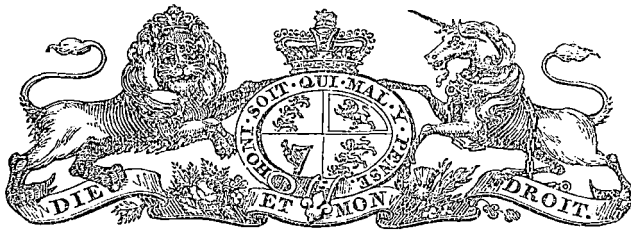


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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

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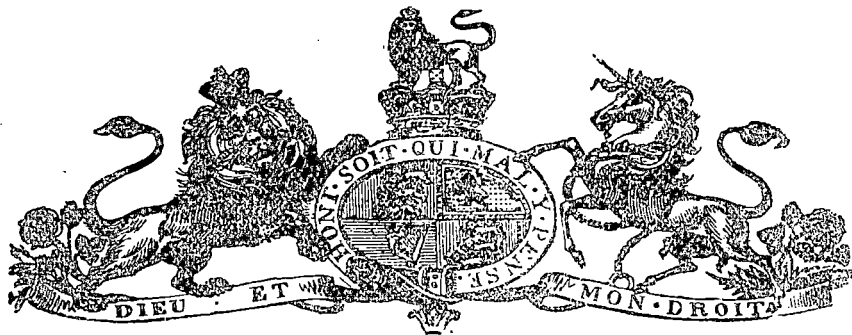
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RABBITS DESTRUCTION ACT:

REPORT BY CHIEF INSPECTOR.

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



## THE RABBITS DESTRUCTION ACT.

*REPORT by Chief Inspector.*

*Office of Inspector of Sheep, Hobart, 1st July, 1886.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor herewith to furnish you with a Report of the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1882," for the year ending 30th June, 1886.

The outlook upon the serious question of rabbits' destruction is not encouraging to the Australian Colonies; it requires considerable and prompt attention, and the passing by Parliament of such stringent measures as shall compel the destruction and eradication of the pest.

I may remark that when the eradication of Scab from Tasmania was enunciated by the late Hon. James Whyte, he was looked upon as a theorist, but the successful issue proved beyond a doubt that he understood the task he proposed to accomplish, though it was deemed by many sceptical persons to be an impossibility; and so it might have been, had not the Scab Act of 1870 been repeatedly amended, with more stringent clauses inserted and enforced. These remarks, I maintain, are applicable to the present working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act;" the time has arrived for the enactment of more stringent measures with an increased staff of Inspectors.

With the meagre staff at present employed in Tasmania no possible good will or can be effected, particularly when we see the want of co-operation on the part of large property-holders with the Department, and when they, instead of assisting the Inspectors, place impediments and obstructions in the way of rabbits' destruction. This, in a measure, may be accounted for by the diversity of opinion expressed by holders of infested land, who are divided as to the best and most destructive methods that should be adopted. The general opinion of those who have had considerable experience, and who have watched closely the operation of the Act, in connection with the obstructive action taken by some owners of rabbit-infested land, and the want of combined action, is that the pest increases daily: this I admit.

The information to hand, taken from "The Report by Occupiers" furnished up to date, clearly indicates that to effect any permanent and satisfactory results, compulsory and simultaneous poisoning, with the use of bisulphide of carbon and digging out burrows, must be the recognised modes of destruction. Many argue that with the use of phosphorised grain they cannot find the carcasses of rabbits poisoned, and at once condemn the method, asserting that if the rabbits were killed they would be found. The test is, are the traces disappearing?—if so, the number of rabbits must be reduced. Much capital is made out of the injurious and destructive effect poisoned grain has upon our native magpie, and is taken up as an argument against the use of poison, by those who do not care for this system of destruction to rabbits and cannot be sincere in their belief, asserting that this bird is the farmer's friend, and destroys worms, grubs, and other insects,—and there is no disputing this point; but yet these gentlemen maintain the magpie is a grain-eater, consequently a destructive bird to the farmer, unless his discrimination is so great that he would rather commit suicide than eat the grain the farmer sows for seed.

Upon referring to "The Handbook of the Birds of Australia," by John Gould, Esq., F.R.S., whose authority cannot be denied upon this subject, he says:—"The magpie's food consists of grasshoppers and other insects, to which berries and fruit are added when procurable."

The use of bisulphide of carbon as a destroying agent for rabbits has been fully tested by a few practical men last season, who are much gratified with its destructive powers. In one instance 25 rabbits and rats were taken dead out of the burrow; snakes have also been destroyed by the deadly fumes of the carbon. Those who have used carbon are much impressed with the desirability of using it in the breeding season. The labourers employed for this method should be careful and reliable men.

Trapping, as a means of extermination is, I contend, most objectionable; the more I see and hear of this practice the more convinced I am that the system is bad. At the present time trappers will not work at the rate now offered, from 1s. to 1s. 3d. per dozen for skins, but will allow rabbits to increase unless owners or occupiers engage them to trap at so much per week. In my Report of 1885 I asserted trapping was taken as an occupation by those who wished to be under no control, and only trap so long as the work is reproductive, as has been proved this season; who will liberate young rabbits as unprofitable on account of the lesser money value on their skins; who do not care for the interests of the owner of the estate upon which they are working (being rovers for this employment); who will only reduce rabbits to a certain limit, taking care to leave numbers to propagate, making these estates a source of profit for the following season. Another most objectionable feature is that trapping drives rabbits into country not previously occupied, also into the unoccupied Crown lands; hence the Government are blamed for having lands, warrens, and feeders for the surrounding private holdings,—which I assert is not the case. Trapping has a most seriously demoralising influence upon the rising youth of Tasmania, who naturally embrace an employment that enables him to go or come at will or, in other words, to be his own master.

The natural enemy of the rabbits I look upon as a thing of the past, but trust the Government in Tasmania will pause before they adopt the course of action New Zealand has, I think, injudiciously followed for rabbits' destruction, viz., the introduction of ferrets, weasels, stoats, and pole-cats. Granted they will destroy numbers of rabbits, it yet has to be proved whether these animals will not turn their attention to sheep and lambs: we know their appreciation for hen-roosts and all feathers, which I maintain they will attack before fur.

I am very strong in my belief that eventually, to cope with this increasing pest, rabbit-proof fencing will have to be erected. In the case of small holdings it might be constructed by a combination of owners in groups, so as to embrace areas of from 6 to 15 square miles; fencing of this description has been erected by some of the midland proprietors with good effect. When constructed the property so embraced is safe from the inroad of rabbits, and the operation of extermination can be carried on with greater chance of success within the limited extent so protected. Care must then be taken to prevent rabbits from burrowing into these enclosures. In the case of large estates each owner could completely isolate his property; this process would entirely do away with the ill-feeling that now exist as to who are the rabbit breeders.

Issuing and serving notices upon the owners of properties in the Richmond District under the 7th Section of "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1883," (47 Vict. No. 15) has caused considerable excitement. A meeting of property holders was held protesting against my action, and was followed by a deputation, which requested that the matter of briars' destruction should be stayed until the meeting of Parliament. It was asserted at the meeting that the briars and the berries were good food for stock, which to my experience is novel; I have never heard that the propagation of briars is beneficial to land, or is valuable or desirable as a food plant. Stock are excellent disseminators when fed upon the berries, not only over the owner's own land, but over neighbours' properties. I may point out that this section has been enforced in the north of the Island with very good and beneficial results; no exception was taken to the way in which the department worked the Act, nor have any ruinous or arbitrary means been resorted to. It was explained to the meeting that ordinary measures should be taken to deal with the growing evil. There is a desire on the part of the Richmond owners to have this section repealed. I also recommend that course to be adopted.

I have suggested in my Report under the "Californian Thistle Act" the passing of a law for the suppression of "noxious weeds," and have requested that the briar be named as one of the objectionable plants. The destruction of this plant would be the means of saving our valuable river flats and cultivated land from certain destruction. I feel confident this would be the proper and best way to deal with the briar question.

In consequence of the rabbit pest being such a serious evil and loss to the Colony, I trust that the Government will see fit to admit wire netting for rabbit-proof fencing, phosphorus, phosphorising machines, and bisulphide of carbon into Tasmania free of duty. I believe many holders of land would avail themselves of the concession, and erect netting fence as a block against rabbits.

I must again suggest that Section 6 of "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1882" be repealed, and an Amended Act passed with a clause making the use of poisoned grain and bisulphide of carbon compulsory and simultaneous (from a date to be named), to be continued with other means such as the Department recommends to be followed.

More power must be conferred upon Inspectors under the Act; provision must be made compelling negligent owners or occupiers to destroy rabbits. When an Inspector finds that an owner or occupier is not using sufficient means to cope with the pest, he shall at once serve a notice insisting that more active means be taken to destroy rabbits; if the occupier or owner fails within seven days to carry this into effect, an Inspector shall have power to employ men and destroy rabbits on the property mentioned in the notice, at the cost and risk of the owner or occupier.

The insertion of a clause equivalent to the 14th Section of "The Education Act, 1885," (49 Vict. No. 15), to provide against objectionable action being taken when Inspectors are laying informations, as has been the case within certain Municipalities, is absolutely necessary to facilitate the working of the Department.

In answer to my letter addressed to the authorities in New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland, courteous replies have been received furnishing me with valuable information on the Rabbits and Marsupial Destruction Acts, to which I beg respectfully to draw your attention.

New South Wales replies to the following effect, taking my questions seriatim:—

No. 1. How the fund for carrying out the Rabbit Act in New South Wales is raised?

A special fund is raised by annual assessment from all stock-owners of 200 horses or cattle, or 200 horses and cattle and upwards, at a rate not exceeding  $1\frac{1}{2}d.$  per head for all exceeding that number, and all stock-owners of 100 or more sheep at a rate not exceeding one farthing per head for all exceeding that number. These assessments must be paid on or before 1st May to the Colonial Treasurer, or to such other duly appointed person on his behalf, and are carried to the credit of a special account called the Rabbit Account, to which all moneys paid under this Act are charged. They are an annual preferential charge on all stock liable to assessment into the possession of whomsoever they pass.

In the event of the fund standing to the credit of the Rabbit Account proving inadequate to pay all subsidies, salaries, expenses, and other sums authorised by the Act, they are paid out of such moneys as may have been appropriated by Parliament for the purpose of the Act, but must be recouped to the Consolidated Revenue when there is a sufficient balance to the credit of the Rabbit Account.

No. 2. The amount required to meet demands?

The average expenditure since the Act came into operation on 1st May, 1883, has been at the rate of £82,882 per annum.

No. 3. The number of Inspectors employed, with rate of salary?

1 Superintending Inspector, at £400 per annum.

1 ditto, at £350 per annum.

The Superintending Inspectors receive an allowance for travelling expenses, at 30s. per diem, when absent at night from head quarters, and of 25s. per diem when travelling during the day but at head quarters at night.

33 Inspectors at £300 per annum; 1 Inspector at £250 per annum; 4 Inspectors at £400 per annum. Inspectors receive a forage allowance of from 10s. to 30s. per week, according to the nature of the district in which they are stationed; they also receive an annual allowance of £3 for stationery.

No. 4. The most effective mode of dealing with the pest in New South Wales?

So many methods have been tried with such varying success that it is difficult to say which has proved the most effective; but the largest results have been obtained from trapping, hunting with dogs, and the use of bisulphide of carbon. There can be but little doubt that the eradication of the pest can never be achieved by the measures at present adopted, unless the same be assisted by the introduction of a comprehensive scheme providing for the enclosure of the infested area in blocks of from 10 to 20 square miles, combined with increased protection to the natural enemy of the rabbits, by the imposition and enforcement of heavier penalties in every conviction for the destruction of cats, iguanas, &c. The members of the Rabbit Conference, held in Sydney in October last, were very emphatic in the enunciation of these views; and as that meeting was principally composed of gentlemen whose interests were most affected by the inroads of the pest, and as many of the members were persons whose experience of the best means for its suppression has been of a varied, and in many instances crucial character, their opinions may perhaps be accepted as deciding the question of what is the best mode of dealing with the plague in this country.

I have to inform you that during my recent visit to New South Wales I took the opportunity of placing myself in communication with the Rabbit Branch of that Colony to gain, if possible, any

information that would be instructive, beneficial, or applicable to our own circumstances, and be the means of forwarding the destruction of the pest in Tasmania. I was strongly advised by Mr. Taylor, who is the gentleman administering the law in New South Wales, to proceed to Hay and from there strike out west so that I might see the Mallee Country and that portion of the mainland where rabbits were most plentiful, also this being the nearest part of the country to be reached, as I had only a very limited time at my disposal. From Hay I proceeded west into the Mallee Country, being furnished with horses by Mr. James Tyson, jun., of Tupra, who accompanied me during the greater portion of my journey: he then provided a guide to the Mallee. The rabbits in this were not nearly so numerous as in Tasmania, neither is the country so difficult to destroy in as our rocky hill-sides and scrub country. Trapping and hunting with dogs is the New South Wales recognised methods of destruction, on account of the subsidy that is paid for scalps. The rate fixed is 6*d.* per scalp, of which amount 1½*d.* is paid by the squatter, and 4½*d.* by the Government. Poisoning with phosphorised grain and bisulphide of carbon is seldom used on account of the loss of skins by these methods, and consequently of the subsidy.

I have to thank Mr. Taylor and Mr. James Tyson, jun., for their kindness in giving me all possible directions and means by which I was enabled to carry out the object of my trip into the Mallee Country.

Victoria has furnished me with the following information relative to the working of the Rabbit Act in that Colony:—

For the Rabbit Act, funds for working unoccupied Crown Land only are provided by Parliament. The amount varies. The sum provided on the estimates for 1884 and 1885 was £1200, and for 1885 and 1886, £23,000. The Head Inspector receives £300 per annum and travelling expenses, and allowances of 15*s.* per diem, personal expenses when travelling only. The Crown Land Bailiffs act as Inspectors when required, and receive an allowance in addition to the salaries paid for Crown Lands Bailiffs' work. Phosphorised grain, chaff, and arsenic, and bisulphide of carbon has been found the most effective for the destruction of rabbits.

Queensland.—The working of the Marsupials Act takes another form. The expenses for this Act is raised by an assessment levied per 100 sheep or 200 head of cattle and horses, which varies in the different districts from 1*s.* to 5*s.* The Government grant a subsidy at the rate of one pound for every pound levied by this form of assessment.

The number of rabbits, as furnished by the Schedule Report of Occupier, for the past six months ending 31st December, 1885, herewith given, when compared with the previous six months up to June 30th, 1885, reporting the number of rabbits destroyed, which I have curtailed, clearly shows that during the season when skins are not valuable little is being effected to destroy rabbits; this will always be the case so long as owners and occupiers persist in trapping so as to make rabbit destruction reproductive.

Under these circumstances I consider I am justified in asking that compulsory and simultaneous poisoning, with the use of bisulphide of carbon and digging out burrows, shall become law for rabbits' destruction throughout Tasmania. This method, with an increased staff of inspectors, is absolutely necessary to secure that the work is well and truly done.

The additional Inspectors required, with the rate of salaries, I will embody in my Report under the Scab Act, as Inspectors under "The Rabbits Destruction Act" are Inspectors under the "Scab Act," which I propose to have renamed "The Sheep and Stock Act."

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

THOMAS A. TABART, *Chief Inspector.*

*The Hon. J. W. AGNEW, Chief Secretary.*

NUMBER of Occupiers adopting the various modes of destruction specified, during the Six Months ending 31st December, 1885.

	Total Number of Occupiers.	Hunting, Shooting, Trapping.	Digging out.	Poison.	Fumigating.	Bisulphide of Carbon.	Men working.	Rabbits destroyed as shown by Returns.
Northern District ..	532	783	403	227	3	—	807	380,379
Southern District ..	140	195	63	47	43	—	286	107,263
Midland District....	203	558	17	93	4	—	672	370,973
	875	1536	483	367	50	Nil.	1765	858,615

NUMBER of Occupiers adopting the various modes of destruction specified, during the Six Months ending 30th June, 1885.

Total Number of Occupiers.	Hunting, Shooting, Trapping.	Digging out.	Poison.	Fumigating.	Bisulphide of Carbon.	Men employed.	Rabbits destroyed as shown by Returns.
678	392	120	309	7	22	1725	2,841,911

No reliable data is given to show how much time of the men employed was given to rabbits' destruction.

The Custom House report shows the number and value of rabbit skins exported as under :—

	Rabbit Skins exported.	Value.
1883.....	1,735,857	£20,367
1884.....	1,730,626	£14,537
1885.....	2,872,896	£22,572

I herewith beg to furnish a Report of the number of prosecutions that have been instituted under "The Rabbits Destruction Act" during the past 12 months, from 30th June, 1885, up to 30th June, 1886, showing the fines inflicted in each District, with the amount :—

#### MIDLAND DISTRICT.

Cases Tried.	Fines inflicted in each case.	Total amount.
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
3	0 1 0	0 3 0
9	0 5 0	2 5 0
1	1 0 0	1 0 0
1	3 0 0	3 0 0
1	5 0 0	5 0 0
4 cases dismissed	...	...
19	...	£11 8 0

One case was heard in this District for using insulting language to the Inspector, under "The Police Act." Delinquent fined £1 and costs.

#### SOUTHERN DISTRICT.

Cases Tried.	Fines inflicted in each case.	Total amount.
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
1	0 10 0	0 10 0
1	10 0 0	10 0 0
2	...	£10 10 0

## NORTHERN DISTRICT.

<i>Cases Tried.</i>	<i>Fines inflicted in each case.</i>	<i>Total Amount.</i>
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
3	0 1 0	0 3 0
4	0 5 0	1 0 0
1	0 10 0	0 10 0
1	1 0 0	1 0 0
1	2 0 0	2 0 0
1	20 0 0	20 0 0
11	...	£24 13 0

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 & Son .....	1884-5	Bushels 260	<i>Nil.</i>	800 lbs.	8
Ditto .....	1885-6	58½	170 lbs.	740 lbs.	<i>Nil.</i>
Ditto .....	1886-7	80	165 lbs.	960 lbs.	5
Mr. C. F. Pitt .....	1884	81½	196 lbs.	<i>Nil.</i>	<i>Nil.</i>
	1885	72½	672 lbs.	62 lbs.	<i>Nil.</i>
	1886	98½	464 lbs.	140½ lbs.	<i>Nil.</i>

It will be seen from the above Table the large increase in the quantity of phosphorus used, which method will, I feel certain, shortly become the recognised mode of rabbits' destruction.