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1893.

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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

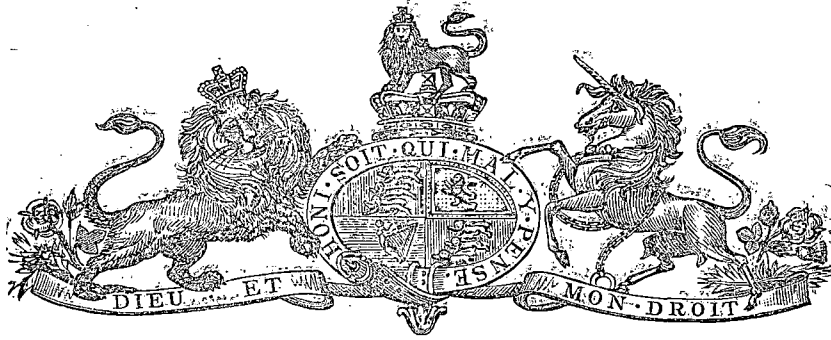
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RABBITS DESTRUCTION ACT:

REPORT OF 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 Stock, Hobart, June 30th, 1893.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to furnish my Annual Report under "The Rabbits Destruction Act," up to date, also Reports from District Inspectors. These are herewith attached.

I have the honor to further comment upon the Rabbit question, and in so doing beg to draw your attention to the diversity of schemes placed before meetings and the public, which clearly demonstrates that there is no consensus of opinion, and that those who oppose the present Act and Inspectors appointed to administer the law, do so either from animus against the Department or from insufficient knowledge of the most efficient method of dealing with the Rabbit pest. The meetings held at Richmond and at Bothwell favourably considered the wire netting scheme I placed before you for approval. The Green Ponds meeting, composed chiefly of Members of the Branch Board of Agriculture, disapproved of my scheme, but unanimously adopted the Council of Agriculture's proposals. At Ross the meeting resulted in nothing practical. A resolution was passed to repeal the present Act; also that a local body should administer any future Rabbit Act. These suggestions were supported by many occupiers who had been prosecuted and fined, as also by members of the Council of Agriculture and members of Branch Boards there present. The meeting held at Oatlands on May 13th last appointed a committee to bring up a Report to express the views in accordance with the resolution. The following is the substance of the recommendation made to the adjourned meeting by the Committee, who disapproved of the present Act and Inspectors, the netting scheme, also that propounded by the Council of Agriculture, but favoured a tax of  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per acre upon all land in the colony (which would produce £16,500), and that local bodies should disburse this large sum by purchasing skins of the rabbit at 1s. per dozen all the year round, and calculated upon receiving 1s. 6d. per dozen in England for the winter skins, the propounders evidently not losing sight of the fact that Government would have to pay £12,000 out of the amount, with what object, except to pay for rabbits taken upon infected private lands. The Council of Agriculture's proposal is to place the control of the Rabbit Act in the hands of a governing body without funds (so the Secretary announces—*vide* "Tasmanian News," May 4, 1893), every occupier to be an informer against his neighbour to the governing body, who shall give 21 days' notice; (without any power to ascertain if the complaint is made from bad feeling of neighbours or otherwise); if the first notice is disregarded a further 21 days' notice is issued, involving 42 days' notice to commence work. The period of gestation of the rabbit being 30 days, the increase continues in the mean time. This fact alone shows that those proposing such skeleton laws must be practically ignorant of the habit of the rodent; the occupier having failed to commence work in 42 days, has men placed upon his land by the governing body to destroy the rabbits. Now the most vital question occurs under the Council Resolutions—how is the work to commence and continue without funds? The governing body after having destroyed the rabbits proceeds to recover, possibly sell the property, which, owing to mortgage, does not cover the outlay. A rate will then have to be levied throughout the district, to pay for killing rabbits upon the property, a proceeding which does not concern any one except the tenant, owner, or mortgagee: further comment is unnecessary.

I most strongly urge the Government to retain the present law for the destruction of rabbits, and to again submit to Parliament the Bill that passed through the House of Assembly last Session, with the addition of a Clause providing for the appointment of a Magistrate to hear all prosecutions under the Rabbit Act. The fines then inflicted would be uniform in every District, and all cases would be determined upon their merits. Consequent upon the opposition, I consider it would be waste of time to frame a Bill to make the netting scheme I submitted to you law, but I am still of opinion that ultimately this will be a popular recommendation (enclosing, as it shows, a large acreage at a very nominal cost), and would be the groundwork and base-line for universal wire-netting, which is admitted on all sides to be the primary step towards rabbit destruction.

I cannot conclude without briefly drawing your attention to the dismissals of cases when proceedings have been instituted under "The Rabbits Destruction Act," notably in the Green Ponds District. One case was dismissed upon the evidence of trappers, one of whom swore that few rabbits were to be caught upon the estate owned by the defendant. The evidence of myself and the District Inspector went to prove that rabbits were very numerous, and that no sufficient means had been taken to destroy. This fact has been clearly established by the occupier himself in his returns for the past six months ending the 1st April, 1893, wherein he admits having destroyed within that period from 25,000 to 30,000 rabbits. Proceedings were instituted in September, 1892. Any practical occupier would not hesitate to admit that this number could not have been killed upon the estate within the period named unless they had been very much neglected when the information was dismissed. In the same District another case was dismissed, where upon the estate the rabbits were more numerous than I have seen them for years, or even thicker than in olden days in the Campbell Town District. Two Inspectors gave corroborative evidence, but still a dismissal followed. In these, as in all cases, notices were served upon the occupiers to take effective steps to destroy their rabbits, but were disregarded.

Upon perusal of Inspectors' reports you will observe that all are strongly in favour of poisoning, and the appointment of a Magistrate to hear all cases instituted under the Rabbit Act. These opinions are supported by myself, conclusively showing that those who administer the law are desirous of an amendment so as to enable the Department to deal successfully in the destruction of rabbits. Should the suggested amendments be passed by Parliament, the owner who performs his duty fairly, and conforms with the law, need not fear the Inspectors or any Act, no matter however stringent, and I feel sure will support such legislation. It is only the occupier of land that evades the law, disregards notices, and generally trifles with the question, who will raise his voice in opposition, and who does not aim at rabbit destruction, but continually complains of his neighbour, himself being the greatest offender, by conserving rabbits in the summer and breeding season for the benefit and gain of the professional trapper—the man who destroys without expense to the owner, only in the winter months, and not infrequently pays such owners for the right to kill. These occupiers absolutely forget that the grass is in the meantime being thrown away upon a pest instead of profitably feeding his sheep and cattle. Hence it is that indifferent lambings, faulty clips of wool, and scarcity of fat stock follow, which is universally admitted. These are the occupiers who assert the present Act is a failure, because they themselves compel pressure to be brought about by Inspectors for their own culpable neglect and indifference in carrying out the provisions of the Rabbit Act. Compulsion is always distasteful alike to the guilty and negligent occupier of land as to the much-abused Inspectors who are paid to administer the law without prejudice; and I consider the reflections that have been and are continually being cast upon the staff is unmanly and paltry in the extreme, when those so doing must know that public officers are debarred the opportunity of reply.

Notwithstanding the difficulty Inspectors have experienced in having the law carried out, I must express my approval of the manner in which their duties have been performed. It has been remarked that in some Districts no prosecutions have been instituted, therefore the law has not been enforced. This is a misconception. It is only in aggravated cases that prosecution is resorted to; and if occupiers can be persuaded to perform their duty without compulsion, it is infinitely better for every one concerned. The absence of Police Court cases is therefore not a sign of laxity on the part of the Inspector, but of a desire on the part of the occupier to conform to the provisions of the Act.

I have the honor to be,  
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

THOMAS A. TABART, *Chief Inspector.*

*The Honorable the Chief Secretary.*

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## DELORAINÉ.

I HAVE the honor to furnish my Report upon the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act" in the districts under my charge during the past year.

Rabbits have unquestionably decreased in the worst infested centres—notably in Chudleigh, Mole Creek, and Irish Town, but in other localities I cannot report any diminution.

The year's experience again confirms the necessity of amending the law in the direction so frequently recommended by the Department:

- (a). A reduction of the minimum penalty.
- (b). Compulsory poisoning.
- (c). Power to destroy at occupiers' expense, and
- (d). Amendment of "The Boundary Fences Act."

Although the Act is defective its enforcement has prevented a large number of holdings from being neglected, to the great injury and annoyance of those who honestly endeavour to cope with the pest.

Proceedings were instituted as follows:—Mr. C. J. L. Smith, Fernbank, £5 and costs; Edward Sullivan, Long Plains, £5 and costs; Mr. W. E. Field, Somerville, dismissed; Mr. E. J. R. Parker, Sillwood, dismissed; Mr. Enoch Richardson, Archer, £5 and costs; Mr. John Reardon, Exton, dismissed; Mr. David Rose, Mole Creek, £5 and costs; Mr. W. G. Porter, Exton, £5 and costs; Mr. John Hartnell, Fernhill, £5 and costs; Mr. John Reardon, Cluan, £5 and costs.

Hunting, shooting, and trapping are the methods of destruction usually employed, but the efficacy of phosphorised grain is now generally recognised.

The expense of wire-netting alone precludes its adoption by many who thoroughly believe in it as the only means of effectually preventing the spread of the pest.

All infested Crown lands were poisoned, and on resuming operations this year I find that rabbits are not nearly so numerous.

The outcry sometimes made concerning Crown lands has little reason in it, from the simple fact that rabbits prefer the best food they can get, and that ample provision is made for the destruction of those that seek shelter thereon during the winter months.

R. W. MCGOWAN, *Inspector*.

## FINGAL.

I HAVE the honor to report on the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act" in the Districts under my charge for the past year.

I am very glad to be able to report to you a marked decrease in the rabbits throughout my districts, especially in the parts which have for years past been their strongholds.

Landholders seem to have at last waked up to the necessity of constant activity.

Trapping and shooting have been the favourite means of destruction, but poisoning was very successful wherever tried.

I have made frequent and careful inspections lately, and have never, since having charge of the district, seen the rabbits so well under.

Informations—two, both against T. H. Parker, Esq., at Fingal—dismissed each time.

Inspections on Crown lands showed need of expenditure in only one case. I had poison laid, with satisfactory results.

Distance travelled during the year 3033 miles.

A. MORTYN, *Inspector*.

## CAMPBELL TOWN.

I HAVE the honor to report on the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1889," in my districts for the past twelve months.

Owing to a most favourable breeding season, since my last Report in June, 1892, there has been a more than usual increase in the number of rabbits: still I have no hesitation in saying that the rabbits in the districts under my charge show a marked decrease.

I am still of opinion that a "compulsory poisoning clause" should be inserted in the present Act, giving Inspectors power to order poison to be laid in localities, and at times to be fixed by Inspectors, with the approval of the Chief Inspector.

That the present Act, with the addition of a compulsory poisoning clause and the appointment of a magistrate to hear all cases under this and other Pest Acts, is, I feel convinced, all that is required to make the 1889 Rabbit Act a success.

I regret having to report that, owing to the neglect of some owners and occupiers of land in my districts not complying with notices served on them under Schedule 1 "Rabbit Act, 1889," I have been compelled to lay several informations, as under:—

Mr. Robert C. Gatenby, Stewarton, fined £5, costs, Campbell Town; second information.

Mr. Geo. Thirkell, Devrington, £5, ditto, ditto.

Mrs. Clara Leake, Rosedale, case dismissed; third information.

Mr. James Davidson, Streamshalh, fined £5, costs, ditto.

Mr. Robert Bayles, Ellenthorpe, fined £5, Ross.

Mr. Harry Brown, Ellenthorpe, case dismissed, ditto.

Mr. Charles Headlam, Egleston, fined £5, costs, Campbell Town.

Mr. Edward Dowling, Quorn Hall, fined £5, costs, ditto.

Mr. Wm. Jones, Wolfsraig, fined £5, costs, ditto.

CHARLES W. TABART, *Inspector*.

## NEW NORFOLK.

I HAVE the honor to furnish you with my Report upon the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act" for the past year in the Districts of New Norfolk and Hamilton.

It is with satisfaction I am able to report a marked diminution of the pest in these Districts, advantage having been taken during the late dry season to poison freely: the results, where properly laid, most effectual.

Laying poisoned grain in plough-furrows is now becoming general, although some still keep to the old method of chipping. Trapping at the present time is most resorted to, the skins being again profitable, although trappers in these districts are complaining that they cannot make it pay as in other years, notwithstanding skins are a better price.

The use of wire netting is steadily increasing. Mr. Downie has again been most successful in clearing another large area from rabbits in about 12 months. Mr. G. C. Nicholas, whose run is enclosed, purposes subdividing into 3 or 4 sections. At Lawrenny about 1000 acres have been enclosed around the homestead, and most energetic measures are being taken to destroy the rabbits within this enclosure.

On unoccupied Crown Lands, where necessary, I have had poisoned grain laid, with very satisfactory results.

Had the compulsory poisoning clause proposed last Session become law, I am convinced I should have been enabled to forward you a much more satisfactory report upon the working of the Act.

I have only proceeded against two occupiers, both cases were dismissed: the case against Messrs. Nicholson and Ashton of Kinvarra, the bench considering that laying 10 lbs. of oats on 3900 acres of land was sufficient; the other case against Mathews Brothers of Macquarie Plains, was also dismissed: in this case subsequent proceedings were taken by the Crown for conspiracy, resulting in a committal for trial, but no bill was filed.

CHARLES J. CHALMERS, *Inspector.*

## LAUNCESTON.

IN reference to the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act" in my District for the past 12 months, I regret to inform you that in the rougher portions of the District the rabbits are still far too numerous, notwithstanding the quantities which have been destroyed. In the older infested parts they are kept well under, and in doing this the pest gets driven out further every year.

I still think that nothing but constant killing, summer and winter, chiefly by using poison and the fumigator, the clearing of harbour, and the use of wire netting, will ever keep the vermin in subjection. A preparation of pollard phosphorised has been used lately in Evandale District with grand results.

Prosecutions have been as under:—

R. C. Field, fined £5.  
John Field, ditto £6.  
J. C. Field, case dismissed.  
W. H. D. Archer, ditto.

J. N. FLETCHER, *Inspector.*

## BOTHWELL.

I HAVE the honour to report on the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act," Bothwell District, for the past year.

Poison during the summer was a marked success where used of sufficient strength and judiciously laid. This has been followed by traps, ferrets, and shooting, with good results.

Sixteen notices have been served and complied with.

Twenty-one letters have been written to occupiers where laxity has been shown, with the result that in each case more strenuous means have been taken.

Several miles of wire netting have been erected, with satisfaction to those concerned. It induces occupiers to use more efforts in most cases.

The unoccupied Crown lands, which are only slightly infested, have been attended to, and poison laid with good result.

WM. STONEHOUSE, *Inspector.*

## BRIGHTON.

I HAVE the honour to furnish you with my Report of the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act" in the District under my supervision for the year ending 30th June, 1893.

Careful observation enables me to assure you that the rabbits have been continuously decreasing during the period under review, and that they are at this date less numerous than they have been at any time within the last three years. This result is in great part attributable to the more general and systematic use of poisoned grain.

I would state in support of this view that this year I have had three informations, as against fourteen for the previous twelve months.

The following are the cases I have had :—

1892.—At Green Ponds, 10th October. Information against Bisdee, E. O. Dismissed.

1893.—At Green Ponds, 7th February. Information against Page, Alfred. Dismissed.

Ditto, 12th May. Information against Jones, Henry. Dismissed.

*Re Crown Lands.*—The work of poisoning and destroying the strongholds was commenced on the 1st of April last, and is still being continued where I consider it necessary. The poisoned grain has had good effect, consequently the rabbits are not numerous.

CHARLES GRUEBER, *Inspector.*

#### PARATTAH

I HAVE the honor to furnish you with Report of the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1889," in the District under my control for the past year.

I have made 455 inspections, the distance travelled being about 4700 miles, and the state of the District I maintain is reduced, although some parts not so much as others.

The most general mode of destruction is trapping, but upon properties where phosphorised grain has been systematically used the results have been most satisfactory, so I would strongly urge that its use be made compulsory and simultaneous, at the discretion of Inspectors.

I have kept a close watch on the Crown lands and, where required, have had them poisoned, with excellent results.

I am pleased to see that wire netting is coming into more general use, and the results have amply repaid for the outlay.

With regard to the future working of the Act I would strongly recommend that it be amended as proposed last session of Parliament.

CHARLES GRIFFITH, *Inspector.*

#### RICHMOND.

I HAVE the honor to furnish you with my Report upon the working of "The Rabbits Destruction Act" in the District under my charge during the past year.

I have made 731 inspections, the distance travelled being somewhere near 2500 miles.

I can say that the rabbits have decreased since my last report.

The rabbits upon the larger estates that I spoke of last season have been greatly reduced, poisoning during the autumn, and now trapping.

The principal means adopted for destroying the rabbits have been hunting, trapping, and poisoning. More persons have laid poison during 1892 than 1891, and with good results.

With regard to Crown lands, I have had ten men poisoning for about three months, which has kept the rabbits well under.

GEO. WILSON, *Inspector.*