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WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

REPORT

of the

Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly

appointed to consider the best means of
combating the

Rabbit Pest.

PRESENTED BY MR. SMITH ON TUESDAY, 26TH MARCH, 1918.

Ordered to be printed.

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EXTRACTED FROM THE MINUTES.

WEDNESDAY, 13th FEBRUARY, 1918.

35. *Rabbit Pest*.—Appointment of Select Committee to inquire into.—Mr. Smith, pursuant to notice, moved, That in view of the alarming position created by the rabbits, a Select Committee of this House be appointed to immediately inquire into the present system adopted by the Department for combating the pest, with a view of recommending more effective methods of dealing with this national menace.

Debate ensued.

The Minister for Works moved, That the debate be adjourned.

Question—put and passed.

THURSDAY, 14th FEBRUARY.

11. *Rabbit Pest*.—Appointment of Select Committee to inquire into.—The Order of the Day was read for the resumption of the debate upon the following motion moved by Mr. Smith:—That in view of the alarming position created by the rabbits, a Select Committee of this House be appointed to immediately inquire into the present system adopted by the Department for combating the pest, with a view of recommending more effective methods of dealing with this national menace.

Debate continued.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.
The House divided.

AYES—34.

<p>Mr. Angelo Mr. Broun Mr. Brown Mr. Davies Mr. Draper Mr. Durack Mr. Gardiner Mr. George Mr. Griffiths Mr. Harrison Mr. Hickmott Mr. Holman Mr. Hudson Mr. Johnston Mr. Lefroy Mr. Maley Mr. Mitchell Mr. Money</p>	<p>Mr. Munsie Mr. Nairn Mr. Pickering Mr. Piesse Mr. Pilkington Mr. R. T. Robinson Mr. Roche Mr. Smith Mr. Stewart Mr. Stubbs Mr. Teesdale Mr. Thomson Mr. Underwood Mr. Veryard Mr. Willmott Mr. Hardwick (Teller).</p>
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NOES—8.

Mr. Angwin
Mr. Chesson
Mr. Collier
Mr. Green
Mr. Jones

Mr. Lutey
Mr. Willcock
Mr. O'Loughlen
(Teller).

Question thus passed.

A ballot having been taken the following members were declared to be duly elected, in addition to the mover:—Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley, and Mr. Troy.

Mr. Smith moved, That the Committee have power to call for persons and papers, to sit on days over which the House stands adjourned, to adjourn from place to place, and report on Thursday, 7th March.

Question—put and passed.

Mr. Nairn moved, That the evidence taken by the Committee be not printed, but be made available in type-written copies limited to ten.

Question—put and passed.

The date for reporting was extended until Thursday, 21st March.

TUESDAY, 26th MARCH.

7. *Report of Select Committee*.—Mr. Smith brought up the Report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the best means of combating the Rabbit Pest, and moved, That the Report be received and printed.

Question—put and passed.

Report received, read, and ordered to be printed with appendices and minutes of proceedings, exclusive of evidence.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE.

FRIDAY, 15th FEBRUARY.

The Committee met at 2.15 p.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith, Mr. Maley, Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey.

Election of Chairman.—Mr. Smith was elected Chairman.

Mr. A. Crawford, Chief Inspector of Rabbits, was in attendance.

The Chairman stated that he had authorised the insertion of an advertisement in the *West Australian* inviting evidence from the Public.

The methods of proceeding were discussed.

Adjournment.—The Committee adjourned until Monday, 18th February, at 2.15 p.m.

MONDAY, 18th FEBRUARY.

The Committee met at 2.15 p.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey.

Letters and Papers.—A letter was received from Mr. Crawford, Chief Inspector of Rabbits, forwarding three large maps and some smaller ones for the use of members and copies of Vermin and Rabbit Acts.

Letters volunteering evidence were received from Messrs. M. Murray, J. Beach, A. E. Lewis, H. Mc Callum, and R. E. Welchman.

Witnesses.—The following witnesses were examined:—Mr. C. J. Craig, Inspector of Rabbits; Mr. A. Arnold, Inspector of Rabbits; Mr. A. A. Rosenow, Returned Soldier.

Adjournment.—The Committee adjourned until Tuesday, 19th February, at 2.15 p.m.

TUESDAY, 19th FEBRUARY.

The Committee met at 2.15 p.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley.

Witnesses.—The following witnesses were examined:—Mr. William Paterson, Managing Trustee Agricultural Bank and General Manager of the Industries Assistance Board; Mr. John Thomas Eakins, Drover, residing at 488 Hay Street, Perth; Mr. John Joseph Purtell, Miner, 26 Broome Street, East Perth; Mr. Everard Stone, Station Manager; Mr. George Frederick Best, Farmer, 94 Hensman Road, Subiaco.

The Committee adjourned until Wednesday, 20th February, at 11.30 a.m.

WEDNESDAY, 20th FEBRUARY.

The Committee met at 11.30 a.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley.

Witnesses.—The following witnesses were examined:—George Lowe Sutton, Agricultural Commissioner for the Wheat Belt; John Beech, 211 Bul-

wer Street, North Perth; John Gottlieb Sachse, Farmer, Kununoppin; George Frederick Best (Recalled); Samuel Richard Lewes Elliott, Pastoralist. The Committee adjourned.

THURSDAY, 21st FEBRUARY.

The Committee met at 10.45 a.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley, Mr. Troy.

Witnesses.—The following witnesses were examined:—Alexander Crawford, Chief Inspector of Rabbit Department; Edward Horne Wittenoom, Pastoralist; Alexander Mackenzie Murray, Tea Expert, Perth.

The Committee adjourned.

TUESDAY, 26th FEBRUARY.

The Committee met at 2.30 p.m.

Present.—Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley, Mr. Troy.

Witnesses.—The following witnesses were examined:—Frank Ernest Shaw, Manager State Implement Works; William Brogan, Stock Dealer; Sydney Frederick Logue, Squatter; John Henry Mead, Pastoralist; Ronald Macdonald, Chief State Land Tax Assessor.

The Committee adjourned.

WEDNESDAY, 27th FEBRUARY.

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley, Mr. Troy.

Witnesses.—The following witnesses were examined:—Alexander Crawford, Chief Inspector of Rabbits; Charles George Crane, Farmer; Alexander Robert Richardson, Trustee of Agricultural Bank and Chairman Industries Assistance Board; William Magill Robins, Restaurant-keeper; Albert Greenham, Farmer.

The Committee adjourned.

THURSDAY, 28th FEBRUARY.

The Committee met at 3 p.m.

Present:—Mr. Maley, Mr. Griffiths.

Witness.—The following witness was examined:—Thomas Amos Drage, Pastoralist.

The Committee adjourned.

TUESDAY, 5th MARCH.

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey.

Witnesses.—The following witnesses were examined:—Edward Alexander Mann, Government Analyst; John Hopgood Gibson, Farmer; Christian Frederic Mouritzen, Farmer; Hugh Wilson, Farmer; Arthur John Langford, Auctioneer.

The Committee adjourned.

SATURDAY, 9th MARCH.

The Committee met at Badgerin.

Present:—Mr. Maley (Chairman), Mr. Lutey.

Witness.—The following witness was examined:—William Baldwin, Poison cart driver.

The Committee adjourned.

SUNDAY, 10th MARCH.

The Committee met at Mulji, Mt. Marshall, and Trayning.

Present:—Mr. Maley (Chairman), Mr. Lutey.

Witnesses.—The following witnesses were examined:—Charles Traver, Farmer; Basil Wilberforce Gladstone Hopwood, Farmer; Joseph Elliott Clough, Farmer; Richard Harrison, Farmer; Arthur Bance, Farmer; Henry Guy Vernon Hardwick, Farmer; Frederick Charles Weyman, Farmer; Frank Ridgway, Secretary Ninghan Road Board and Vermin Board.

The Committee adjourned.

MONDAY, 11th MARCH.

The Committee met at Hindmarsh.

Present:—Mr. Maley (Chairman), Mr. Lutey.

Witness.—The following witness was examined:—Frederick Charles Ball, Farmer.

The Committee adjourned.

WEDNESDAY, 13th MARCH.

The Committee met at 2.30 p.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey.

Witnesses.—The following witnesses were examined:—Sydney Stubbs, M.L.A., Wagin; Charles Lewis Morgan, Manager and Editor *Sun* Newspaper; Alexander Crawford, Chief Inspector of Rabbits; George William Simpson, Manager Industries Assistance Board.

The Committee adjourned.

THURSDAY, 14th MARCH.

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey.

Witness.—The following witness was examined:—Alexander Crawford, Chief Inspector of Rabbits.

The Committee adjourned.

TUESDAY, 19th MARCH.

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley.

The evidence was discussed.

The Committee adjourned.

WEDNESDAY, 20th MARCH.

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley.

Discussion on the evidence continued.

The Committee adjourned.

THURSDAY, 21st MARCH.

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley.

Discussion on the evidence continued.

The Committee adjourned.

MONDAY, 25th MARCH.

The Committee met at 4 p.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley, Mr. Troy.

A draft report was submitted by the Chairman and considered.

The Committee adjourned.

TUESDAY, 26th MARCH.

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

Present:—Mr. Smith (Chairman), Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Lutey, Mr. Maley, Mr. Troy.

Discussion on the draft report continued.

Question—That the report be agreed to—put and passed.

The Committee adjourned.

REPORT.

The Committee held twenty meetings in Perth, took evidence at Badgerin, Mulji, Mt. Marshall, Trayning, and Hindmarsh, and examined forty witnesses. The committee also visited the State Implement Works at North Fremantle and inspected the poison carts and other rabbit destroying appliances being manufactured there. The manager of the works gave a demonstration of the poison carts at work.

Two members of your committee, Messrs. Lutey and Maley, inspected by motor car the rabbit infested country around North Cowcowing, Mt. Marshall, Trayning, Wyalkatchem, and along No. 2 rabbit fence to Cunderdin. This is considered typical rabbit country and the visiting members were enabled to obtain a correct impression of the effect of the ravages of the pest and also examine witnesses on the spot.

A supplementary report by Messrs Lutey and Maley is attached. The other members of the committee did not consider it necessary to accompany the expedition, as they had many opportunities of seeing this and similar country on previous occasions and can substantiate the statements in the supplementary report.

Your committee could have examined many more witnesses, but as this only meant repetition of evidence and delay in submitting the report, besides unnecessary expense, it was agreed that the evidence herewith presented is sufficient for the purpose of the inquiry.

After hearing the various witnesses examined and from personal observation, your committee is convinced that not only is the country between No. 1 and No. 2 fences greatly infested with rabbits, but they have been on the west side of No. 2 fence and some considerable distance south of No. 3 fences for several years, and they are at present rapidly increasing. They have also been located at isolated places south of Moora and west of No. 2 fence and also west of the Darling Range. There is no doubt that unless energetic measures are promptly undertaken the country west of the No. 2 fence, including the Darling Range, which at present it considered clear, will shortly be overrun with the vermin. Should they obtain a footing in the rough hill country, your committee is not prepared to forecast the tremendous damage that is likely to accrue, whilst the cost of keeping the pest in check would mean an enormous yearly tax on the community.

We are satisfied that great damage has been done to crops in the Wheat Belt, particularly during the past two seasons and that in many instances this has led to the abandonment of farms. It would be hard to express the loss to the community in money, but it must run into many thousands of pounds, and if the loss is going to be minimised in the future, the State has undoubtedly got to face a large annual expenditure.

Briefly, your committee consider that the rabbit has arrived in Western Australia to stay and can only be controlled by untiring watchfulness and judicious expenditure of money.

Although rabbits have been known to exist in several localities for a number of years inside No. 1 fence, it is only within the past two or three years that the pest has assumed such alarming proportions, culminating last season in what may truly be described as a national disaster.

Your committee in searching for the causes of this state of affairs is forced to the following conclusions:—

1. That the several Governments in office since the rabbit invasion neglected or failed to provide sufficient money for the proper carrying on of a war of extermination.
2. That they also neglected to provide up-to-date legislation for dealing with the pest.
3. That the Rabbit Department, the Agricultural Bank and Industries Assistance Board were lacking in energy and common sense co-operation in carrying out their duties in connection with rabbit destruction.
4. That many farmers and settlers displayed general apathy and neglect in not making effort to suppress the pest on their holdings.

Coupled with these four principal causes, the recent favourable seasons contributed largely to the great and widespread increase in rabbits, so that as already stated, they have become a national menace.

Dealing with cause No. 1, it will only be necessary to give the amounts of the various rabbit votes for the past few years to show how expenditure has been curtailed:—

1912/13	..	..	£15,250
1913/14	..	..	£15,034
1914/15	..	..	£13,500
1915/16	..	..	£12,000
1916/17	..	..	£9,000

These reduced votes were made in face of continued appeals by the Chief Inspector for more money and also the self evident necessity for greater expenditure, as the rabbits increased and spread over a large tract of country.

Cause No. 2 is borne out by the fact that the Rabbit Department is still working under an Act passed as far back as 1902, at a time when rabbits were commonly supposed to have been effectively checked by No. 1 fence. Contrary to public opinion, this Statute does not provide for the carrying on of general rabbit destruction by the department. It does not appear to have contemplated the existing state of affairs and deals mainly with fencing and the suppression of sporadic outbreaks. Poisoning

is scarcely mentioned while the trapping and sale of local rabbits is absolutely prohibited. This may have been intelligent legislation at a period when rabbits were scarcely known to exist inside the fence, but it is obviously out of date when the whole country is now overrun with vermin. So apparent were the deficiencies of the Rabbit Act, that on several occasions Ministers have suppressed prosecutions taken by the Chief Inspector against settlers. They evidently felt that it would be unreasonable to prosecute settlers for having rabbits on their blocks when the Government itself was not prepared to proceed with the eradication of rabbits on adjoining Crown lands. Your committee is advised that the section of the Act compelling settlers to destroy rabbits on their land is now to be enforced, subject to all such prosecutions being first referred to the Minister.

A section in the present Act provides for the protection of the natural enemies of the rabbit, but this has not been very carefully looked to, as the Chief Inspector was not too sure whether the bunggarr was on the protected list or not. We understand that this reptile is the greatest enemy of the rabbit, but is not protected, though the Inspector says he has several times asked to have it gazetted. No reason for the omission is suggested.

Cause No. 3.—For lack of energy on the part of the Rabbit Department it is only necessary to refer to the numbers of rabbits allowed to exist on the Dromedary Camel Station. This property is used by the Rabbit Department as a breeding place for camels to be worked on the fences. It is immediately inside No. 1 fence and there are thousands of rabbits on it almost coming up to the doors of the homestead. One would think that the department should at least set a good example. In attaching any blame to the department, however, we desire to minimise our censure by pointing out that sufficient funds for carrying on the work were not provided. There are at present only 27 officers and men employed, and as 2,043 miles of fencing have to be supervised there is not much time left for carrying out extermination work.

We find that the Agricultural Bank and the Industries Assistance Board were not sufficiently alive to the seriousness of the position, bearing in mind that many of their securities, were in danger, and these two departments are largely responsible for the prefunctory efforts which have been made to eradicate the pest.

The general policy of the bank and the Industries Assistance Board appears to have been to disclaim any responsibility and the throwing of the onus on to the Rabbit Department. There is undoubted evidence of want of co-operation between these departments, with the result that practically nothing was done. As an instance of the lack of mutual understanding, it might be mentioned that the Bank's inspectors were gazetted inspectors under the Rabbit Act and that 12 months afterwards the head officials were unaware of their appointment. Nor does it appear that any reports were made by these officers. The Bank apparently was not much concerned as to what effect the rabbits would have on its securities, for we cannot find that much effort was made by that institution to compel or assist fencing of dams in dry areas, or supplying clients with poison carts, or insisting on the rabbit netting of properties. In some cases the Bank refused to make advances for rabbit netting and only

allowed sheep netting on the grounds that there was no danger from rabbits.

There is evidence that the Industries Assistance Board were not sympathetic in allowing settlers assistance when engaged in rabbit poisoning, holding the view that advances were only made to forward cropping. Lack of funds is again given as the excuse for not being able to do anything.

Cause No. 4.—There is no doubt that many settlers could have considerably saved their position if they had shown a little more enterprise and self-reliance in undertaking the destruction of rabbits. We have it on evidence that some were supplied with poison delivered free at their door by the Rabbit Department, yet they did not take the trouble to lay it round their farms. As a consequence their crops were more or less ruined. Some farmers even expressed themselves in favour of allowing the rabbits to come in, in order to provide cheap meat. On the other hand, we are pleased to say that many farmers displayed great energy and enterprise in waging war on the rabbit, and they were able to reap the reward in saving their crops.

The present Act provides for the supply of rabbit netting to farmers on very reasonable terms, but this concession has not been availed of to any great extent, except in the case of one or two pastoralists. So poor was the demand for netting that the department gradually discontinued importing supplies, and to-day they have only a few rolls for most urgent necessities, such as fencing dams, etc.

WORK OF THE DEPARTMENT.

Fences.

As at present constituted the principal work of the department appears to be the control of the barrier fences, and the evidence tendered shows these to have been well erected and maintained. They have undoubtedly been the means of destroying great numbers of rabbits every year. Yard traps were erected every five miles on the eastern side, but recently the department thought it advisable to transfer a number of these traps to the west side. In our opinion, which is backed up by that of the Chief Inspector, these traps have not always been located at the best sites. We think they should be at more frequent intervals, and placed at spots favoured by rabbits instead of the hard and fast rule of one at every five-mile peg.

It has been suggested that No. 1 fence should be lifted and the netting distributed amongst settlers. Your committee after carefully considering this proposition are emphatically of the opinion that it would be a great mistake.

The fence at present is an undoubted check to the waves of rabbits, which from time to time sweep westward from the goldfields. A tremendous wave is at present approaching.

The cost of lifting the fence and distributing it to the farmers would be prohibitive, while there would only be enough netting to serve a small percentage of the holdings.

The width of the netting would also be reduced, as the six inches placed underground has deteriorated to such an extent that it would be useless once it was lifted.

The evidence given proves conclusively that rabbits find their way through the gates on the fence line when left open, either accidentally or by design. We think that some improvement in the present sys-

tem of closing the gates should be looked for. Your committee tried four gates, and in each instance the catch would not work when swung to, but would bounce open again.

It may not come within the province of your committee, but we think we are justified in drawing attention to the fact that an enormous quantity of barb wire is at present, and has been for some years, lying along No. 1 fence. We understand the idea is to fix this wire on to the fence at some future date. In our opinion this would not be of much use as a protection against vermin. We recommend that the wire be collected and sold to farmers or pastoralists requiring it. The present high price of barb wire would return the department a very handsome profit on the original cost, and the money could be used more effectively in other directions. At present there does not appear to be much prospect of using the wire on the fence for many years.

Although later on we recommend wire netting as one of the principal means of coping with the pest, there are at present practically no stocks available in Australia, and the Rabbit Department is unable to say where it can get supplies. Other than making inquiries from one or two firms, no effort has been made to obtain supplies abroad.

Poisoning.

When the pest had assumed alarming proportions, the Ninghan Roads Board with commendable enterprise, procured three I.X.L. poison carts from Sydney, and spent out of their own funds some £130 in laying poison.

The expense in operating the carts was too heavy for the local authority, and they were taken over by the department and worked in different parts of the country. The destruction of rabbits by this means has proved very effective, and poison carts are now coming into general use. At Lake Grace, where the rabbits threatened ruination to the settlers, the poison cart saved the situation. The State Implementation Works has evolved a cart which is said to be doing the work satisfactorily, and a large number has already gone out.

The Rabbit Department as also the Agricultural Bank and Industries Assistance Board, having become alive to the situation are now seeing to the distribution of carts all over the country.

A spasmodic effort was made by the department to destroy rabbits by means of poisoned apples, but the experiment ended in failure, and has not been repeated. The department also distributed quantities of various brands of poison for hand laying.

In most instances the results were satisfactory, but the method is slow and costly when compared with the poison cart. Speaking generally, there does not appear to have been any continuity of effort in poisoning by the department, but the Chief Inspector rightly points out that the Act does not impose upon him this responsibility.

It appears certain that with the great number of carts going out, there will be a large quantity of poison required. The Chief Inspector estimates the need at from three to four thousand cases, but the quantity he has in sight and on order only amounts to three or four hundred cases. He is unable to indicate where he is likely to get sufficient supplies

to meet the demand. The Federal authorities are stated to have approached the Imperial Government for permission to allow supplies of poison to come to Australia. If the request is not granted the position in the future is indeed serious, for the Eastern States are also in great need of supplies.

The department has experimented with other poisons such as arsenic, but with unsatisfactory results.

It has tried to obtain supplies of carbonate of barium and strychnine, but the market is practically bare.

The Ninghan Vermin Board is using cyanide for poisoning water around dams with good results. The Government Analyst does not think that it would be practical to manufacture poisons locally other than arsenic, which we do not consider satisfactory.

Fumigating.

Very little fumigating has been done by the department on the ground that this method of destruction is only suitable when there are large colonies of rabbits inhabiting burrows. Here again there is a shortage of the necessary chemicals so that this means cannot be relied on.

Trapping.

The department has not lately encouraged trapping. In fact the Chief Inspector condemns it *in toto* for the reason that spring traps tend to scare and scatter the rabbits. Nevertheless settlers in many parts have used spring traps extensively and succeeded in destroying large numbers of rabbits, and by this means saved their crops.

Within the past 12 months the department has permitted the marketing of trapped rabbits on payment of a license fee of 2s. 6d., and a number of settlers have earned considerable sums of money where the train service permitted the marketing of rabbits in good condition.

The Settler and the Department.

For some unexplainable reason there is undoubtedly want of harmony existing between the general body of settlers and the Rabbit Department. This is rather unfortunate, as the work of destroying the pest is considerably nullified. We cannot say what is the reason for this state of affairs, but it undoubtedly exists. Perhaps if the Chief Inspector got more into personal touch with farmers things in this direction would work more smoothly.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

After carefully considering the position and weighing the evidence tendered, your Committee unanimously make the following recommendation:—

First, the immediate passing of a new Act to deal with the pest as it is to-day and to provide for possible contingencies in the future.

Such legislation to include the decentralisation of administration.

The formation of vermin boards from existing roads boards controlling districts where rabbits are known to exist or adjacent to those districts.

Compulsory destruction of rabbits to be carried out by settlers under the supervision of the vermin board officers.

Special rates to be levied on the owner or occupier of all alienated lands or lands in the process of alien-

ation, including lands in the hands of the Agricultural Bank and other mortgagees, also pastoral and other leases.

A Government subsidy to be paid to the boards on account of unalienated lands or abandoned farms which may have reverted to the Crown. Such subsidy to be based on the work of destruction done or to be done instead of a pound for pound grant.

The Rabbit Department to have supervision over all vermin boards with power to carry out work where a board neglects to do so and to charge for same. Also to establish vermin boards in districts where rabbits have been reported.

From evidence adduced it is abundantly clear that the pest can never be properly got under control until farms or groups of farms are wire netted. Unfortunately it is impossible to obtain the necessary netting for this work in Australia at present, and we would urgently recommend the Government to use every endeavour to obtain supplies at reasonable rates from outside as soon as possible. The world's markets should be searched by our Agent General.

We recommend that fencing of holdings, including dams in dry areas, with rabbit netting be made compulsory, and that any settler unable to finance the work be assisted either by the vermin board or the State and that all fenced holdings receive rebate on their rates, the maximum mesh of netting not to exceed 11½ inches.

We recommend that as soon as wire netting can be obtained a barrier fence should be erected east and west between the pastoral and agricultural lands somewhere about the 30 parallel of latitude.

As considerable quantities of netting will be required for a number of years, we recommend the Government to consider the advisability of manufacturing their requirements at the State Implement Works failing supplies being obtained from other sources.

Poisoning.

There is no doubt poisoning is the most effective method of destroying rabbits, and it is imperative that this method should be considerably extended, especially with poisoned pollard in the dry season and other poisons in winter time.

We recommend that immediate steps be taken to secure sufficient supplies of phosphorus for use in the coming season and that no effort be spared in this connection. As already pointed out, four thousand cases are likely to be required and only a tenth of that amount is in sight. Should supplies not come to hand the position will be most serious. Failing supplies of phosphorus, other poisons should be obtained. Arsenic and cyanide may be purchased locally, and we again refer to the success of the Ninghan board in using the latter. We advise great care in the use of these two poisons as there is a danger of destroying the native bird life when poisoning water.

We are of the opinion that the manufacture of poison carts at the State Implement Works should be continued until the requirements of the State are met. A saving in cost could be effected if orders for carts were placed in fairly large lots at one time instead of half dozens as at present.

The Chief Inspector of the Rabbit Department estimates that he could do with a thousand carts at present and we would recommend the Minister for Works to anticipate orders accordingly. So far we understand less than 100 carts have been ordered.

Some witnesses are of the opinion that pollard poisoning is useless when green feed is plentiful. Other witnesses stated that while pollard is not so readily taken in winter, they had met with success by using poisoned grain and other poisons. The Chief Inspector corroborates the latter and we think that poisoning in winter should be initiated by the department and skilled officers be detailed to instruct settlers in the best methods.

Trapping.

Notwithstanding the deep-rooted objection to trapping by the department, we recommend that no restrictions be placed on bona fide farmers and their employees in trapping and marketing rabbits, and that all fees in connection therewith be abolished. We do not think that trapped rabbits from districts where poison is being laid should be sold, although there is no evidence of any danger. The weight of evidence and the experience in other States is against the professional trapper, and we do not recommend that he be encouraged, but this remark is not intended to apply to the goldfields or outside No. 1 fence where we can see no objection to professional trapping.

We recommend that the experiment of trapping by yard and pit traps and marketing the rabbits alive in crates should be tried by the department, or that farmers be allowed to do so.

We recommend that additional traps, yard and pit, be erected on both sides of the barrier fences in the Wheat Belt, and in suitable spots, particularly where rabbits are likely to establish colonies, and that open traps be covered with brush in order to lessen any unnecessary cruelty by exposure to the hot sun of rabbits, bungarras, or other victims.

We recommend that fumigating be undertaken in suitable localities.

We recommend that greater protection be given to the natural enemies of the rabbit, and that particularly the bungarra be immediately placed on the protected list.

We had very striking evidence that the rabbit skin is capable of being turned into wealth, and we strongly recommend the Minister for Industries to direct his attention to the question. One witness, Mr. Murray, exhibited excellent specimens of tanned skins done by himself from local red gum. Pending the establishment of regular trade the department might assist in creating a market.

We recommend that the Railway Department provide better facilities for marketing of rabbits so as to eliminate loss as far as possible.

We recommend that prominent notices be exhibited at all gates asking settlers and others in their own interests to see that these are properly closed.

JAMES McC. SMITH,
Chairman.

26th March, 1918.

WITNESSES.

Reference to Questions.

- 108-186 Arnold, Arthur, Assistant to Chief Inspector of Rabbit Department.
- 1103-1149 Baldwin, William, Poison cart driver.
427-439 Beech, John, 211 Bulwer Street, North Perth.
341-354 } Best, George Frederick, Farmer.
and }
484-509 }
758-771 Brogan, William, Stock Dealer.
1243-1244 Bull, Frederick Charles, Farmer.
- 1182-1185 Clough, Joseph Elliott, Farmer.
1-107 Craig, Cowan James, Inspector of Rabbit Department.
868-903 Crane, Charles George, Farmer.
535-676 } Crawford, Alexander, Chief Inspector of Rabbit
815-867 } Department.
1302-1324 }
1337-1426 }
- 989-1004 Drage, Thomas Amos, Pastoralist.
- 261-298 Eakins, John Thomas, Drover
510-534 Elliott, Samuel Richard Lewes, Pastoralist.
- 1017-1034 Gibson, John Hopgood, Farmer.
952-979 Greenham, Albert, Farmer.
- 1200-1208 Hardwick, Henry Guy Vernon, Farmer.
1186-1194 Harrison, Richard, Farmer.
1162-1181 Hopwood, Basil Wilberforce Gladstone.
- 1068-1102 Langford, Arthur John, Auctioneer.
772-787 Logue, Sydney Frederick, Squatter.

Reference to Questions.

- 806-814 Macdonald, Ronald, Chief State Land Tax Assessor.
1005-1016 Mann, Edward Alexander, Government Analyst.
788-805 Mead, John Henry, Pastoralist.
1262-1301 Morgan, Charles Lewis, Manager and Editor, "Sun"
Newspaper.
1035-1045 Mouritzen, Christian Frederic, Farmer.
723-742 Murray, Alexander Mackenzie, Tea Expert, Perth.
- 201-260 Paterson, William, Managing Trustee of the Agricultural Bank and General Manager of the Industries Assistance Board.
299-318 Purtell, John Joseph, Miner.
- 1195-1199 Rance, Arthur, Farmer.
1222-1242 Ridgway, Frank, Secretary, Ninghan Road Board and Vermin Board.
904-932 Richardson, Alexander Robert, Trustee of Industries Assistance Board.
933-951 Robbins, William Magill, Restaurant-keeper.
... Rosenow, Adolphus Augustus, Returned Soldier.
- 440 Sasche, John Gottlieb, Kununoppin.
742-757 Shaw, Frank Ernest, Manager State Implement Works.
1325-1336 Simpson, George Wm., Manager, Industries Assistance Board.
319-340 Stone, Everard, Station Manager.
1244-1261 Stubbs, Sydney, M.L.A., Wagin.
355-426 Sutton, George Lowe, Wheat Belt Commissioner.
- 1150-1161 Traver, Charles, Farmer.
- 1209-1221 Weyman, Frederick Charles, Farmer.
1046-1067 Wilson, Hugh, Farmer.
677-722 Wittenoom, Sir Edward Horne, Pastoralist.

(Evidence not printed.)

APPENDIX.

Report by Messrs. Lutey and Maley, members of the Select Committee, who visited the country around North Cowcowing, Mt. Marshall, Trayning, Wyalcatchem, and Cunderdin.

We beg to report having left Perth on Saturday, the 9th inst., at 8.30 a.m. by motor, generously placed at our disposal by Mr. McCallum Smith, M.L.A., and proceeded to the rabbit-infested area in the Mt. Marshall district, via Toodyay, Goomalling, and Dowerin.

Some twenty miles east of the last-mentioned townsite we passed through the No. 2 rabbit fence and immediately encountered abundant traces of the pest. As considerable evidence had been tendered in regard to the gates being wilfully left open and also of the defective fastenings thereon, we made a point of examining each gate passed on the tour and found almost without exception that none would automatically shut if swung to with any degree of force. As many passengers, with restive horses, swing these gates back and pass on believing they have secured them again, it is apparent the inducement offered by such a form of fastening results in these gates being often found open, and malice attributed. We recommend that a chain and hook should be fastened around the gates from the stud-post in addition to the present fastening. Several of the signs warning people to shut the gates and describing the penalty attaching thereto are almost indecipherable.

At Badgerin we were hospitably entertained for the night by Mr. Greenham, and we take this opportunity of thanking settlers for accommodation during our tour.

From Badgerin we proceeded the following day (Sunday) to Mt. Marshall, Trayning, and Wyalcatchem, camping at the latter place overnight. During this day's tour much evidence of damage to crops was noticeable. It was noticeable from the testimony of individual settlers that where energetic poisoning and trapping had been employed the damage to crops had been reduced to a minimum. Two carts were noticed working in this area with visibly good results—one, an I.X.L. pattern, by the Rabbit Department at Badgerin, and the other a State Implement Works cart, at Mt. Marshall, by the Ninghan Vermin Board.

It was noticed that although the Government dam near the Bencubbin siding, or terminus of the Mt. Marshall line, was fenced in with wire netting, a dam some eight miles north of this station on an abandoned Agricultural Bank holding was unprotected.

From the evidence of the secretary of the Ninghan Roads Board, which is also a vermin board, we gathered that a distinctly energetic attempt had been made to grapple with the pest in that area, which is all the more praiseworthy since their efforts do not appear to have received that sympathetic co-operation of departmental administration which should have been readily provided. In fact, it was even brought to our notice during our visit that a consignment of poison carts was then being held up in transit as the traffic was not considered urgent, although representations to this effect had been

made. In marked contrast to the attitude of that board is that of its neighbour, the Meckering Board, who, according to an interview we held with its secretary at Cunderdin, does not appear to grasp the seriousness of the menace threatening them.

Proceeding from Wyalcatchem early on Monday morning, we soon approached again the No. 2 fence and proceeded south along a considerable distance to Cunderdin. Rabbits were visible here in exceedingly large numbers, and very considerable colonies appeared to be established on the areas of sand-plain on its route, which class of soil favours burrowing. Another I.X.L. poison cart is being worked along the fence here north of Cunderdin by the Rabbit Department and, judging by the stench, is causing great destruction.

Along this section we observed the yard traps, which had been, in our opinion, ill-advisedly shifted from the eastern to the western side of the fence, all empty, while on the opposite side rabbits were passing along in thousands. Statements were made to us by settlers in this locality that no rabbits had been caught in the traps since they were shifted.

We contend that more judgment could have been used in the first place by placing these traps in likely localities, such as sand patches, rather than placing them by mechanical precision at regular distances no matter whether the locality was suitable for rabbit congregation, and it appears to offer itself for consideration whether this particular type would give results equal to proper pit traps.

Passing through to the west side of the fence slightly to the north of Cunderdin, statements were made to us that rabbits were becoming noticeable on a few farms on the western side of the fence near that township, and it was this information which led us to question the secretary of the Meckering Road Board, whose office is situated at Cunderdin, in regard to what action his board proposed to take.

From Cunderdin we proceeded to Meckering and thence through York to Perth, arriving back at 6.30 p.m. on Monday, having registered approximately 540 miles for the trip.

From close personal observation, the numbers of rabbits actually visible throughout the tour in the affected area, excepting along the fence, do not appear more numerous than the number visible in the northern areas immediately south of the No. 3 fence. Recent poisoning and trapping, we were told, had considerably reduced the numbers in the before-mentioned area, but it is reasonable to assume that rabbits in the northern agricultural areas will rapidly develop from a menace to an actual pest.

(Sgd) H. K. MALEY.

(Sgd) J. T. LUTEY.

JAMES McC. SMITH,

Chairman.

26th March, 1918.