VERMIN REPEAL BILL 1885

**House of Assembly, 8 September 1885, page 750-7**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. J. Howe)** believed the Bill would recommend itself to the consideration of hon. members. They knew that the measure of 1882 was introduced for a good purpose, and it was thought that by including the dingo, the eaglehawk, and the marsupials they would be doing a benefit. They also provided for local authorities to act in the matter of destruction, but the result so far had been to lead the colony into great expense without any concomitant advantages. The rabbits were multiplying to such a degree that it was like throwing public money away, and the Government had therefore concluded to revive the Act of 1879 so as to throw the responsibility of destruction on the Government and on the occupiers and owners of land. Simultaneous action had already proved successful in dealing with the pest in some districts of the colony. The Victorian Government was also endeavouring to extirpate the rabbits, and had introduced a Bill somewhat similar to our own. They had rented their mallee lands at a nominal price in order to have the rabbits destroyed, but the system did not seem to work well, as the lessees had not sufficient capital. Rabbit-proof wire fencing had proved effective. He had received a letter from a southern farmer living in an infected district stating that although the surrounding country was swarming with rabbits, yet by means of the wire fencing he would soon have scarcely a rabbit on his place. When the ex-Commissioner of Crown Lands (Mr. Coles) brought in his Bill he told the House that the sum of £19,000 had been expended on the eradication of vermin, and that the effect of the measure would be to reduce this great expenditure which had been incurred in five months. Since the Vermin Bills were passed the country had paid no less than over £200,000 for the eradication of the pest, and instead of diminishing it had increased. All kinds of remedies had been suggested, such as electricity, magnetism, and tuberculosis. From the experience of other colonies the latter did not appear to have the desired effect. A Mr. J. Harris Browne, writing from England to the *Register* in May last, called attention to a herb growing in France said to be fatal to rabbits. The Government had obtained some of the seed and planted it at Government Farm, and it remained to be seen whether it was injurious to other stock. The letter was as follows: — “To the Editor. — Sir — In the *Register* of April 6 there were two paragraphs referring to the proposed offer of the Government of New South Wales of a reward for some effectual means of destroying rabbits. These I cut out and sent to the editor of the *Field*, thinking that to be the most likely medium through which the desired information may be obtained. In the *Journal d’Agriculture Pratique,* May 7, a correspondent asks how he can destroy the swarm of rabbits that infest his vineyard and eat off the shorts of his vines. The reply given is as follows ‘The plant called cameline is very common in the Ardennes. It is very much sought after by wild rabbits, and purges them so violently that it kills them. When the proprietors of a district combine it is easy to destroy all the rabbits in it. To obtain this result patches of cameline are sown all through spring, summer, and autumn, at intervals of two or three weeks, in order that the rabbits may always have plenty of it in a tempting state.” In the north of France cameline is cultivated for its seeds, from which lamp oil is made. It grows well in almost any kind of soil, and for a crop is sown from April 1 to the end of June. About 5 lbs. of seed are sown to the acre, being previously mixed with sand. Seed can be obtained from M M. Vilmoria, Andrieux, and Co., 4, Quai dc la Megesserie, Paris, at a cost at from 4d. to 6d. per lb. To protect a garden or vineyard, a belt of it is sown round the outside. Rabbits are so fond of this plant that they never pass through it, and it is so fatal to them that those who desire to keep rabbits have to fence them in their preserves or warrens. I do not suppose this plant would be of much use in our dry northern districts, but wherever the rainfall is equal to or greater than that of Adelaide it might be as useful as it is in the Ardennes.” Even if the plant proved deleterious to other animals it might be fenced in, so as to be eaten only by the rabbits. It had been suggested that this Bill would throw a number of men out of employment, but he denied that altogether. Marsupial skins were bringing very high prices now, and there was room for many more men in the business of obtaining them.

Mr. J. L. STIRLING had arrived at no very definite conclusion as to the best method of eradicating the pest, but he thought the Government was about to take somewhat too precipitate action in the matter. (Hear, hear, and dissent.) Under the present system some money might be wasted, but still an enormous number of rabbits had been killed. It must be remembered that the rabbits were much more numerous now than they were in 1879. A great deal of our pastoral land was held under annual lease, and it was not to be expected that such lessees would pledge themselves to any large expenditure; indeed, he believed the Government would find that most of the lessees would surrender their leases rather than attempt to clear their runs under the proposed Bill. One run whose lease fell in in 1888, carrying from 15,000 to 20,000 sheep, had spent annually £3,000 on rabbit destruction, and during last season their profits had not reached that sum. The result of putting on rabbit parties had not been more satisfactory than the present system. It had been proved in the south-east that the actual cost of killing the rabbits by parties was per head 4s. 6d. (Mr. Catt — “All moonshine.”) Where the land was freehold, as at Anlaby, it was very right for the owners to destroy the rabbits, but what was the inducement for a man with 1,000 square miles on a two years’ lease to do so? One of the principal reasons for the introduction of the existing Rabbit Act was the fact that the Government did not clear the land for which they were responsible. The amended Bill passed last session gave the vermin boards power to get overdrafts and advances in anticipation of their rates. This had been done in many instances, and the overdrafts were guaranteed by the directors of the boards. What was now the position of the guarantors? (Mr. Rounsevell — “Hear, hear.”) He differed from the Commissioner of Crown Lands in thinking that the hunting for kangaroo skins would keep the present rabbit-hunters — about 1,000 men — sufficiently employed. The wages they made were largely due to the fact that in shifting about in the search for kangaroos they went in for rabbit-killing at the same time. He was glad to find that the Commissioner of Crown Lands had altered his mind as to the efficacy of wire netting, as when one or two members had tried to urge on the Government the erection of a boundary fence between South Australia and Victoria, they met with adverse criticisms from occupants of the Treasury benches and other members. He did not know that it was necessary to point out any remedy for the present system, but he thought before abandoning that system six months’ notice should be given. The work was now being economically carried out by the boards. The rabbits were killed at an economical price per head, and the fact that Government inspectors had in one or two instances been got at was not sufficient to condemn the whole system. The Commissioner of Crown Lands had said that in one case a man had defrauded the Government of £60 by the production of artificial scalps, but the chairman of the board informed him (Mr. Stirling) that this man bad not been paid for the scalps. It was the duty of the inspectors to see that the Government were not got at, and he did not believe that those stories of fraud which almost paralysed hon. members the other day had broad grounds for their foundation. Nor did he think that people were fostering a trade in scalps by introducing rabbits into different districts, nor that scalps were being brought in cartloads over the border. No doubt the expense incurred had been heavy, but then we had had a great scourge to contend with, and if the Government expected that the people in the outside districts would clear off the vermin without State aid they would be deceived. If six months’ notice of the repeal of the Act were given the Government might in the meantime exclude all other vermin excepting rabbits and wild dogs from the operation of the measure. (Mr. Tennant — “Hear, hear.”) To pay for other vermin was a mere waste of money, and if they were left out of the Act there would be a saving of from one-fourth to one-fifth of the present expense. He urged that they should look round for a better system of coping with this difficult question.

Mr. TENNANT said if the Act were repealed now, it would mean that some 700 men would be thrown out of employment, and the rabbits would go on increasing and going further north. He knew of one instance in which the rabbits had taken some years to go 16 miles, and they had been in that country for ten years. The rabbits, unless destroyed, would keep on going further north until they infested the whole country. The Art of 1879 would be the most dangerous measure that could be enforced at the present time. Under it, rabbit parties had been placed upon the lands of a pastoral lessee, although the lessee had the necessary labour at hand, and he was charged at the rate of £70 per month. The Government refused to remove the party, and the lessee thereupon said that he would surrender his lease. That would be the case now with leases having from one year to five years to run if the Act of 1879 were enforced. If the House wished the leases surrendered let proper provision be made for this, and the lessees be paid for improvements on a fair valuation. If a man had a long lease, he should afford to exterminate vermin, but was it fair for instance to make the lessees of the thousands of miles of country falling in in 1888 do the whole of the work? It would mean ruination to them, or it would compel them to surrender their leases, and this would not be fair. It was impossible for a few individuals to undertake so gigantic a work as vermin destruction. He suggested that the colony should be divided into three districts. First of all there would be the Port Lincoln district, where it was almost impossible to erect wire netting on account of the stony nature of the country. Then the country was full of blow holes and cavities, which extended for hundreds of yards, and proved hiding places for vermin. What would have to be done in that country would be to introduce the stoat, the ferret, and weasel, the natural enemies of the rabbit, which would only cost a few thousand pounds. The rabbits would soon be killed off, as they had been by the same means in New Zealand, and then from want of food and want of water the stoats, ferrets, and weasels would themselves die. Some hon. members said that the lambs would be killed. The stoat and the weasel were not large enough or strong enough to kill lambs. Another district should be the mallee scrub country. This should be fenced in and the rabbits would soon die. At the present time the Murray scrub carried but little stock, and if it were fenced in and the stoats and weasels admitted the rabbits would be killed just as they had been by the domesticated cat run wild in the Mount Pleasant district, and other districts in the south. The third district should consist of the north, north-west, and north-east country. This was open country, and it could be dealt with, but it would be done at great expense. When Mr. Catt was Commissioner of Crown Lands, he complained to him of rabbits being turned out at Blinman by the miners, but in spite of the fact that he had seen the pests himself the inspectors more than once reported that there were none, and he thought Mr. Catt was to blame for his inaction in the matter. (Mr. Furner — “Is a Catt the natural enemy of the rabbits?” Laughter.) Between March 1 and August 31 there were 1,487,721 vermin destroyed in district No. 29. These consisted of rabbits, kangaroos, hawks, and dogs. (The Hon. J. Colton — “How many hawks?”) There were 446 hawks, 466 dogs, 1,411,880 rabbits, 27,020 wallabies, and 17,909 kangaroos. The Commissioner of Crown Lands had said that kangaroo skins were very valuable; but while this was true as applied to the south and south-east and Yorke’s Peninsula, it was not as applied to the north, where, he supposed on account of the climate, the skins were only worth from 6d. to 1s. He regarded this vermin question as a national calamity, and one not to be dealt with by a few people. He thought it was right that freehold proprietors should destroy the rabbits on their own land. At any rate if the Act of last year was to be repealed, six months or longer notice should be given. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. E. W. HAWKER agreed that the Government should not act with too great haste in this matter. He was glad to hear that the Commissioner of Crown Lands had changed his mind as to the efficacy of wire-netting. The experience of Mr. Pegler on Ned’s Corner run was that the pests could not be kept out without fencing. Rabbits could be coped with in detail by poisoning half the country gone over. The scalpers left when the rabbits became few in number, and before winter the country was covered again. In Victoria 150 miles of wire-netting was being erected at a cost of £14,000 to £15,000. The northeast Vermin Board there were erecting 114 miles of fencing, and were trying six different kinds of fencing, and the owners of fifteen blocks of land there were fencing in 1,500 square miles with wire-netting. At present that country carried 10 000 sheep, but it was expected that when the wire-netting was put up the land would carry 100,000 sheep. The New South Wales Cabinet had under consideration the fencing in of the railway from Dubbo to Bourke with wire-netting, and the Queensland Government had put £100,000 on the Estimates with the view of dealing with this rabbit question, and he believed they intended to fence in the Queensland border. He thought we would have to fence in our country, and that it would have to be fenced into districts. The fences need not be permanent. They could be moveable and could be taken to different districts as required. On Ned’s Corner they recognised the impossibility of clearing the rabbits in the large scrub, and they were simply going to fence them out. As to the mallee country there was an interesting letter written by Mr. Lascelles to the *Argus.* He had fenced out 30,000 acres, then fenced out the waterholes, leaving small holes of water which was poisoned accessible to the rabbits. The day after he found 1,400 rabbits dead all round, and afterwards found from 20 to 60 rabbits dead each morning. He (Mr. Hawker) believed this would be one means by which the rabbits in the north could be dealt with. He knew rabbits could do without water for a long time, but if it were placed for them, they would drink it. Mr. Michael Kenny had said that he had tried every means of exterminating the pest. First of all he put poisoned green stuff into the burrows, and placed a piece of calico over the top, and no rabbits came out. He had also tried poisoned oats and other methods, and eventually he and his neighbours had recognised that the only means by which they could grapple with the difficulty was by erecting wire fencing. He (Mr. Hawker) would like to point out that the country north-east of the Burra was cleared of rabbits under the Act of 1879. (An hon. Member — “No.”) To a great extent the rabbits were reduced. Mount Bryan was cleared, and the farmers’ land surrounding was also cleared. It was a question with us whether we could afford to pay £100,000, which under the present Act would amount to £200,000 a year, and he thought hon. members would all agree that we could not afford it. With £100,000 we could put up 1,500 miles of wire netting, and with this we should not have one-eighth of the difficulty in getting rid of the rabbits that was now experienced. He would also suggest that the Government should offer three prizes of £100, £50, and £25, for an essay on rabbit destruction, as one good suggestion might save us thousands of pounds. The Government should also ask for suggestions from those people who had had experience in dealing with the pest. He would, however, ask them not to take hurried action in this particular matter, but to endeavour to discover the best means of coping with the difficulty.

Mr. ROUNSEVELL deeply sympathised with the Government in the difficult position in which they were placed. There had been no less than five Bills dealing with this question introduced into the House during the last ten years, and though he had suggested the other day that the standing orders should be suspended to allow of legislation being passed he felt on reconsideration that they ought not to deal too hastily with the matter, or they might get into a worse mess than they now were. It was only just that the position of the various vermin boards should be taken into consideration. (Hear, hear.) There were undoubtedly some good features in the Rabbit Act of 1879, but it had been found to be ineffectual to cope with the pest. (The Commissioner of Crown Lands — “That was not the fault of the Act.”) To a great extent it was the fault of the Act, and it was partially perhaps because of the method of administration adopted. The Commissioner of Crown Lands ought to know that some of his (the Commissioner’s) and of his (Mr. Rounsevell’s) constituents were subjected to great injury and injustice. (The Hon. T. Playford — “They should have cleared out the rabbits.”) In some cases the rabbit parties were placed on men’s lands in the north where there was not a rabbit to be seen. They had stayed on the land for months, and sent in reports to the Government, and the cost to the owners of the land was such as to entirely deprive them of the land they had selected, and all the improvements they had placed upon their selections. (Hear, hear.) Under the Act great abuses occurred. One or two members who had spoken were not altogether correct as regarded the cost of clearing vermin, particularly as regarded the annual leases, and also leases that had only a short time to run. There was the following proviso to clause 15 of the Act of 1879, “Provided that the lessee shall be liable to pay such annual proportion of the cost and expense only so long as he remains in occupation of the land.” It was pointed out in a previous part of the clause that the lessee was only to pay one-fifth annually, so that the argument that lessees with short tenures would have to pay enormous sums for vermin destruction hardly held good. He hoped, however, that something of a different character to the Act of 1879 would be introduced by the Government. He believed the Act of 1884 had been effectual in clearing land held by the Government of vermin, but land held by pastoral lessees and land taken up by selectors had been unnecessarily classed together. There was no doubt that when the rabbits had been reduced to some extent the wire fence was the thing to keep them out. (Mr. Bagot — “The fence must be put on first.”) At Lake Albert the vermin had been got under first, and then the fence had been put up, and the land had been cleared by the destruction of everything inside the fence. The freehold lands of the country were comparatively clean, but considerable expense would have to be incurred in the destruction of vermin on Crown lands. He sympathised with the Government in the action they proposed, but he thought that before the Act of 1884 was repealed the House ought to know what action the Government intended to take, and to be assured that the various boards would be properly protected. (Hear, hear.)

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD said various efforts had been made to deal with this pest. In the first place, when Kapunda was the hotbed of the rabbit pest, the duty of dealing with the matter was thrown on the corporations and district councils. In the next place, by the Act of 1879 the Government had to deal with the matter, and the principle on which they acted was that every man who had rabbits on his land was to kill those rabbits. If he did not do so the State did it, and charged it against the land. If he was a lessee and the lease had five years to run, he had the right to charge one-fifth to his landlord, and so on. Under that principle the whole of the land within the hundreds of South Australia was cleared, except a portion in the south-east, where the work was begun, but was abandoned on account of the passing of the Vermin Bill. (Mr. Tennant — “What about Port Lincoln?') There were very few there then. Then under the Vermin Act the destruction of the vermin was put under the control of boards, and the scalps were paid for. That scalp system had completely and unmistakeably failed. (Cheers.) No matter how many rabbits were killed the scalpers left sufficient behind them to continue the pest and breed again and, in a few years, it would be worse than ever. The gravity of the matter had forced itself on the Government owing to the expense that was incurred. The new system had received a slight modification by the Act of last session, but that only made matters worse. (Hear, hear.) That, however, had been passed in good faith and was prepared after consultation with the pastoral lessees, who were most interested, and whose suggestions were adopted. That system had failed, and there could not be any fairer system adopted than that under the Act of 1879, wherein men destroyed the rabbits on their own lands and the Government those on the Crown lands. There was no difficulty about the provisions of the Act, and if properly put into operation they must effect their object. In the early part of 1879 a very large deputation of farmers waited on him as Commissioner of: Crown Lands. They said they had been eaten out for years around Kapunda by the rabbits, and unless the Government did something they could not carry-on wheat-growing. The country was infested from this side of Kapunda to the Hundred of Wonna. The rabbits were very thick to the Burra, extremely thick along the travelling-stock reserve from the Burra to Hallett and Terowie, and Booboorowie and Hill River were infested with them. The result of a vigorous application of the provisions of the Act of 1879 had been that the country was cleared, and there were very few rabbits there now. He had been amused to see it stated that Lieutenant Claxton had gone to the neighbourhood of Anlaby lately to have some rabbit shooting, and that as showing the effect of the Vermin Act, he could not find any. The fact was that they had been destroyed under the Act of 1879. Mr. Morris, of Anlaby, who attended on the large deputation to which he had referred, said that no matter what was done he and other people in the neighbourhood would be unable to clear the country owing to the rock-capped hills and caverns in which the rabbits had burrowed. But when the Act of 1879 was passed Mr. Morris set himself to work and succeeded in clearing his land. There were many men, notably those in the neighbourhood of the Burra, who were on the deputation, but who directly the Act came into force were the first to complain of it and to say that they had few rabbits on their land. Their statements were utterly untrue, and when rabbit parties cleared the land they wanted to get out of paying the expense that the Government had incurred in killing the rabbits. That Act of 1879 had the effect of clearing the land as far as the annual leases belonging to the pastoral lessees. The pastoral lessees did not like the application of the Act at all, and they got Mr. Catt to introduce a Vermin Destruction Bill, under which so much a scalp was paid for the scalps of rabbits, kangaroos, wallabies, wild dogs, and eagle-hawks. The result had been that we had spent more money than we had received from all the pastoral lessees put together during the last few years in paying for the destruction of these animals on their runs, and in the improvement of their property. And as far as the general community was concerned, we might as well have had no Crown lands at all. The burden of the reduction of the members of this pest ought to be put on the right shoulders. The majority of the pastoral lessees knew before the rabbits came on the land the fearful scourge they would be in time, and they knew that if they had exerted themselves and spent a small sum of money when they first began to approach the borders of their runs, they could have kept them away. (Hear, hear.) They, however, allowed them to increase, and Mr. Tennant now came and said the pastoral lessees ought not to have to pay for destroying the vermin on their runs. (Mr. Tennant — “Where did the rabbits come from? Did they not come from the freehold?”) He was at Kanyaka a few weeks ago and Mr. Goyder said that twenty -five years ago he had hunted rabbits there which had been let loose by Mr. Marchant for the purpose of sport. All over the country the pastoral tenant had let them loose in the first instance for sport, utterly unconscious that they would be an injury. Strange to say in some parts of the country the vermin had not increased in numbers for years. But suddenly they got beyond the wild cats and their other natural enemies and began to increase at such a rate that it was necessary for man to step in and do something. The Act of 1879 treated the pastoral lessee precisely as any other lessee. (Mr. Tennant — “It did not do any good.”) He could point to country that had been cleared. On the west coast the rabbits were driven from near Port Lincoln to Venus Bay, and he had intended to erect a wire-netting fence and then destroy them when the Vermin Act was passed and operations were stopped. When Mr. Catt introduced his Vermin Bill he had told him that its effect would be to stop the rabbit parties in the south-east, and if the whole of the unoccupied Crown lands in the south-east were not leased they would be overrun by rabbits. There were very few there at that time, but now the country was overrun. Mr. Tennant said the annual lessee would have to abandon his country if the Act of 1879 was revived. Well, taking into account the pastoral country cleared and the expense with regard to vermin it seemed that they had eaten up more than the rent we had received from the pastoral lessee, and it did not appear that it would be a great hardship to the country if the land was thrown up. But if the lessee went vigorously to work, and had a five years’ occupancy to destroy rabbits, he could recoup himself for any expense in those five years, and this would be better than having the country overrun by rabbits, or coming to the people and asking them to kill the rabbits off his particular run. By the strict administration of the Act of 1879, starting from given centres where the rabbits were cleared, and working out and spending during a year or two a large sum of money, we should be better able to cope with the pest than by the Vermin Act which at present was such a farce. But he agreed that the present vermin boards should be protected, and he thought the Act might be altered to give them power to collect their rates and fulfil the engagements into which they had entered. Proper notice should also be given so that all rabbit parties would know that after a certain day rabbit scalps would not be paid for. He felt that the Government would have to come to some arrangement with pastoral lessees with regard to fencing their runs with wire netting. They ought to be paid for the fence at the end of their term, and should be encouraged to erect such a fence in order to destroy only those rabbits on their own land. By making such an arrangement in regard to wire-netting which had unmistakably been found to be effectual, and by carrying out the provisions of the Act of 1879, he thought there would be no doubt that in a few years the pest would be kept under except in those parts of the country that were so poor that it was really not worthwhile to destroy the vermin upon them. (Hear, hear.)

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Hon. J. W. Downer) said the Government found that under the Vermin Destruction Act now in force the expenses had increased from £2,500 in April to £9,067 in September, and they had been assured that during September the expense would be increased to £12,000 or £13,000. The matter of course required very immediate attention. The Government had no hope of dealing with the matter in the first instance at all exhaustively, or of introducing a measure that would be looked upon as ultimate legislation on the subject. They felt that the expense going on and increasing in terrible progression must be stopped at once, and they thought the House would assist them in doing that, and afterwards in devising the best scheme that could be agreed on for the eradication of what was a universal pest. (Hear, hear.) If a Bill had been introduced dealing exhaustively with the subject months would probably have been occupied in passing it, and meanwhile the expense would have gone on increasing. Therefore they felt that the House would assist in simply repealing the present laws on the subject, leaving the Government to administer the Act of 1879 in a manner that would do as little injustice as possible, and accept the assurance that the Government would get the best information they could on the subject and submit a measure that the House would have time to consider without feeling that every week’s delay involved thousands of pounds of cost to the country. (Hear, hear.) This was not a question of freeholder against pastoral lessee. (1 he Hon. T. Playford — “Hear, hear.”) He did not go as far as Mr. Playford in all that he had said. (Hear, hear.) When he said the pastoral lessee ought at his own cost to extirpate this pest, he forgot the conditions that had to exist in order to enable him to do it, and the absence of which would end in his surrender of his run, and leave the land in the hands of the Government. At the same time we were paying more than twice what we were getting from all the runs that were principally infected, and if matters went on a little longer as they were it would be four times as much. (Hear, hear.) Rather than go on like this it would be better not merely to allow men to occupy the land without rent, but to pay them for occupying it. (Hear, hear, and laughter.) The Government thought they might get five or six gentlemen — members of Parliament, if possible, but at any rate men of acknowledged position — who would assist them in formulating the best scheme that could be formulated. That was why the Commissioner of Crown Lands in moving for leave to introduce the Bill suggested that it was only a temporary measure, and that the Government intended to appoint a Royal Commission to report as to the best method of dealing with the pest, and afterwards to introduce the necessary legislation. The Government still had the same intention, and he thought it was one that the House would approve of and support . Whether the result would be to give such terms to pastoral lessees as would induce them, as suggested by Mr. Playford, to rabbit-proof fence their land, or whatever course the Government might be led to follow, he trusted to get such a report as would much assist both the Government and the House in arriving at a sound conclusion. Meanwhile the Government asked the House to pass the present Bill. Hon. members need not fear that the provisions of the Act of 1879 would be put in force with such stringency as Mr. Tennant seemed to think. (Mr. Tennant — “So long as you are in office, perhaps not.”) Whoever might be in office the House would not permit a measure intended for meeting an immediate evil to be made the means of inflicting either an immediate or lasting hardship. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. COPLEY was glad the measure had been introduced. In the earlier part of the session hon. members had scarcely grasped the seriousness of the terrible expenditure now going on in connection with the extermination of rabbits. (Hear, hear.) At the same time proper precautions should be taken so as not to stop all the machinery at present at work without giving due notice, otherwise an injustice would be done to the hundreds of men now engaged on rabbit destruction. The boards, too, had incurred liabilities which must be provided for. Rates had been levied for the current year, some of which rates had not been collected, and the persons liable would probably object to pay if the Bill were passed. Last year a most monstrous injury had been done to the country by the way in which the Vermin Bill was hurried through Parliament, and he hoped this mistake would not be repeated. The mover of the Bill of last year spoke of the generosity of the pastoral lessees in desiring power to increase the maximum rates chargeable to £5 per thousand on sheep and £2 per hundred on large stock and 1s. per square mile on leased land, while selectors paid a halfpenny per acre. But in no case had the maximum rate been levied upon the sheep held. In every case, however, the maximum had fallen on the farming land, and in most cases the maximum stock rate had been levied, as sheep were not held in the settled districts nearly so much as working stock and cattle. When the Bill was introduced into the Council by the Hon. R. C. Baker it was said that the owners of land other than pastoral lessees would only be liable to the halfpenny per acre upon their land, and that was the impression throughout the country; but when the Act came into operation it was found that they had to pay on stock the same as the pastoral lessees. Wherever the country was held in small blocks it was comparatively easy to cope with the rabbit difficulty; but in the case of the large leases, as Mr. J. L. Stirling had said, the difficulty was almost insurmountable. The remedy was to cut up the large blocks in favour of the scores of people who were waiting to take those lands up. He would again express the hope that if the Bill passed operations would not be altogether suspended'. (The Commissioner of Crown Lands “That is not intended.”) A fair course to adopt would be to give notice that at the end of the present year a new system would be adopted. He would support the second reading of the Bill, and had no doubt that the necessary alterations would be made in Committee (Here here.).

Mr MOODY had had a pretty large experience in regard to the rabbit pest. He remembered that the Bill of 1879 met with pretty much the same class of opposition now urged against the present measure, but the Act of 1879 proved to be a great blessing, and under it the public expenditure on the destruction of vermin was only £12,000 per annum against the £100,000 now required. (Hear, hear.) He quite agreed with Mr. Copley that the Act of last year was a mistake, and it had pressed very heavily on the outside selectors. As showing what might be done in the way of rabbit destruction, he would refer to the Anlaby run, where in 1875 they were paying for 72,000 scalps in one month, and within twelve months from the passing of the Act of 1879 there was a very marked improvement in the quantity of wool raised on the run. He hoped all reasonable notice would be given to boards and others interested in the matter, so that operations might be stopped gradually, and without any sudden strain or inconvenience.

Mr. COLES moved the adjournment of the debate, which being declared carried, the COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS called for a division, which resulted as follows: Ayes, 22—Hon. T. Playford, Messrs, Bagot, Beaglehole, Bower, Burgoyne, Caldwell, Casque, Copley, Duncan, Furner, Handyside, Harvey, E. W. Hawker, Homburg, Johnson, Moody, Moule, Rounsevell, J. L. Stirling, Symon, Tennant, and Coles (teller).

Noes, 18—The Attorney-General, Commissioner of Public Works, Treasurer, Minister of Education, Hons. J. Colton, J. C. Bray, and G. C. Hawker, Messrs. Atkinson, Basedow, Catt, Coglin, Glyde, Green, Gilbert, Landseer, Mattinson, Smith, and the Commissioner of Crown Lands (teller).

Majority of 4 for the Ayes.

The debate was then adjourned till Thursday next.

(15 September 1885, Page 818)

Adjourned debate on second reading.

Mr. COLES assured the Government that he did not move the adjournment with any view of embarrassing them, or of throwing any impediment in the way of an alteration in the present law. His only object was to give hon. members an opportunity of considering the Bill for a few hours, which was rendered all the more necessary because it was not a very easy matter to gather from the speech of the Commissioner of Crown Lands or of the Attorney-General exactly what the intentions of the Government were. The Commissioner of Crown Lands told the House that it was the intention of the Government to repeal the Acts of 1882 and 1884, and to revive the Vermin Destruction Act of 1879, thus sweeping away the whole of the vermin boards. A few moments later the Attorney-General informed the House that it was the intention of the Government to repeal the Acts to which he had referred, and then to take time, look around, and see what was the best thing to do. It seemed to him there should not be one moment’s cessation in the work of destruction — (hear, hear)—and he therefore moved the adjournment to enable a few members to meet and formulate some suggestions for the consideration of the Government. He was willing to admit that the Act of 1884 had not been a success, and that the sooner they put a stop to the scalp-money the better, but he believed the House was quite as much to blame as the late Government for the Act of 1884. The Bill as originally introduced by himself provided for the Government taking the work of destruction entirely into their own hands and rating the country for the cost, and he believed that principle would be ultimately adopted. The House thought the Bill might be improved, and it was referred to the Stockbreeders’ Association, who were supposed to be more likely to make satisfactory and practical suggestions than anyone else. The Act which was passed was based entirely on the suggestions emanating from that body. After the adjournment the other day some eighteen or twenty members of the House, who were greatly interested in the work of vermin destruction, met in one of the committee-rooms, and various suggestions on the subject were brought forward. One was that the Government should insist that all lessees outside the limits of corporations and district councils — and he would remind the House that within these limits there had been very little trouble in the matter — should be compelled to fence their country in a rabbit-proof way, and should be refunded the cost of the fencing at the expiry of the lease, and that the Government should not trouble as to whether the rabbits were killed within the boundaries of their runs or not. One objection to this was that the principal part of the infested country was comprised in the 1888 leases, and even supposing it were rabbit-fenced and the vermin were not destroyed, the land would be very little good when the leases expired, and the Government would obtain very little for them. Another suggestion was to abolish the scalp-money altogether, and give the lessees power either to double their rate or to charge such a rate as would be sufficient for vermin destruction. Here again objections were made that some lessees who had spent thousands on vermin destruction on their own runs might be taxed to destroy those on the adjoining land. The third suggestion, which he ventured to recommend to the Government on behalf of the gentlemen who met to consider the question, was that they should eliminate from the Act of 1884 all vermin but rabbits, and that the scalp-money should be reduced one-half. He understood that one of the principal reasons why the Government had introduced the Amending Act was to do away with the immense amount of money now expended on vermin destruction, a sum he was willing to admit the country was altogether unable to bear. By adopting his suggestion the Government would at once do away with more than one-half of the expense. There would be no cessation; the work, the boards, and rabbit parties could go on as usual, lie admitted there should be further legislation, and that the Government should pay something towards the cost of vermin destruction, and he did not think Id. per head would be too much. The resolution to which he referred was — “That we should eliminate from the Bill all vermin except rabbits, and that scalp- money on rabbits should be reduced to one-half.” To that he was prepared to add “that on and after December 31 the payment for scalps should entirely cease.”

Mr. CATT said the last speaker had scarcely put the position of the meeting correctly, and he would take the liberty of reading the decision arrived at, which was as follows: — “That to suddenly abolish the vermin boards and stop the payment of scalp-money is not desirable in the interest of the colony — (Mr. Coles — “Hear, hear”) — or fair to those now engaged in the destruction of vermin, but that it is necessary to abolish the present system and make other provision for dealing with the rabbit pest as soon as possible; that in the meantime an amended Bill be passed at once to provide that the Government payment of scalp-money for all vermin except rabbits shall cease on September 30, and that from the 1st October to the 31st December 1d. instead of 2d. per scalp for rabbits be paid to the vermin boards, after which date no scalp-money will be paid” (Mr. Coles — “Hear, hear.”) They felt that the present measure must be repealed, but their desire was to slow off proceedings so that no injustice might be done to those at present engaged in carrying out operations under the Vermin Act. He thought the decision was a fair one, and should commend itself to the House. He wished to point out one misapprehension with regard to the introduction of the Act of 1882. When the Act of 1879 was working fairly well there arose an agitation regarding the increase in kangaroos and wild dogs, and in consequence the Government introduced a measure on the New South Wales pattern, dealing not only with rabbits, but also with kangaroos, wallabies, eaglehawks, and wild dogs. He agreed with several speakers that very good work was done under the Act of 1879, and he believed it only wanted one or two amendments to work still better. (Hear, hear.) The rabbit question was such a large one that most of the speakers had been led into exaggeration. Mr. Rounsevell led off by stating that the Act had been very badly carried out, and that individuals who never had a rabbit on their land were ruined by rabbit parties being placed upon their property. (Mr. Rounsevell — “Hear, hear.”) That statement was untrue —

The SPEAKER—The hon. member cannot use that phrase.

Mr. CATT would withdraw it, and say the statement was inaccurate. No officer in charge of a rabbit party would think of putting his men on land where there were no rabbits, and keeping them there for months. The hon. member could not substantiate what he had said. In some cases selectors had refused to clear their land, and it was done at the expense of the State. The selectors were sued for the money, but when it was reported that the charges made were higher than they might have been, the Government reduced them in some cases by one-half. Then Mr. Stirling spoke about parties in the south-east destroying rabbits at a cost of 4s. 6d. per head. That was another gross exaggeration. The rabbit parties in the south-east performed their duties remarkably well, and it was impossible for anyone to know how many rabbits they killed, as they stopped the burrows and injected bisulphide of carbon. The Hon. Mr. Playford was wrong in stating that “when Mr. Catt introduced his Vermin Bill he had told him that its effect would be to stop the rabbit parties in the south-east, and if the whole of the unoccupied Crown lands in the south-east were not leased they would be over-run by rabbits.” Instead of that the hon. member complimented him on introducing the measure, and spoke of it in terms of praise They had come to the conclusion that the state should leave the destruction of marsupials to the landholders, and he thought hon. members could not do better than support the Government if they would embody the suggestions of the committee in the Repeal Bill.

Mr. ROUNSEVELL rose to speak.

Mr. CATT—I would point out that the hon. member has already spoken on the question. I have just been quoting from his remarks made last week. (Laughter.)

The Hon. J. C. BRAY—The hon. member’s speech is on page 753 of “Hansard,” and a very good speech, too. (Laughter.)

The SPEAKER—The hon. member cannot address the House again on the second reading.

Mr. HANDYSIDE did not think it advisable to at once do away with the Acts of 1882 and 1884, and fall back on the Act of 1879, as such a course would cause an immediate cessation of rabbit destruction during the principal breeding season. It would be better to carry on the scalp-money for some time longer, and thus give the Government time to bring in some new measure. A good deal had been said about the Government having almost exterminated the rabbits at Streaky Bay, but he was informed that the parties only killed them near the coast, and drove the rest back into the scrub, whence they returned as soon as the party went away. Nor did he think the destruction had been very complete in the south-east. The inspectors had filled up the burrows and certainly killed some rabbits, but after they left the place was just as bad as before. The two great difficulties which we laboured under were our financial position and the rabbit question. To get rid of them he proposed that the Government should introduce a Bill similar to that proposed by the late Mr. Henning last session for dividing the colony into shire councils, making each shire council where the rabbit pest existed fence in its district with wire-proof netting. They should have power to assess their district for the same, and the Government should subsidise half the cost on all fences erected on private property, and pay for all fences passing through Crown lands. The Government would have power to charge Crown lessees say 6 or 7 per cent, on cost of fencing; and the council to have the same powers as that given the Crown under the Act of 1879. The assessment of the different properties could be obtained from the assessment-book of the Government. Unless the system of having rabbit-proof fencing and dividing the country into sections was adopted there would be little chance of destroying the rabbit pest. The chairmen of vermin boards, who had held a meeting in the south-east, wrote to him as follows: — “We see no necessity for abolishing the whole Act, especially at a time when the results of past labours are only just becoming apparent; the feeling is to give the boards the opportunity to test the efficiency of the present Act, even if the Government subsidy for the destruction of scalps at once cease. As the rates have in most cases been paid, and the machinery for the working of the boards becoming- perfect, we wish to show that if the power and influence which boards now exercise is to at once cease, then not only will all past efforts be useless, but the actual injury to the country will be almost past redemption, considering that just now the vermin are in full breeding.” He would support the Government in bringing in a measure that would assist in this direction.

Mr. DUNCAN would support the second reading of the Bill with a view of making it an amending instead of a repeal measure. To stop the expenditure at once would necessitate a much larger amount being ultimately required for the eradication of the pest. No doubt the Act of 1879 would be effectual in keeping the settled districts clear, but it would be impossible for the Commissioner of Crown Lands to apply it to the outside country. If he attempted to apply it to that country, he would be doing a great injustice to the holders, because it would be unfair to expect them to attempt to eradicate the rabbits from that country. Much of the country was held on annual leases, some of it on leases that would expire in a very short time, and leaseholders could not reasonably be asked to spend the large sums of money that would be required. Then it was contemplated to at no very remote period cut up some of this country for small sheep farmers. It would be of no use to them if it was overrun by rabbits, and therefore it was the duty of the Government and the House to endeavour to keep the nuisance under. He recognised that it was necessary in the present position of the finances of the colony that something should be done to stop the large expenditure that was now going on; but it was better to continue a small expenditure now than to ultimately have to spend a much large sum. Mr Coles had suggested that the scalp money in future should only be paid for rabbits, and not wallabies and other animals. He would point out how ever, that especially in the scrub hundreds the wallabies were a much greater nuisance than the rabbits, and it was of the utmost importance to the farmers in those hundreds that an effort should be made to keep the wallabies down. He hoped the Government would agree with Mr. Coles and other hon. members who had met to consider the matter, and gradually stop the expenditure rather than bring it to a sudden stoppage. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. BAGOT said the system now in vogue had been a gigantic failure, and he would gladly assist the Government in legislation to deal with the plague. He was, however, disappointed with the measure before the House. An amendment of the Vermin Act had been promised since the commencement of the session, but no action had been taken until the Government, finding how the expenditure was increasing, had introduced this repeal Bill. This was not sufficient, for hon. members ought to know what was proposed to bring about a better system. It would be absolutely unjust to the boards established under the Act of last session to at once put a stop to all the machinery in motion. In spite of the imputations hurled against them, the operations of many of the boards had been most energetic and praiseworthy. (Hear, hear.) Several members had blamed them for incurring engagements above the amount of their levied rates. He, however, thought they were worthy of all praise. If the assessment which was limited by the Act of last year had been doubled, in many instances the full amount would have been levied from the ratepayers, and many boards had gone on the principle that it was infinitely better to destroy as many rabbits as possible within a given time than allow them to increase by working in a half-hearted manner. Therefore, to abolish these boards and do away with the opportunity they had of raising a fresh assessment in the coming year to defray their liabilities would be an act of injustice. He was inclined to think that the charges of fraud that had been made were sensational and not founded on fact. At any rate, it was the duty of the Commissioner of Crown Lands to follow up any information he was possessed of and prosecute with the utmost rigor of the law the individuals guilty of the frauds. He deprecated anything that would cause delay in dealing with this question. He was satisfied that if the work was not energetically prosecuted an enormous sum of money that had been raised by ratepayers, in addition to that coming from the general revenue, would be practically thrown away. It had been abundantly proved that the work of rabbit parties was most expensive, and had not had much effect. Mr. Catt had stigmatised a statement made by Mr. Stirling as grossly exaggerated. Well, the late Mr. Henning last session obtained information which had been taken as correct, that the amount paid to the rabbit parties in the south-east was something like 4s. 6d. a head. (Hear, hear.) The Act of 1879 might be effectual as far as the freehold lands were concerned, but the great difficulty was with the rabbits that infested pastoral and annual leases. To compel the holders of annual leases to undertake the destruction of vermin upon those leases practically meant confiscation, and the House certainly did not desire to institute such a policy as that. (Hear, hear.) Mr. Playford had fairly put it that holders of leases expiring in 1888 were entitled, where the land was not required for any other than pastoral purposes, to the continuance of their annual leases to the termination of their original term. If any policy of compulsion was now adopted the result would be that it would be ineffectual to compel the present holders to destroy the vermin, and they would throw up the leases. His opinion in regard to the annual leases was that the best way to deal with them would be to offer the present holders a lease of sufficient tenure to justify the expenditure on the condition that they would erect a rabbit-proof fence round the boundary and destroy the vermin within the boundaries. Though this would interfere with the Crown Lands policy of the Government it would effectually rid 11,000 or 12,000 square miles of heavily rabbit-infected country held under annual leases from this vermin without the cost to the State of a single penny. Hon. members knew that the majority of the pastoral leases infested with rabbits expired in 1888. It would be extremely difficult to enforce the Act of 1879 on those leases. The prospects of the wool market, too, were so extremely bad that he thought the profits of graziers would be very much diminished in the future. Mr. Playford had instanced Anlaby as showing the successful operation of the Act of 1879. He would point out , however, that the run was open country and that Mr Morris spent 6,000 in grappling with the pest. Other owners were not so favourably situated as that gentleman was. With regard to repressive measures, he was satisfied that wire netting must precede any effectual destruction of vermin. Mr. Hardy on a previous occasion made the valuable suggestion that the country should be divided by rabbit-proof fences into blocks. He was satisfied the Government had made a mistake in not agreeing with the Victorian Government as to a fence on the border. Instead of declining to accept that suggestion the Government should have enlarged upon it, and should have recommended the Government of Victoria to fence the whole boundary, or at any rate as far as to the neighbourhood of Naracoorte. It had also been suggested that if not both sides at any rate the northern side of the intercolonial railway from the Murray bridge to the Victorian border should have a rabbit-proof fence. He heard from reliable sources that rabbits were taking possession of that line—that they had made their burrows in the banks, and in many places were undermining the permanent way. This, if it continued, practically meant ruin to the railway. The fencing of that railway would fence off the largest portion of rabbit-infested country in South Australia, and would make one great paddock of it, with the fence along the Victorian border. He did not think any good would come of referring the whole matter to a Royal Commission. It would be very expensive, and a long time would elapse before the report would be laid before the House. There would also be great differences of opinion among experts in the matter. Where scrub existed rabbits did not burrow; in sandy soft country they did burrow; and in country where limestone existed, they were kept on the surface by the use of brush fences, which were a disadvantage in soft country. Hon. members would therefore see how opinions of witnesses would differ as to the matter. Mr. Tennant strongly advocated turning loose the natural enemies of the rabbits—the mongoose, weasel, and others. A telegram appearing that day stated that some mongoose liberated by squatters in the neighbourhood of Wentworth were invading the poultry yards of Wentworth township and becoming a great plague. The mongoose was a large animal, capable of killing a lamb if not a larger animal, and if set loose would be hard to eradicate. (Hear, hear.) If the Bill was passed a period should be fixed at which the Acts now in operation should cease, say at the end of the year. He would support Mr. Duncan in attempting to alter the Bill in committee.

Mr. LANDSEER thought it would have been far better for the country if the Act of 1879 had been adhered too. However, it was an absolute necessity that the matter should be grappled with with determination, so that the present expenditure should be stopped as early as possible, and he would support the Government in carrying the Bill. He felt sure that the Government might be trusted to do what was wisest and best under the circumstances.

Mr. CALDWELL would also support the Government, and he might say that if the Commissioner of Crown Lands had not introduced the Bill he would have asked the support of the House to a measure which he would have himself brought forward to deal with the subject. A knowledge of the cause was halfway towards a cure. How did the rabbits come here? They were not indigenous to the colony. They were brought here and carefully protected until they increased in enormous quantities. The land system had done a great deal to continue and spread the nuisance. Both farmers and squatters had too large areas of land to deal with, and the result was that that the rabbits could not be kept under. (Hear, hear.) The same thing might be said of the thistle nuisance. That too spread very rapidly where people held more land than they could keep in thorough order, and if the thistles were cut down after seeding time it did next to no good at all. There was a proper time for dealing with every description of pest, but undoubtedly the most serious difficulty was that population had not followed the occupation of the land with sufficient rapidity, and the result had been that various nuisances could not be held adequately in check. When the north was first settled the same difficulties were met with in the case of the wallaby and the kangaroo rat, but as population became established the nuisance gradually died out. So on Yorke’s Peninsula the kangaroos and rabbits had been practically exterminated. It had been said by Mr. Bagot that the rabbits were only a nuisance on the ’88 leases. (Mr. Bagot — “Not at all.”) He thought that was the effect of what the hon. member said. (Mr. Coles — “No; he said all those leases were infested with rabbits, not that they were the only parts affected.”) However, it was a matter that did not affect the squatter merely or solely; it was a matter concerning the colony generally. (Hear, hear.) He had observed that the clamour for rabbit destruction had come much into fashion of late years, since Governments had begun to allow themselves to be “got at.” Formerly it was the practice to let people do the best they could for themselves, and to allow the responsibility to fall on the shoulders where it properly devolved. The same principle ought to apply now, and those who took up large blocks of land should accept the responsibility. In that direction, however, he would not be niggardly. If short leases were not a sufficient inducement to the holders to exterminate the vermin on their runs, then let the leases be made longer. What could be done in the way of extermination was shown by experience near Kapunda, where an expenditure of £1,700 had exterminated the rabbits on a run, and greatly extended the carrying properties of the station. (Hear, hear.) Further, if the work of extermination was thoroughly done at first very little was needed afterwards to hold the pests in check. Of course where there were only one or two men to look after the rabbits on a run the pests could not be kept in check; but, as he had said before, those who took up large blocks must accept the accruing responsibilities. Meanwhile the public could not stand the paying away of enormous sums for work that ought to be done by individuals. The present system was one of the very worst forms of protection, but it had been agreed to by many who strongly objected to much milder proposals to support the industries of manufacturers. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. BURGOYNE would support the second reading, in the hope that the Government would see their way to accept some of the suggestions that had been made. One thing was specially necessary—that after the passing of the Bill operations must not be allowed in any way to cease. This was just the time when rabbits were most rapidly propagated. He feared that in the effort to do too much a great deal that might have been done had been overlooked. For instance, the eaglehawk was the natural enemy of the rabbit — (hear, hear) — yet it had been included in the same category as vermin to be destroyed. The suggestion for the introduction of other enemies of the rabbit, such as the mongoose, the weasel, and the stoat, was most valuable. Some of these animals might be dangerous to poultry, but it was comparatively easy to keep poultry fenced in. These animals would go on doing their work whilst there was a rabbit to destroy. They would need no staff of inspectors to look after them, and thus by perfectly natural causes the rabbits would be efficiently held in check. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. COGLIN found fault with hon. members for forming a caucus meeting to dictate to the Government and to Parliament what should be done to deal with the difficulty. He would like to know who were present at the caucus? He had listened with much pleasure to the remarks of Mr. Playford, who had made the position in regard to the rabbit question perfectly clear. It was certain that the present system could not be continued. Indeed, as the Attorney-General had said, it would be practically cheaper to let the squatters have their leases for nothing if they would exterminate the rabbits. He believed the revival of the Act of 1879 was the proper way of dealing with the difficulty. Let every man exterminate the rabbits on his own property. (Hear, hear.) He hoped; therefore, the Bill would be carried without amendment. It had been said that the rabbits on the west coast had been exterminated, but that was not the case. He would, however, suggest that a little time should be given to enable the arrangements at present subsisting to be gradually brought to a close without inconvenience to all concerned. (Hear, hear.)

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. J. H. Howe) said the Government had every reason to be grateful for the way the Bill had been received. The country appeared just now to be suffering from a variety of causes. In the south-east there was a request for a relaxation of the cultivation clauses on account of the heavy floods, while in the north the wheat would not come up on account of the drought. Some of our staples were at a very low figure, and in addition we had now this great rabbit difficulty to solve. No doubt the Bill of last year was introduced with the best of motives, but the practical effect had not been to do any good to the country. It had led to lying and perjury, and many men who ought to have been employed in the fields had gone off to find in scalp hunting a more profitable career, while the nuisance remained as great as ever. He was not long in office before he saw that something must absolutely be done at once to grapple with the evil. In answer to Mr. Burgoyne, who was always finding fault and describing every measure brought forward by the Government as “bald”, he would point out that the Act of 1879, which was re-established by the present Bill, worked admirably. It was perfectly equitable, and threw upon the lessees the responsibility of exterminating the vermin on their runs, while the Government undertook to do the same on their own land. As to annual leases, which had in many instances owing to neglect on the part of the country and of the previous occupiers become a breeding ground for rabbits, the Government felt that it would be unjust to throw the whole destruction of the pest on the present holders of the leases, because the land might be resumed at any moment. Such action would simply mean confiscation, and what the Government proposed to do was to say that all annual leases held by original lessees should be deemed to be Crown lands, and the State would undertake the destruction of the vermin. (Mr. Coles — “It will cost twice as much as the present system.”) It did not matter what it cost. There must be no cessation of the destruction of the vermin. (Hear, hear.) What he had denounced in the present system was the expenditure of money without corresponding good being obtained. He agreed that it would not be fair to compel the owners of leases falling in in 1888 to destroy the brush fences without compensating them for doing so, and the Government therefore proposed if they destroyed them and put-up wire fences that they would be entitled to the full value of those fences at the expiry of their leases. (Mr. Coles — “The Pastoral Act provides for that.”) That only provided that the fences could be erected with the permission of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and unless it could be shown that they would increase the carrying capabilities of the country they could not be put up. Referring to the so-called caucus meeting held the other day he might say that it was attended by Messrs. Coles, Playford, G. C. Hawker, E. W. Hawker, Tennant, Beaglehole, Handyside, Moody, Duncan, J. L. Stirling, Bagot, Burgoyne, and Bews, and he himself would have been present had not an important engagement prevented his doing so. He was sure the hon. members he had named had only in view the best interests of the colony, and really wished to assist the Government. A great deal had been said as to the Government not meeting the Government of Victoria, but he would point out that Victoria could have met us in this matter years ago had she so desired, while now we had nothing to fear from the pest in Victoria, as our south-eastern country was inundated with that pest. Victoria had more to fear from us than we had from her. It did not matter to this great country whether the rabbits were exterminated on the western side of the River Murray. In that river he recognised one of nature’s fences. He was aware that hon. members had said that rabbits swam the river, but he had never read anything of that sort in natural history, and his opinion was that if rabbits came across, they were carried over. Victoria was now taking stringent measures for the eradication of the pest, and he believed the time would come when she would rid herself of it. That was no reason perhaps why we should not meet that colony in some shape or form. He only mentioned it to show that we had nothing to fear from Victoria.

The Bill was then read a second time.