**ANIMALS’ PROTECTION BILL 1912**

**House of Assembly, 28 November 1912, pages 1107-8**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS**, in moving the second reading, said the object of the measure was to give power to protect from destruction and an­nihilation such of the native animals, which by virtue of their rarity, harmlessness, or commercial value required some measure of preservation to save the species from extinction, and also to enable the opossum, kangaroo, and other commercially valuable animals to replenish stocks from time to time. Unlike imported animals, those indigenous to Australia were not prolific, hence it was intended to prevent their being killed during the breeding season. The rare and harmless varieties named in the first schedule of the Bill would be protected during the whole year. The opossum had been placed in that schedule with the object of allowing that very valuable animal to increase its numbers. When it that had been attained he could be removed into the second schedule, when it would be available to the hunter between January 1 and June 30 of each year. It was wholly protected in Victoria. Those in the second schedule it would be illegal to kill during the summer months from duly to December inclusive. The animals mentioned in the third schedule remained unprotected. Provision was made in the Bill for transferring any variety from one schedule to another, so that if any now in the first schedule should become a nuisance they could be sent down to the second or third schedule as might be considered desirable. On the other hand, any species might be moved up to the first or second schedule. Thus the Act, while it sheltered animals that they wished preserved, left open for destruction all such as might become a nuisance. As showing the need for saving the opossum from extinction, the number of their skins brought to market had been decreasing for the last 15 years, and the cash value of those shipped to-day was less than it was in 1896, although the price had risen nearly 700 per cent. In place of lots from 80 to 120 dozen at the auction mart a few years ago, five or six dozen were all that could be got. Last year the number of skins sold at auction numbered 115,000, at 30/ per dozen as compared with 102,000 at 18/ per dozen during the previous year. That increase was attributed to the exceptionally high prices offered, and to some extent, the reselling of old stocks. The increased value of the skin was causing a rush for them, and unless the destroying hunter was checked the opossum would soon become exterminated, a fate that had befallen the black opossum of Tasmania, whose skin attained extreme value. The figures quoted showed that the opossum skin trade was an important one, and led to a large sum of money being distributed throughout the State each year. Although that source of income would be temporarily suspended to replenish supplies, stocks would, it was hoped, be plentiful and prices good in a few years’ time when the opossum might be made available for the hunters from January to June of each year. In the old days the opossum was a great apple and grain eater, and was destroyed on that account, but people did not now suffer in that direction. His natural food was the young gum leaf, and as he had no competition for that item, he would always have a plentiful supply of food, and would not diminish the stock pastures. The kangaroo was another native animal of commercial value on account of his skin and tail. In the settled district the kangaroo caused injury to the wheat field, but when he trespassed into any gar­den, plantation, or cultivated land, he went beyond the pale of protection, and might be summarily shot. The value of kangaroos skin averaged about 2/6 per pound, and had not varied more than 3d. per lb. during the last few years. The sales at auction during the last six years were:—

1. 1 2,750; 1908, 19,000; 1909, 33,750; 1910, 12,000; 1911, 10,000;
2. 1912, 12,000. Included in these figures were skins from Western Australia and the other States, and the larger numbers in some years were thus

accounted for. The supply of South Australia had slightly decreased during the last few years. It was not intended to restrict the fullblooded aboriginal from the free use of his old hunting grounds. He would still be able to take what animals he required for food for himself and his family. Nor would the Bill prevent the keeping of animals as domestic pets. Any persons would be allowed to keep a pet kangaroo, or opossum, or any other animal. The Bill did not prevent the destruction at all times of kangaroos, wallabies, opossums, and any other native animals if found in any garden, plantation, or cultivated land, provided that no animal so destroyed should be offered for sale. No restriction was imposed upon obtaining animals for the Zoological Society. The third schedule made all introduced animals unprotected except those included in the first and second schedules. At present the only introduced animal mentioned in the schedule was the deer, but it was desirable to have the words so printed as to provide for any introduced animals being at some future time placed in the first or second schedule. The Bill also provided that from time to time they could exempt areas. That led him to refer to a petition from Kangaroo Island. The people there claimed that they were in a different position from those on the mainland. They stated that some of the animals mentioned were very plentiful, and were a nuisance to those trying to grow cereals. They also said that it was absolutely necessary to snare and trap the wallabies, and sometimes it happened opossums were caught as they came down the trees. The ease of persons residing there would be fully and carefully considered, and the settled hundreds of the island might be made exempt from the provisions for such time as might be found desirable. A portion of the island was to be set aside for all time as a reserve to safeguard all animals native of the place or put there. The case of the opossum in this State had been made very acute recently because of the desperate hunt for its valuable skin. Not content with the period of moonlight, hunters had made use of acetylene lamps. With the artificial illuminant they were able to hunt every night, whereas years ago that was done only in the moonlight. That made the extinction of the animal more likely. Generally the Bill was framed on almost identi­cal lines with the Birds Protection Act, passed a few years ago. The marginal notes were full and complete, and there was no need for him to explain the sections. He looked forward to members giving hearty support to the Bill and the object behind it.

On the motion of Mr. JACKSON the debate was adjourned until November 28.