**RABBIT BILL 1878b**

**House of Assembly, 3 September 1878; pages 850-3**

Second reading.

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. T. Playford),** in rising to move the second reading of this Bill, stated that a measure of similar character in many respects, but with points of difference which he should presently point out, had been introduced into and rejected by the other branch of the Legislature that session. Some legislation on this subject was absolutely essential —(Hear, hear)—and it was desirable that a law should be passed at the very earliest possible moment, so that the Government on the one hand and private people on the other might act simultaneously and protect those crops which in the absence of such protection might be destroyed even before the harvest commenced. (Hear, hear.) The Bill introduced would be an amendment of the Act of 1875. There were two points in respect of which the Legislative Council had not approved of the Bill which had been submitted to them, and to which he had before referred. The Council did not think it right that pastoral lessees and holders of annual leases should be called upon to destroy rabbits off their lauds at their own expense, having regard to the—in many cases—very short tenure of their leases. The other point of objection raised by the Council was that they did not consider it fair that the Government having years ago preserved the rabbits under the game laws should now seek to destroy them at the expense of the owners of the property on which the rabbits existed. It was suggested as a means of helping private persons to destroy the rabbits that one-half the expense should be borne by the Government. With regard to the first point of objection raised by the Council he was quite willing to give way. It was scarcely fair to expect the ordinary lessees and the pastoral lessees of the Crown to destroy the rabbits at their own expense. In clause 5 of the Bill now before the House it would be seen that the Commissioner of Crown Lands had power to go upon the lands held under pastoral leases from the Crown and destroy the rabbits. In regard to the second point, the Government felt that they could not agree to the proposals of the Council. In the first place, it was at the instigation of the owners of land themselves that the game laws were passed. The ordinary taxpayers of the colony had no voice in the matter. The persons who had insisted on the policy of rabbit preserving were the owners of large estates, who were then introducing these very animals and endeavouring to acclimatize them. He had been informed that for years and years the owners of certain estates used every endeavour to protect their rabbits from people who wanted to shoot them. They had even threatened to bring up those people as trespassers. As regarded the Government paying half the cost of destroying the rabbits, it would be impossible to tell what the proper cost was unless a whole army of people were retained to check the accounts sent in for the destruction of the pests. By the present Bill the same power would practically vest in the Commissioner of Crown Lands as was now possessed by the District Councils. It was better to have one authority than a number of divided authorities, and for that reason it had been thought better to vest whatever powers might be necessary for the effectual carrying out of the provisions of the Bill in the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the time being. There was one other important alteration. The Governor might proclaim a rabbit district without waiting for the usual memorial to be sent in, and on the recommendation of the Commissioner of Crown Lands the limits of rabbit districts might be extended. There was this power granted to the Commissioner of Crown Lands in excess of the powers possessed by him under the present Act. The present Act gave power to District Councils to say to the owners of property, “You must kill all the rabbits on your lands but the Councils had no authority to charge the owners with the expense if they entered upon the lands and destroyed the rabbits themselves. By the Bill now introduced the Commissioner of Crown Lands would be able to charge the owners of the property with the expense incurred by the Commissioner or his agents in destroying the rabbits. He did not intend to adopt rating clauses in any instance. (Hear, hear.) He should at once organize parties for the destruction of any rabbits on the waste lands of the Crown, more particularly adjoining the parts at present cropped. Owners of property would have notice that they would be expected to destroy all rabbits in the vicinity of any cropped lands first. Next year the Act would probably have to be put in force with even more rigour than would be desirable this year, when some little leniency might be advisable in putting all the provisions of the Act into operation. With regard to the cost of destroying the rabbits, he might mention that some trials had recently been made by Mr. Goyder, junior, in the manufacture of squibs composed of pollard and saltpetre. These squibs had been proved, on experiment, to be perfectly efficacious in the extermination of rabbits in artificial burrows, and experiments were now being conducted in the neighbourhood of Mount Bryan which it was anticipated would show that in their natural burrows the rabbits could be destroyed at a cost of about one farthing apiece. (Hear, hear.) He trusted that in view of the great urgency of the case, as shown by a deputation which had recently waited on him, hon. members would in every way facilitate the passing of so important a measure as that which he now submitted to the House.

The Hon. J. CAKR must congratulate the Commissioner of Crown Lands upon his liberality. The Hon. Commissioner had proposed *42* years’ leases for the squatters, and now he proposed to keep their runs clear of rabbits for three years. (Mr. Playford—“ You know very well there are no rabbits outside the black line where the *42* years’ leases begin.”) On what ground was it proposed to destroy free of cost the rabbits on the property of pastoral lessees? If the Commissioner of Crown Lands was so liberal to the squatter why could he not destroy the farmer’s rabbits also? He waited for a reply. Talk about class legislation, why this was class legislation of the highest degree to propose to destroy gratuitously the rabbit on the lands of those who paid only a small amount compared with what they ought to pay and to let those who were paying a large sum for their property destroy their own rabbits. With regard to the rest of the clauses he had little objection to raise. In the principle generally of the Bill he concurred, but he could not agree with the way in which it was proposed to carry out that principle.

Mr. KRICHAUFF, although the Bill was not exactly the measure that he would have liked to have seen passed, would not oppose it. It was better to have half a loaf than no bread, and therefore he should vote for the Bill.

Mr. MOODY was pleased that the Government intended to thoroughly grapple with the rabbit difficulty. It was not desirable that the squatter should get off free, but on the other hand no doubt considerable portions of the pastoral lands of the colony would shortly be resumed by the Crown, and the cost of destroying the rabbits would then fall on the Government.

Mr. REES must express his deep regret and great surprise at the remarks which had fallen from the Hon. J. Carr, who had attempted to make the matter under discussion a class question. He had been present when a deputation numbering about 350 farmers had waited on the Commissioner of Crown Lands on the subject of the rabbit nuisance, and the Commissioner had then explained the invidious position in which he was placed owing to the opposition raised to the Bill recently introduced in another place. The evil to be faced was so great that it was not desirable to quarrel with a righteous compromise of the various interests at stake. (The Hon. J. Carr—“Then let the matter be dealt with fairly out of the public revenue.1’) He had heard that morning of a fine crop belonging to a son-in-law of Mr. Saunders, of the Burra Mine, which was not expected to yield three bushels to the acre in consequence of the rabbit nuisance. More than three million acres were affected by this curse. As representing a district afflicted by the pest in question, he ventured on behalf of his constituents to tender his thanks to the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the manner in which he had grappled with the difficulty.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. T. Playford) desired to say, in reply to the remarks of the Hon. J. Carr, that it was useless raising the question of what the pastoral lessees ought to pay. (Hear, hear.) As a matter of fact they paid all that they were asked to pay. He himself had tenants in Hindley-street who were not paying him a fair rent for his property there, but it would be absurd to ask them for more, as they were paying all that the terms of their leases required. With regard to the rabbits on lands held on annual leases notice of resumption in respect to the lands in question would be given in a few months, and as regards lands held on longer lease he would have no objection to the introduction of a proviso that if resumption did not take place within a certain time the cost of destroying the rabbits should be borne by the squatters.

The motion was carried.