**GAME ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1886**

**Legislative Council, 28 July 1886, pages 530-1**

Second reading

**The CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. D. Murray)** said this was a Bill consolidating the Acts of 1874 and 1885. They all knew the necessity of having a Game Act in these colonies, where so many people used firearms for the destruction of animals both wild and tame. They had to thank a number of persons who were interested in the protection of the different races of birds and animals for the previous Acts, and for the present Bill, which hon. members would agree were of value not only to sportsmen, but to those who made their living by the sale of animals which they had killed. The previous Acts had been prepared with an imperfect knowledge of the habits of the animals, and a greater amount of information upon these subjects had resulted in this amending Bill being brought forward, and be thought it would have the effect of conserving those animals whose preservation was necessary in these colonies. The present Bill altered the classification in regard to the protection afforded, and it set out those which were removed from all protection. The close season was altered in accordance with recent observations and experience. The open time for shooting would now commence on the 14th December, which would permit of sportsmen making; some use of the Christmas holidays for their sport. The close season would begin at various times for different birds or animals, according to the requirements of the case. The possession of a swivel gun was now made illegal, it being found insufficient to make the use only illegal.

The Hon. H. SCOTT hoped the Chief Secretary would furnish some information in regard to seals. According to the Act the summer season was made close for seals. Now it was impossible to get seals in the rocky places off Kangaroo Island except during the summer season. He was told that seals would eat 30 lb. weight of fish at a time, which seemed a large quantity certainly. He was told that there were many rocky islands near Kangaroo Island which being practically inaccessible would afford protection to the seal. No doubt Mr. Minchin would be able to supply the Government with further information as to the necessity or otherwise of protecting seals.

The Hon. A. B. MURRAY was surprised to see some of the exemptions from protection embodied in the Bill. Why should snipe, ducks, geese, and native companions be exempted from protection? He would like also to have further information as to the habits of the seal, and the necessity for protecting these amphibious animals.

The Hon. M. SALOM, as one formerly interested in the sealing trade, could testify to the importance of procuring full information as to the classes of seals on the coast, and the nature of the protection to be afforded to them. In the trade there were three classes of seals recognised, and it was the practice of fishermen to kill the “butts” or young seals. Be trusted that every protection would be given to the young seals, as the trade both in sealskins and seal oil was an important one.

The Hon. R. C. BAKER might explain to the Hon. A. B Murray that the reason why snipe were not protected in the Bill was because they did not breed in this colony, and arriving here fully matured needed no protection. As to seals he was told that protection was afforded to those animals when they did not need it. They ought not to be protected right through the summer months, as that was the only season when the islands could be approached where the seals lived.

The debate was adjourned till Tuesday next on the motion of the Hon. R. A. TARLTON.

**GAME ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1886**

**Legislative Council, 10 August 1886, pages 655-6**

Adjourned debate on the second reading.

The Hon. R. A. CARLTON said he had moved the adjournment of the debate in order to give the Chief Secretary an opportunity which he thought he required to look into the propriety of putting seals among the protected animals. In that morning’s *Advertiser* there was a letter signed by Mr. Randall, who professed to be the mouthpiece of those interested in the trade, in which he stated that to protect the seals during the summer months would be to shut up the trade at once. (Hear, hear.) The calm weather during the summer months was the only time suitable for reaching the rookeries frequently inhabited by the seals. (Hear, hear.) There was very little danger of the seals becoming extinct; and he had been told that seven men took more than a couple of months to capture a thousand seals. The same gentleman stated in his letter that in no country in the world were seals protected—not even in America or Russia. The naturalist who accompanied the “ Challenger expedition” in speaking on sealing remarked “Fur seals are easily knocked over with a blow on the nose, but are very tenacious of life, and require to have their throats cut directly they are stunned or they escape after all. It is a pity that some discretion is not exercised in killing the animals as is done in St. Paul’s Island, in Behring Sea. in the case of the Northern fur seal. By killing the young males and selecting certain animals only for killing the number of seals may even be increased.” It had been said if they protected the seals as was proposed by the Bill it would seriously injure the fisheries. It was doubted, however, if the seals were large fish-eaters. It was known that they ate fish; but the balance of evidence was against their living largely upon it. They lived mostly upon crustacea. Mr. Brown, in his account of Arctic seals, said the food of the northern seals consisted mostly of crustacea, a species of gammarus called “ seal’s food ” by the whalers. They also ate fish, and sometimes took down birds. Dr. Buckholtz found only crustacea in the stomachs of the seals in the Arctic regions. He would quote from the third volume of “Nature” upon this subject, where it was said—“The most remarkable part of the present memoir is perhaps the account of the extraordinary habits and customs of the northern fur seal, given from Captain Bryant’s observations of these animals on the Pribyloff Islands, off the northern part of Alaska territory. As is the case in other known species of eared seals there is an enormous discrepancy in the size and weight of the two sexes, the weight of the female being rarely more than one-fourth of that of the full-grown male. The fur seals resort to the Pribyloff Islands during the summer months for the purpose of breeding:, and in St. Paul’s Island, where Captain Bryant made his observations, occupy at this season a belt of loose rocks along the shore, varying in width from 5 to 40 rods. Twelve miles of shore line at least are taken up by what is called their ‘ breeding rookeries’ in this island, and are tenanted by not less than 1,152,000 breeding males and females according to Captain Bryant’s estimate. Each male seal stations himself in a particular spot, usually the same as he has occupied in former years, and keeps about a square rod of ground free around him to afford space for the reception of his ten or fifteen wives. By June 15 all the males have arrived and have stationed themselves each in his own domain, not without constant growlings and fightings with his neighbors for what he considers the best station. The young males are not allowed to take a place on the rookeries, but are driven by the patriarchs back into the sea or compelled to resort to high rocks above. After the middle of June the females arrive in small numbers at first , but increasing as the as the season advances until the middle of July , by which time they are so crowded that they overlap one another. The old males who are nearest the shore seize upon the females at once and of course fill their hares first. Buut the males who are higher up upon the rocks select the time when their fortunate neighbors are off guard to steal their wives, taking them up in their mouths and carefully carrying them off to their own dominions as a cat would her kittens, and struggles often occur between two males for the possession of a female, and both seizing her at once terribly lacerate her with their teeth. When his harem is full the old male struts complacently around reviewing his domestic circle, and fiercely driving off all intruders. Two or three days after landing and taking up their abode the female brings forth her single pup, after which she is ready to associate with the male. By the middle of August the young are all born, and the females are then again pregnant. The old males having been constantly in their stations for four months without food now leave the females and young to the company of the younger males and go off shore to feed. At the end of October the whole body of seals leave the island and journey southwards. The greatest care is taken by the hunters never to disturb the breeding places of the seals in any way, and the only seals killed for the sake of their fur are the younger animals (principally males), who resort to the higher rocks above the “rookeries” to pass the night. A party of men armed with clubs surround a portion of the herd and drive them off sometimes six or seven miles across the island to the place selected for killing and skinning them. By this plan the rookeries are less liable to be alarmed, and the seals are made to carry their own skins to the sorting-houses, which would otherwise be a work of much labor. At the present time the annual yield of sealskins from the Pribyloff Islands is estimated to have reached 100,000, and the killing yearly of this number is believed in no way to check their increase, but rather to augment it.” This came from some very large fisheries in Alaska, carried on by the North Americans, which had existed for 150 years; and the seals did not in any way diminish in number there. He could see no reason why they should protect the seals along the coasts of South Australia during the summer months, which was the only time when sealing could be profitably carried on. (Hear, hear.) When the Bill was in committee he would move that the seals be struck out of the list. (Hear, hear.) He supported the second reading of the Bill.

The CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. D. Murray) said with regard to the Hon. Mr. Tarlton’s remarks as to the seals, he had made enquiries into the matter, and had decided to alter the clause so as to leave the seals open in the months of February, March, and April. These were the best months for sealing, and he hoped the Hon. Mr. Tarlton would accept this compromise. Sometimes it had been said that pleasure parties had destroyed large numbers of seals, leaving them where they were killed, and it was desirable to prevent this sort of slaughter. (Hear, hear.) He thought the alteration he had indicated would give sufficient time to those engaged in the sealing trade, and at the same time protect the seals.

The Bill was then read a second time.