**RABBIT BILL 1878a**

**House of Assembly, 13 June 1878, page 131**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. T. Playford**), in moving the second reading of this Bill, said it was almost a copy of the measure passed last session. There were only one or two amendments. Hon. members would remember that the first Bill for the destruction of rabbits was passed in 1875, and from that time till now it had remained in force. He believed, however, that its failure might be attributed to two causes. The first was because the carrying out of the Act within the limits of districts was left to local authority. The second was the twofold means adopted for the destruction of the rabbits. Power was given to the Governor to proclaim certain districts as rabbit districts, and two ways were provided in the Bill whereby the rabbits might be destroyed by the local authorities. The first was by declaring a rate and also offering a bonus for every rabbit scalp, and the second was by compelling every owner to destroy the rabbits on his land after receiving notice. The first part of the Act had been put in force in some parts of the colony, but the second part had not been applied. As long as there were two means for the destruction of rabbits embodied in an Act the least effectual would be adopted, and therefore good results would not naturally follow. As long as local authorities were entrusted with the power of destroying the rabbits failure would be the result, because whilst one body might be desirous of putting the Act into force the adjoining body would utterly neglect it, thus rendering nugatory the efforts of their neighbours. That was felt so strongly by the late Government that at the time when he was in office in 1876 he proclaimed rabbit districts outside of the District Councils, and assessed these districts, yet his successor (Mr. Carr) considering the Act unworkable stopped all further proceedings in regard to the destruction of rabbits outside the District Councils. One of the centres from which rabbits spread were Kapunda, Apoinga, and Hanson. A few years ago they were more numerous in those places than in any others. They had not spread much to the south, because the land in that direction had been taken up to a considerable extent by farmers who held limited quantities of land. They had spread to the east, the south east, and the north-east. In the south-east they had spread to the Murray and down the flats to the lakes. In the east they had spread beyond Mount Bryan, and in the north-east to Paratoo. In the north and west they had spread to Mannanarie, Rocky Gully, Blackrock Plains, Wepowie, Booleroo, Mount Brown, and Pichirichi. They had not spread to any great extent westward to the sea, their progress in that direction being checked by the farmers. The rabbits had spread mostly in the neighbourhood of large properties applied to pastoral purposes. He thought it would be admitted on all hands by those acquainted with the country that the settlers in the neighbourhood of large properties suffered more from the depredations of rabbits than those in other parts. The owners of these large properties did not feel the injury caused by these pests to the same extent as the farmers, whose whole crops might be eaten off in one year and their means of living taken from them, he was confident that no Act of Parliament would be effectual which did not provide first, that the Government undertook the destruction of rabbits, and secondly, that it should be compulsory on every owner of property to destroy the pest on his land. If these principles were not embodied in any Act that might be passed it would be as great a failure as the existing one. He believed that the Bill introduced last session, as far as it went, provided a way out of the difficulty. He knew some who contended that the Meat-preserving Companies would be the means of getting rid of the pest. Without any efforts on the part of the Government these Companies would only keep the rabbits down within certain bounds. At Eudunda, where there was a preserving establishment, the rabbits had been considerably reduced in number; but this had been brought about more through the action of the Government than the operations of the Company. The late Government agreed to pay for all small rabbits taken to that particular establishment at the rate of ½ d. per head for those from the Hundred of Neales and 2d. for those taken from the Hundreds of Julia and Hanson. The trappers thus found it to their advantage not only to catch the large rabbits used by the Preserving Company, but also the smaller ones, which, under ordinary circumstances, would not be trapped. Unless these small rabbits were trapped it would be like cutting down Scotch thistles with one hand and sowing the seed with the other. (Laughter.) It was not to the interest of the trappers to destroy the smaller rabbits unless they were offered an inducement for doing so, because by allowing them to escape they ensured for themselves a plentiful stock for the future supplies required by the Company. The Government had been robbed, as it were, in paying for these small rabbits, because the majority of them came from private properties. The Bill which he asked the House to deal with now was a copy of the Bill presented last session except on two points. The Bill of last session provided that an Inspector could give notice to an owner or occupier of land to stop rabbit holes, and if this were not done that the Inspector could enter on the land to stop up the holes. In the Act before the House he had made an alteration of this clause to the effect that the Commissioner and not the Inspector should give the notice to the owner or occupier. He thought this alteration necessary so as to prevent any arbitrary or tyrannical action on the part of the Inspectors. Their recommendations would have to receive the sanction of the Minister before they could be put in force. The bill of last session provided that the Inspectors could destroy rabbits by any means except poison. The words “except poison” had been omitted from the Bill before the House. The reason why he had omitted these words was this. Hon. members had doubtless noticed that the Government had been trying experiments with machines for the destruction of rabbits without going to the trouble of digging out the holes or of plugging them up with earth. A machine for injecting sulphur into the warrens had been brought under the notice of the department, but after a number of trials it was found not to act as successfully as anticipated. It was found that the machine would not force the sulphur into the innermost parts of the holes. It had the effect of killing all the rabbits for a certain distance, but the air in the warrens prevented the sulphur being forced throughout them. The sulphur fumes were lighter than air, and therefore the machine could not force them beyond a certain limit. The Surveyor-General believed that if they could procure some ignitable substance which would generate gas of sufficient density to force its way throughout the warrens all the rabbits would be killed. As some experiments in this way might be tried, and as the gas generated might be considered a poison, it had been thought advisable to omit the words he had mentioned. These were the only two alterations which had been made in the Bill of last session. The only local body so far as he was aware that had passed a rate this year for the purpose of destroying rabbits was the Hanson Council. They had spent a large sum of money and had asked the Government whether they would not destroy the rabbits on Crown lands. A party had been sent up to clear the pests off a travelling-stock reserve, and the person in charge had written to him last week. In his communication he stated that as soon as they had worked up to one end of the reserve they found that the rabbits were as numerous as ever at the point where they commenced. They were very plentiful on the adjoining land, and where they found the earth removed they commenced new warrens. The Chairman of the District Council had written to him on the subject. He stated that no efforts that were made for the destruction of rabbits would be effectual unless simultaneous action was taken throughout the country. Some gentlemen had said to him that the rabbits could not be entirely exterminated. He was inclined to think that it would be impossible to do so in rocky parts of the country, but he believed that they could be kept down if the law was fairly and judiciously enforced. If the Act were put into operation next year and not stringently enforced, but carried out with greater vigour in the following year, he was sure that they would be able to confine the pests to a great extent to the inaccessible areas amongst the rocks. If the pests were not speedily dealt with all he could say was that they would completely overrun the colony in a short time. They would not be confined to any particular area, but the whole colony would be more or less infested with them. When he was at Franklin Harbour the other day he had heard that a squatter there had let some rabbits loose and that there were warrens now all over the place. If some law were not put in force to destroy them they would soon destroy the farmers' chances of success. The hon. members for Light and Burra would probably be able to give the House some information respecting the damage sustained by farmers through them. He intended to have another clause added to the Bill, which would render any person who let rabbits loose on lands outside the limits of rabbit districts liable to a severe penalty. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. WHITE moved the adjournment of the debate, and on the Speaker declaring the motion negatived he called for a division. He subsequently Withdrew his call.

Mr. ROUNSEVELL said that he felt deeply on the question, but he was not going to trouble the House with any lengthened remarks, because when a similar Bill was before them last session he had fully expressed his opinions. He would not claim to be the originator of the Bill which was before them last session, but he had furnished the then Minister (Mr. Carr) with the basis of it. That hon. member elaborated the ideas he had given him, and brought before the House what he believed to have been nearly a perfect measure. If the Bill as introduced by him had been passed into law he believed that it would have proved a far better measure than the one the present Minister had introduced. (No.) There was one great defect in the Bill, which he would try to have remedied in Committee, and in which he believed he would have the sympathy of a number of members in that House, if it did not pass another place. This defect he would refer to directly . He looked on the question as now being a purely national one. The measure which was originally introduced affected the District of Light, but now the cruel pest had extended over the various agricultural areas. From the various characters of the soil and the physical features of the country he did not think that rabbits could be totally exterminated, but by a judicious expenditure of money they could be so reduced that they would do no injury to the country. He believed that it was necessary that simultaneous action should be taken throughout the country. He thought that the Commissioner of Crown Lands was hardly fair in his remarks when he said that the rabbits had spread more from pastoral areas than others. The large landowners had encountered the same difficulty as the Government had in their efforts to get rid of the nuisance. When they tackled the difficulty they found that small landowners around them did not at the same time attempt to destroy the rabbits, and the consequence was that their money had been expended in vain. If this Bill were passed both large and small landowners would have to take steps to destroy the rabbits on their land, and it would, he believed, result in great good. The defect in the Bill to which he had previously referred was that the rating clauses had been omitted. The rating clauses were, in his opinion, necessary for the fair administration of the Act and for giving justice to the public. His reason for saying this was that the Government, if not the original, were at any rate amongst the early founders of the propagation of the pest. They held large reserves and large areas of inferior land in trust for the public, and the rabbits had been allowed to flourish on these without, except in one or two cases, any attempt being made to get rid of them. The Government had done more than any private individual in propagating the pest—(Oh)—and they ought to pay a fair share towards its eradication. (Hear, hear.) He should support the measure, because he believed it was a step in the right direction.

Mr. WHITE then moved the adjournment of the debate till Tuesday, which was agreed to.