**VERMIN DESTRUCTION ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1884**

**Legislative Council, 12 November 1884, pages 1666-7**

Second reading

The MINISTER of JUSTICE and EDUCATION (Hon. R. C. Baker) in moving the second reading of this Bill said that the Act of 1879 threw on district councils and corporations the onus of destroying rabbits and vermin on the reserves and roads, and provided that where owners of land whether pastoral or purchased in fee-simple did not perform the duty which the Act imposed upon them the Government could undertake the work at the expense of such owners. That Act worked very well in the settled districts of the colony, but in other por­tions of the colony it was not so successful. Hence the necessity for the present Bill. The provisions of the Act of 1879 having resulted in getting the rabbit pest pretty well under in the central localities matters were not pushed on, and the people became quiescent; but some time afterwards it was discovered that the rabbits were rapidly increasing on the pastoral country outside the settled districts where it was supposed they could not exist, there being no regular supply of water. In consequence of this the pastoralists got up an agitation which re­sulted in the Act of 1882. That Act went on a diffe­rent basis altogether. It left the Act of 1879 intact so far as the settled districts were concerned, and pro­vided a remedy for the pest in the outlying portions of the colony. It provided for the formation of the whole of the colony into vermin boards, and gave the pastoral lessees of the Crown power to tax them­selves in order to raise funds for the ex­termination of the rabbits. That Bill was well enough in theory, but several defects were discovered in its working. In the first place it was found that while some of the vermin boards set to work with determination, and were successful in destroying the rabbits, other boards would do nothing at all—that while one section of the pastoralists were spending their own and Government money in doing good work, the adjoining board was providing a breed­ing place for the animals, as on the establishment of the boards the Government had withdrawn their parties and had allowed the Act in that respect to lapse. Another defect of the Act of 1882 was that it still kept the onus on the Government of destroying the rabbits on Crown lands, so that on one side of a fence the board had to employ parties, and on the other side the Government had to do so, and as the Government employees did not exercise the same amount of vigor the Crown lands became a breeding ground for the rabbits. There was another cause which led to this un­satisfactory state of affairs. The Government had resumed a large quantity of land from the original pastoral lessees, and as they anticipated selling it at any time they did not see fit to destroy the rabbits, and this country also became a great breeding ground, which rendered nugatory the efforts of the vermin boards. That being the state of affairs, the late Government asked the chairmen of the vermin boards to form themselves into a kind of society and to send in a report founded on the result of their experience, with suggestions as to the best course to adopt. They were practical men, and knew what was wanted; but he was sorry to say that for some considerable time their report was not acted upon at all. The first idea of the Surveyor- General was that the Government should abolish the vermin boards altogether and go back to the original system of the Government doing everything. He thought that was a mistake, and did his best to secure the retention of the boards, because being composed of practical men they could do the work more perfectly than the Government, and it was a recognised fact that private individuals could get more out of their employees than the Government could. Further, as they would have to find a great portion of the funds they would be careful to see that good results followed. The Government had there­fore determined to adhere to the advice of the chair­men of the vermin boards, and this Bill was the con­sequence. These boards would now have far larger powers than they originally possessed, but their constitution would be altered in some respects The principles on which the measure was founded were that the whole of the colony, whether re­ferring to leasehold or freehold land, should be formed into vermin districts, and the district councils were to be the vermin boards, but where there were no district councils or corporations the country would be placed under what were called local authorities who would be responsible for the destruction of rabbits, wild dogs, and other vermin. If they did not carry out their duties the Government would be empowered to do so at the expense of the local authorities, It would be seen that the Government were placed in an analogous posi­tion to the Central Board of Health in reference to the local boards of health. The expense was to be borne almost entirely by the district in which the vermin was destroyed, and the power of raising local rates would be given to the local authorities. This latter power was raised in the pastoral districts from 6d. per square mile under the Act of 1882 to Is. under this Bill, and there was to be an assessment on stock, the maximum being raised from £2 under the former Act to £5 under the present Bill. The holders of land other than pastoral lessees would not be assessed on their stock, but would be liable for a maximum of 1/2 d. per acre on their land. The boards would also have the power of charging the Government a maximum of Is. per square mile for all Government lands, and although the Government would not pay so high a rate as the pastoral lessees, and would not be liable to be assessed for stock, yet they would continue to pay for scalps as heretofore. He believed if the Act was wisely ad­ministered that it would have a most beneficial effect in clearing off the pest, and this was greatly to be desired, because any one who had a practical ac­quaintance with the subject would be able to ap­preciate the extent of the danger. During the past five years the Government had spent £120,000 in the destruction of rabbits and other vermin, and yet there had been no appreciable diminution in the pest. Therefore it would be seen that very prompt measures were necessary. Even during the last five months £19,433 had been spent, and it was questionable whether we were holding our own. To give an illus­tration of the amount of money expended by private owners he would mention that one pastoral lessee who had a run comprising 195 square miles of country on the Murray had paid away £2,364 for scalps and £602 for poison and other remedies, or a total of £3,046 in three years. Before he was troubled with the pest he had shorn 29,225 sheep, and this number had diminished to 5,000. In consequence of the money he had spent in destroying the rabbits he was now able to keep 10,000 sheep. But this gentleman justly complained that what was the use of his fight­ing the difficulty when his neighbors did nothing, and he was afraid of being flooded with rabbits from other people’s runs. There must be united action, and this Bill provided as complete concerted action as could be adopted. Formerly the Government used to employ parties to destroy the rabbits, but of course the longer the rabbits lasted the longer their em­ployment continued, and the consequence was that a large amount of money was paid for a small amount of rabbit destruction. Then the other extreme was tried of payment by results, and the consequence was that as soon as the rabbits were thinned the men knocked off and went somewhere else where the animals were more numerous. A third plan was tried of sending round inspectors to estimate the thickness of the rabbits in each locality, and as the number decreased the subsidy was increased. He thought the Council would do wisely to continue to entrust the destruc­tion of the rabbits to boards. If any board did not carry out its duties the Government would have power to hand any portion of their territory over to the more energetic board. If the Bill was passed he hoped the result would be beneficial to the colony, and that in a few years the vermin would be eradi­cated.

The Bill was then read a second time.

In committee,

Clauses 1 to 8 were passed.

Clause 9. Power to annex.

The Hon. H. SCOTT wished to move an amend­ment. Wherever any local authority failed to enforce the provisions of this Bill the land held by such neglecting authority might be attached to some other vermin board. He did not want to make the matter compulsory, but merely to give power to do so. He would move the following amendment:—To add after the word " district” in the second line of the clause the words or land included in any hundred, or land included in any district council or corporation.

The MINISTER of JUSTICE and EDUCATION (Hon. R. C. Baker) regarded the first part of the amendment proposed as unnecessary, and the second as objectionable. It would bring in two local autho­rities having authority over the same land, and both haying power to levy rates. He hoped the amend­ment would not be pressed. All the land in the colony could be brought under the Bill if it was not already within the boundaries of some local autho­rity.

The amendment was put and declared negatived.

The Hon. H. SCOTT called for a division, which was taken as follows:—

Ayes, 4—Hons. W. D. Glyde, A. Hay, M. Salom, and H. Scott (teller).

Noes, 16—Hons, W. C. Buik, G. W. Cotton, || Crozier, T. English, J. Hodgkiss, T. Hogarth, A. B. Murray, D. Murray, J. Pearce, J. Pickering, JU G. Ramsay, J. Rankine, W. Sandover, J. B. Spence, R. A. Tarlton, and the Minister of Justice and Educa­tion (teller).

Majority of 12 for the Noes.

The clause was passed without amendment.

The remaining clauses of the Bill and the preamble and title were passed.

Third reading.

The Standing Orders having been suspended, the Bill was read a third time and passed.