

Government Stores, Tender Board, and Department of Industrial Development and Decentralisation.

- (3) The concession is expected to commence in two to three weeks' time when the committee's report and recommendations are completed.

41. RAILWAYS

Flashing Lights: Vincent Street Crossing, Beverley

Mr. GAYFER, to the Minister for Railways:

- (1) When may it be expected that the flashing lights will be installed at the Vincent Street crossing, Beverley?
- (2) Why was the work commenced and then left, even though considerable expense had been incurred?

Mr. BERTRAM replied:

- (1) It is anticipated that installation will be completed by the 19th August, 1971.
- (2) Field work commenced in April to take advantage of the temporary availability of the installation gang although it was known that the complex wiring of the relay and equipment cases could not be commenced due to technicians being engaged on higher priority work.

42. RAILWAYS

Deraiment at Noggojeering Siding

Mr. McIVER, to the Minister for Railways:

- (1) Would he advise what costs to the department were involved by the recent deraiment of a goods train at Noggojeering siding?
- (2) Will he advise cause of deraiment?

Mr. BERTRAM replied:

- (1) Repair work arising from the deraiment has not been completed, but the total cost to the department is estimated to be \$13,700.
- (2) A departmental investigation has revealed that this deraiment was attributable to overwidth gauge.

QUESTIONS (2): WITHOUT NOTICE

1. INLAND FISHING LICENSES

Amendment of Regulations

Mr. JONES, to the Minister for Fisheries and Fauna:

Is it the Government's intention this session to amend the regulations which require people to

purchase an inland fisherman's license at a cost of \$2 to catch marron, perch, cobbler, and other freshwater fish?

Mr. DAVIES replied:

Inland fishermen's licenses became due for renewal on the 30th June, last. In reviewing the position the Department of Fisheries and Fauna decided that whilst it was necessary for those persons fishing to continue to hold a license no charge would be made in connection with pensioners and children.

2. HOUSING

Expenditure of Loan Funds

Mr. O'NEIL, to the Deputy Premier: In view of the reply given by the Minister for Housing to my question on today's notice paper that for the year 1970-71 the State Housing Commission did not exceed the loan funds allocated to it, can he explain why he in this House mentioned on a number of occasions during last week that the commission had over-spent by some \$2,000,000?

Mr. GRAHAM replied:

I have no doubt you will recollect, Mr. Speaker, I was quoting from a report made to the Brand Government in its dying hours, such report having been submitted by the Under-Treasurer of the State.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY: FOURTH DAY

Motion

Debate resumed, from the 22nd July, on the following motion by Mr. A. R. Tonkin:—

That the following Address-in-Reply to His Excellency's Speech be agreed to:—

May it please Your Excellency: We the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of the State of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express loyalty to our most Gracious Sovereign, and to thank Your Excellency for the Speech you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

MR. REID (Blackwood) [5.06 p.m.]: I would first like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your elevation to the Chair. I am sure you will discharge the duties of your office in an able and capable manner. To the other members of the Chamber, particularly the new members, who have given their opening addresses, I would like to add my congratulations for the high standard that has been set by them. I can only hope that my contribution will also be of some worth.

I am acutely aware of the great honour that has been bestowed upon me by the electors of Blackwood in choosing me to be their representative in the Parliament of Western Australia. This is an honour that not many men or women in the community attain, and I am certainly mindful of the great responsibilities attaching to the office. I am also aware of the very sincere contribution made by my predecessor, Mr. Ron Kitney, during the last Parliament; and, before him, that made by John Hearman who was, of course, Speaker of the House for many years. These members have set a standard I hope to emulate. It is most gratifying from the point of view of a new member to be received so warmly by the members of the staff and the members of Parliament generally. It is heartening for a new member to find he is received and regarded firstly as an individual.

In turning to the Blackwood electorate one discovers that it runs approximately 85 miles in a south-easterly direction from the boundary of the Bunbury townsite, and that it is approximately 40 miles in width. It is an excellent example of a rural seat, because it ranges from living in the near suburbia of a major town, such as Bunbury, to the southern pioneering areas of Chowderup and Tone Bridge. This area produces almost every possible agricultural commodity known in Western Australia with the exception of cotton, pineapples, and bananas.

Quite apart from containing some of the most fertile soils and the best farmlands in the State, it supports a whole-milk and butterfat industry and produces the bulk of the State's export apple crop. It also encompasses some of the finest beef raising areas in the State and grows some of the finest types of wool.

Industries such as fat lamb, potato growing, timber, grain, and mining are also of tremendous importance. Ironically enough, with only a few exceptions all the industries mentioned are in serious trouble.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that I have a time allocation of 45 minutes. I realise, however, that some of the best brains in Australia, if not in the world, are devoting their entire energies to solving this rural crisis. It is therefore unlikely that my time allocation of 45 minutes, or my 20-minute address, will help solve or improve the world situation. Accordingly, I have decided to adopt the latter figure and, having made this decision, it naturally follows that in dealing with such a complex and involved problem one runs the danger of generalising and falling into the familiar trap—as has been done in the past—of making vague statements including such expressions as “market penetration,” or “diversification.”

These expressions have been around for so long that they are treated only with contempt by the farmers. What is needed at the moment is an honest and direct approach to the problems confronting us. The biggest question confronting us is probably this: Do we want an agricultural industry in Australia? Of course we do; but the questions that follow are: Whom do we want in it, and how much can we afford, as a country, to keep them there?

The latter two questions are far more difficult to answer. I believe that most politicians in this nation of ours have been guilty of undermining the position of the family farmer in Australia today by failing to recognise the seriousness of the mounting problems in agriculture that have been apparent over the last five years.

As farmers we have been told, firstly, to get big or get out. This advice was then changed and we were told, “You must diversify.” We were later informed that we worked with our hands and not our heads, and that we would become more efficient by employing farm advisers and economists.

Where, Mr. Speaker, are those men who were reputed to be the fountains of wisdom? Where were they after we got big, diversified, and hired the necessary brain power? These fountains of wisdom have all disappeared. One might ask, “Why?” The reply, of course, is that this was not the answer at all. Portion of it might have been true and might still be true, but it is not the solution.

The tragedy of the situation remains; it is the farmer in the 35 to 40-year-old bracket who faces the greatest crisis today. He is the man who has gone out prepared to work hard to improve his lot by borrowing heavily to develop and remain viable. He carries the additional burden of educational expenses because he has, in the main, a young family. What is more important he is the backbone of the agricultural industry in Australia; he is the one we can least afford to lose.

This type of farmer, however, will be the first to go unless realistic recognition is given to his problems. It seems to be part of human nature not to want to dwell on misfortune or tragedy, yet part of us wants to hear the morbid details; whether they involve a farmer walking off his land penniless—losing all his savings—after a lifetime of hard work; or whether it concerns some city dweller left homeless with a large family after having lost his uninsured home in a fire.

We are too quick to excuse our conscience by saying that he should have known that low wool prices and droughts were coming; or, in the latter case, by saying it is his own fault for not insuring his house, even though the money might just not have been available to do this.

To me it is unbelievable that tax concessions should be available to everyone in Australia who has a tax problem and who wishes to enter the field of food production—a field already oversupplied on the local and world scene. Probably the most pressing need today is for a reappraisal of these tax concessions, bearing in mind the urgent need to protect and assist the family farmer, while discouraging outside parties from entering food production.

Tax concessions could still be made available to those engaged in non-food producing areas, such as in afforestation. Until this step is taken, any moves towards the reconstruction of any of the industries in difficulties will be largely negated. How can the nation truthfully offer farmers assistance with their reconstruction while literally holding a gun in the back of another section of the community and urging it to start clearing productive farmland?

This was fair enough in the early 1950s, when we were largely a primary producing country and urgently needed foreign exchange; when there was very little industry or mineral export. However, it is not necessary now. Farming is probably the most unbusinesslike business there is. The farmer embarks on a 12 months' programme to produce something; whether it be wool, meat, fruit, or grain, with little more than a faint hope that someone in the world, either locally or elsewhere, will offer him a price that will cover his cost of production and give him a small profit margin after he has run the gauntlet with mother nature. She, of course, has the power to wipe out the year's work in minutes by means of storm, fire, flood, or drought.

I would like to illustrate this aspect with a true story; something that occurred to me some years ago. It was the day of the Sunday school picnic in December. We attended church in the morning and then travelled to the coast with a group of 40 excited little ones. After watching over them while they played in the water we returned home that evening only to discover that my fruit crop had been completely wiped out by hail. My next-door neighbour, however, who had been drinking beer all day and keeping company with fast women, got off Scot free! If there is a moral to this story I am not sure that it is a very good one.

This happened to be the third time in four years my crop had been affected by hail, and had it occurred again the following year I would probably have been put out of business. However, because the premiums are so high it is not economical to insure fruit crops. Prior to this experience 20 years had elapsed without any damage being incurred, but what sort of profit margin needs to be built in in order to cater for these types of incidents?

My next-door neighbour, by the way, has mended his bad habits and is now married with a wife and family, and has settled down to a quiet life. Also, he has not yet received a hail strike!

Orderly marketing stands alone in offering security to the farming community. Legislation, therefore, offers the best hope of improving the rural situation. This legislation will need to be far sighted and sometimes courageous to achieve the desired effect. Free enterprise has had disastrous results in the fruit, meat, and wool industries. We all enjoy living in a free society, but as far as the primary industries are concerned, it has been too free and someone else has enjoyed it too much.

I read with interest in the Premier's policy speech the reference to the Queensland Government's contribution of \$10,000,000 for drought relief. This is a tremendous effort for a developing State to make without, perhaps, the support of the developing mineral fields, and it must have been made with the full realisation of the consequences if aid was not quickly forthcoming.

Queensland also offers an interesting example in the operations of the Committee of Direction; that is, the C.O.D. This committee was set up some 40-odd years ago during one of Queensland's blackest periods when fruit and vegetable produce was at rock bottom prices. These prices had been depressed by individuals to absolute bankruptcy level. The influence of the Committee of Direction on the market immediately lifted the price to a payable proposition for farmers. The committee and free enterprise firms still operate successfully in Queensland, but there is no longer any doubt who is underpinning the base price.

This committee is unique in that it makes its own legislation independent of the Queensland Government. I believe these powers were granted by a Labor Government, and I hope that the outstanding success of this organisation will not go unnoticed by this Government if and when it is examining legislation in connection with the wool, fruit, and lamb industries in Western Australia.

Having submitted some proposals on production and incentives to produce, together with ideas of how to rationalise the position through legislation, I would like briefly to comment on markets and marketing. Surely in this field lies our greatest scope for a breakthrough. The Department of Agriculture in Western Australia has many officers of outstanding ability—many of the senior officials I have known for 20 years or more and they are tremendously respected—and yet I feel that the department has been found to be sadly lacking during this current recession.

In order to maximise this department's operations, I suggest it should be split into three separate and distinct groups; that is, one of research, one of advisory services to farmers, and one of markets and marketing. The present situation where a research service and an advisory service exist under the same roof makes for a bad marriage. The professional element from the research department where, by necessity, experiments and observations have to be proven to the last decimal point, has a definite restrictive influence on the advisory services, and tends to alienate itself from the problems in the field. This is aggravated by some services such as the horticulture section which has only two fully trained men in the field, the remainder of the staff being stationed at the headquarters in Jarrah Road, South Perth.

By creating a special marketing and handling section with full liaison with grower bodies and free enterprise firms, a far more singleminded approach would be obtained when examining new markets and handling methods. This section, with its grower, exporter, and departmental content, would make a strong impact on any trade delegation which, at the moment, is long overdue, especially now with Britain's entry into the E.E.C. being only a matter of course there not being, apparently, a transitional period. The effect of her entry, despite comments to the contrary, could hardly be more serious to the agricultural industries today.

I firmly believe that as politicians we must cross from behind the protection of the political barriers and go out to offer and give leadership. For too long we have sat back saying, "Come to us once you have a majority decision and we will help you," knowing full well that this situation very seldom eventuates.

On my last agricultural point I would like to say that I believe the introduction of a simple annual computerised form outlining the current assets and liabilities—including stock and plant—of all farmers is long overdue. These forms could be completed annually with the tax returns and forwarded to Canberra for record purposes. At little more than a moment's notice an accurate year-by-year assessment of a particular rural industry which was developing or growing towards trouble could be ascertained. This would be immeasurably preferable to the present undignified process of pleading, foot stamping, and shoulder crying, that farmers have to go through before receiving any recognition of their problems.

On forestry matters, there is a pressing need for the Government clearly to define its intention to farmers when purchasing cleared farmland for softwood plantings. At the present moment the less the department co-operates with the remaining farmers in a district, the quicker it will

be able to buy them out, which is wrong. Grants to local authorities affected by the loss of rates should and must eventually be made. It is unjust to ask four or five south-west country shires to subsidise the growth of this important industry which must ultimately be of tremendous value to the State as a whole.

A farm forestry policy should be introduced to encourage farmers to plant pines on suitable soils and sites on their properties. Attention should be given to offering pine-planting grants and immediate action should be taken in the probate and tax fields at present affecting private plantations.

The country businessmen's predicament must also be recognised during the current recession in the country areas. Obviously, as soon as the rural position improves, so will the position of the businessman, but at the moment he has special problems which should not be overlooked.

The mining industry in the south-west is also bringing its share of problems. While the whole community welcomes the benefits associated with new industries, and therefore encourages those industries, anyone travelling on the South-Western Highway between Greenbushes and Bridgetown must agree that a high price in environment has been paid. A sensible middle-of-the-road policy must be adopted.

I am pleased to say that the educational standard in the Blackwood electorate has improved. This, of course, must be our continual goal; that is, to seek a steadily rising plane of educational facilities. Of equal if not of more importance is the need in the country areas for children to obtain vastly increased boarding allowances and increased country hostel accommodation. We must try one day to offer to all students equal opportunities in education.

To summarise briefly, I would say that orderly marketing, coupled with good legislation that can rationalise the production of rural produce, headed by a hard hitting efficient marketing section, offer the best chance for the rural sector today. This would add up to a far lesser cost to the Government than providing new schools, hospitals, roads, and the like, which are at present available in the country, but which would have to be provided in the cities should there be a mass migration from farming areas to those cities.

May I suggest that what we need today is not a deceptive hopefulness that success comes easily, but the will to grapple with staggering difficulties.

It has been a great honour to present this address on behalf of the electors of Blackwood, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and members for your attention.