

Legislative Council.

Thursday, 24th July, 1902.

Question: Agricultural Areas, Victoria District—
Question: Railway Bridge, Perth—Address-in-reply,
fourth day, conclusion—Adjournment.

THE PRESIDENT took the Chair at 4:30 o'clock, p.m.

PRAYERS.

QUESTION—AGRICULTURAL AREAS, VICTORIA DISTRICT.

HON. J. M. DREW asked the Minister for Lands: 1, If any date has been fixed for the hearing of the arbitration cases between the Government and the former occupants of the pastoral leases in the Victoria district resumed as agricultural areas? 2, What has been the cause of past delay in the matter? 3, Who has been appointed to act as arbitrator for the Government?

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS replied: 1, No. 2, Negotiations have been proceeding continuously between the parties, and there has been no unnecessary delay. 3, Mr. Sydney Hosken.

QUESTION—RAILWAY BRIDGE, PERTH.

HON. G. RANDELL asked the Minister for Lands: If he can inform this House when the contemplated bridge over the railway at the William street crossing, Perth, will be commenced.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS replied: Plans are well advanced, and it is hoped that the Government will be in a position to call for tenders in about one month from date.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY.

FOURTH DAY OF DEBATE.

Resumed from the previous day.

HON. R. LAURIE (West): It is not my intention to take up the time of the House at great length. I desire to indorse what all the previous speakers have said in regard to that which is contained in paragraphs 1, 2, and 5. With respect to paragraph 6, I should like to say I am exceedingly pleased to know that Mr. Walter James has become Premier of the State. I feel satisfied

that any action or measure which Mr. James may introduce in connection with the administration of the affairs of the country will be brought forward with honesty of purpose. In regard to paragraphs 8 and 9, I can only say that I exceedingly regret to see that Mr. James, on entering upon the Premiership of the State, has had to approve of the appointment of Mr. William J. George as Commissioner of Railways of Western Australia. I also take exception to the appointment from the fact that, if it was thought any change was necessary, that change ought not to have taken place until Parliament had had an opportunity of passing a measure for the appointment of a board of commissioners. I say this with a deep grasp of the trouble that may be occasioned by the appointment of Mr. George as Commissioner, because it means that in the event of Parliament not passing a measure for the appointment of a board of commissioners, there can only be one position for Mr. George to take up, that of General Manager of Railways for Western Australia. The appointment of Mr. George as Commissioner before a measure is passed providing for a board, means that Mr. George will be chairman of that body if a board of commissioners is decided upon. I had some experience on the board which was appointed to inquire into certain charges in connection with the late manager of the railways, and I am perfectly satisfied, if a Bill be passed providing that Parliament have power to control the rates and to deal with all questions involving the interests of the railway servants of the State, if that is taken away from the Commissioners of Railways and left to Parliament, it can only result in the same chaos which existed previously, and which led to the charges being laid against Mr. John Davies. The charges which were laid against Mr. John Davies could not be fairly or honestly brought against him, because whenever a question of railway management, or a question whether the General Manager ought to be called into question or should be dealt with arose, it was found that the General Manager could not deal with the question, because the Minister was the person who ought to have been charged, and not Mr. John Davies. Again when charges were laid

against Mr. Davies, as Traffic Manager, Mr. Short should have been the officer charged. Consequently the Commission could not give that finality to the proceedings which they would or could have given if the general management of the railways had not been connected with the Commissioner. I say fearlessly, if the Government in the measure they bring forward provide that Parliament shall control the rates, then it is only a farce to appoint three Commissioners, because no man can control any business, if anyone else can step in and say that what he has done is not right. How can the Commissioners who are going to deal with the largest asset of the State control affairs if Parliament can interfere with them? I say this is the largest asset of the State, because six years ago the railway revenue amounted to £653,000, while to the 30th June this year the railway revenue was £1,500,000. I ask the question of any hon. member, or of any commercial man outside the House, is it fair that a 'prentice hand should be put to control any business, and particularly one of such magnitude, to learn that business at the expense of the State? I say emphatically, no. There has been too much of that kind of thing. Let us go a little farther. Mr. George is appointed. I am aware that Mr. George is a good business man, that he is a pushing business man, or a strong business man, as it is termed. [MEMBER: Very strong.] At the same time, I have my own opinion as to Mr. George's tact in the conduct of business. I have had experience of Mr. George's conduct of business. Hon. members know that it is the tactful man, as a rule, who gets along best in business; not the blustering man. When a person comes into his office with a grievance, the business man makes that person leave feeling that he, the business man himself, is the one aggrieved. The man who tries to bluster and bluff is not, as a rule, successful. We are all Britishers; and when a man begins to bluster, we respond; and business consequently does not result. I have not a word to say against Mr. George; but I do maintain if the Government wanted a railway manager, they should have got a railway manager. If they wanted a pushing business man as Commissioner to assist the manager,

then Mr. George might have come in. But the Government should have appointed even such a Commissioner only after Parliament had consented to the appointment. As a member of the John Davies Inquiry Board, I can assure the House the main difficulty we had to contend with lay in the circumstance that we could not separate the General Manager from the Commissioner. And here I may point out that the Commissioner at any time may be the Commissioner of a month. His case may be like that of my friend Mr. Moss, who was Colonial Secretary for a month.

HON. M. L. MOSS: Oh, don't rub it in!

HON. R. LAURIE: I am not rubbing it in. That is the position. The proposal is that the biggest asset of the State shall henceforth be handled in a manner different from that which has obtained so far. But I do not see how any Commissioner or Board of Commissioners can be held responsible for the management of the railways, if such matters as the fixing of the rates and the organisation of the men are to remain with Parliament. As to the organisation of the men, all of us who have had to handle labour, and large bodies of labour, year in and year out, know that the working man has the greatest respect for the employer who can tell him what he ought to do. Mr. George now holds the position of Commissioner of Railways, and he will have to make the railways pay. Therefore, in the first place he will have to fix rates. I am told by some of my friends, in this connection, that Mr. George will have under him officers who will assist him; but we know that when a man is newly appointed to the management of a business, the officers under him in that business do not necessarily entertain a feeling of personal loyalty to him. They think for themselves that they are paid only for doing certain parts of the work, and they regard themselves as only a part of the machine. Consequently, the new manager has to learn the business practically unassisted. To turn now to a financial aspect of the appointment, we all know that in no part of the world, and particularly not in America or England, would £1,000 be stinted to procure a good man for the management of a big business. To manage an undertaking which handles a

revenue of £1,500,000 annually, the best man obtainable ought to have been got—the best man, not a 'prentice hand, not a man who would find himself called on to control something he had not controlled before. With all due respect to Mr. George, I maintain that while he may have managed the Rockingham railway, and while he may have superintended the construction of the Portland-Warrnambool and other Victorian lines, his duties amounted only to the charge of certain gangs of men. In his present position, however, he is called on to control rates and make the railways pay. Moreover, the railway management is now faced with the question of an eight-hours day. At the same time, I say, however—and I say it advisedly—that while the water supply to the railway costs £90,000 last year, in this ensuing year, with the advent of the Coolgardie Water Scheme, it will not cost £10,000. The facilitation of water supply means also that the trucks which we have seen going backwards and forwards along the Eastern Goldfields line, carrying tanks, will be released; the engines hauling those trucks will likewise be released; and there is not the slightest doubt that now the question is simply one of working the railways in such a manner as to make them pay. The traffic is increasing; yet I have no hesitation in saying that to-day and yesterday there were hundreds of trucks lying idle at Fremantle. When the railway sheds asked for by the Fremantle people, who knew something of the subject, were at last built—after we had patiently waited four or five years for them—the opening of those sheds released at least 500 trucks for traffic on the railways. Had the sheds been built when the people who had a knowledge of the matter asked for them, those 500 trucks would have been available for traffic years ago.

HON. M. L. MOSS: The department built the sheds, but kept them shut up.

HON. A. LAURIE: I shall deal with that matter presently. I now turn to the question of organising the men. To my mind, if the railways of Western Australia ever wanted an organiser, it is at the present time. We all know that the railway employees from one end of the service to the other say they do not know where they stand, they do not know how

they are. There is not among the railway servants that *esprit de corps* which ought to exist. The men simply get their eight hours in. I do not deny, of course, that there are plenty of good men in our railway service; but there is no organisation. No railway servant knows where he will be to-day or to-morrow: at any moment he may find a man jumping over his head, without his knowing the reason why. There is no grading, no organisation, and consequently there is no desire on the part of the men to do well to-day because they may hope to be advanced to-morrow. Moreover, if a railway servant tells the truth about an accident in the service, he is liable to be fined two days' or perhaps a week's pay, or even to be discharged. I have personal knowledge of cases where accidents happened at Fremantle, resulting possibly in a few pounds' loss to the department: something may have fallen off a truck, or over the side. Accidents in which my own business was concerned have occurred, and I have made a claim for the amount of the loss, since, if I did not recover it from the Railway Department, I should have had to pay it out of my own pocket. When in such cases a railway employee was honest enough to admit that an accident did occur, the man has been fined a week's pay; indeed, a man was dismissed altogether, in one instance. What can the public expect when such a state of affairs exists? I have said repeatedly, I say now, and I shall say repeatedly, that when a servant is honest enough to own up to an accident, he is not to be blamed, and certainly not to be discharged, but rather is to be commended for his honesty. We know that accidents will happen, and, as business men, we allow a certain percentage for losses caused by accidents. Viewing the circumstances of the Railway Department at the present time, I maintain that the man needed to control the department is one who has risen from the ranks and has had a thoroughly good training in all branches of railway service. However, an appointment has been made, and I can only trust and believe that Mr. George—there is no doubt he will hear what has been said by members of both Houses regarding his appointment—will use every endeavour to fill the office to which he has been appointed.

I do not propose to touch on every paragraph of His Excellency's Speech; but I must deal with one paragraph which, while it affects Fremantle in particular, treats of a matter of national importance. I refer to paragraph 13:—

The Fremantle Harbour Works are now advanced to such a stage that the business management of the completed portions should be placed in the hands of a harbour board, and a Bill will be introduced with that object. Similar arrangements are contemplated as early as practicable for Albany, Geraldton, and Bunbury.

Many members of this House probably do not know what are the functions of a harbour board. When I went to school—a good many years ago—on the River Clyde, whence I come, one could almost walk across the top of that river. To-day, under the management of a trust, the largest ships afloat can pass up and down that river. It is managed by a trust from its upper reaches right down to Greenock. The river has been made navigable for all classes of vessels, and every kind of accommodation is provided. I should explain that accommodation is provided not only for shipping, but also for the public, who can travel backwards and forwards in penny steamers owned by the harbour trust and plying from the upper to the lower reaches. Perhaps I may be pardoned if I take up a little of the time of the House in describing the functions of a harbour board, as distinct from a marine board. If a board is to be appointed to take charge of the Fremantle Harbour, hon. members will not I trust, believe the Fremantle community to be sufficiently parochial to demand that the board should consist only of Fremantle merchants or Fremantle residents. The Fremantle Harbour is a national work. Perhaps hon. members will allow me to point out what exactly I mean by a national work. The Fremantle Harbour has, no doubt, been constructed by the State of Western Australia for the purpose of bringing the mail steamers to Fremantle. It has been built in order to make of Fremantle the Brindisi of Australia. I trust the harbour board to be created will be a nominee board; that is to say, that its members will be nominated by the Government; and I hope at least two members of the board will be men possessing a thorough knowledge of what the functions of a

harbour board are. The other members might be nominated at the instance of the Government, or at the invitation of the Government, by Perth and Fremantle; and those members should be good business men. When the harbour board is formed, its duties and functions will be to provide a good harbour, an up-to-date harbour, such a harbour as will be in the nature of an inducement to owners all over the world to send their ships here. The aim of the board should be to accommodate ships at the least possible cost to the owner, and, farther, to deliver goods to the consignee at the lowest possible cost. I may point out that the functions of the board will not be to provide Fremantle with a revenue for the purpose of building up its harbour. While the board must raise revenue sufficient to cover the cost of working the harbour, interest on capital, and sinking fund, its functions will also be to see that the ports of Bunbury, and Geraldton, the North-Western ports, and also the Southern port of Albany—

HON. C. E. DEMPSTER: And Esperance.

HON. R. LAURIE: And Esperance, if you like—to see that all those ports are placed on exactly the same footing as Fremantle with respect to the cost of wharfage. That is to say, seeing that a mail steamer cannot call at Bunbury or Geraldton, the harbour board should see that the Bunbury or Geraldton merchant who receives his goods at the port of Fremantle pays only the same wharfage as if the vessel had gone to Bunbury or Geraldton. It comes to this: one of the functions of the harbour board will be to see that justice is meted out to everyone. Bringing ships to Fremantle Harbour and giving the merchant his goods at the same wharfage rate will place the merchant at Bunbury on a par with the merchant at Fremantle, and so on. That will be one of the functions of the harbour board. If you have a properly constituted body who know how to manage a harbour, they will bring about another improvement. Ships coming to Fremantle will then remain there four or five days, and in that time with the facilities provided a vessel will discharge from three thousand to four thousand or five thousand tons of cargo. At the present time, owing to the dual control and the anti-

quoted manner in which cargo is handled, to discharge that amount of cargo from a ship will take three or four weeks. Under present conditions merchants are paying 32s. 6d. or 35s. a ton, and in some cases 45s. and 60s. a ton, for goods landed at Fremantle, as against 15s. to 30s. a ton paid for goods landed in the Eastern States. When a ship comes to Fremantle it has to lie so long in port that the ship-owner puts up the rates. The expenses of a large ship are from £80 to £100 a day, therefore the owner has to guard the interests of the vessel when he comes to Fremantle. With the facilities offered by a properly constituted board at Fremantle, merchants will receive their cargoes at the same rates that merchants in Melbourne or in Sydney receive their goods. Merchants will tell you that, owing to the high freights from Europe, they can obtain their heavy lines of goods from Sydney at a less rate than if goods are landed here direct. That has in a measure been knocked upon the head lately because inter-State freights are higher now, for these are the days of combines and understandings. But merchants in the past have found that heavy lines of goods can be sent to Sydney from Europe and be brought on here by the coastal vessels cheaper than if the goods were obtained from London direct to Fremantle. We have been building up a harbour, and ever since the harbour started there has been no fixed plan. We have been building wharves, and the Engineer-in-Chief had his ideas how the wharves should be worked. His ideas were up-to-date as to the fixing of electric cranes, or hydraulic cranes, and the laying of the rails. But the Government saw fit—and I agree with the Government of the day, they were quite right—to save the expenditure of £70,000 or £80,000. The rails were laid, but they have been covered over to allow the wharves to be used in a different manner from that proposed at first, and sheds have now been built there. If a board had been appointed previous to the building of the present sheds, we should not have seen the buildings erected in the manner they have been: there would have been a saving to the Government of half the cost of the present sheds. Not only that, but the facilities for working would have been much better. Indeed I

can tell the House that when a cargo leaves a ship's side it has to go to a shed which is 166 feet away, to deliver into the cars. There is no place in Australia where the distance is half so great. To take the goods 166 feet means double labour and double cost; and the merchant here is made to pay more for his goods than he ought to pay at the present time. I have no hesitation in saying that the three sheds erected at Fremantle are giving the Government a revenue of £500 a month. The wharfage charge is 3s. 6d. a ton; the Government provide the shed, and the whole of the work is done at the expense of the merchant, who has to pay 1s. 3d. for the handling of the cargo, being the 2s. 3d. paid into the revenue of the State for the use of the shed so that the ship may lay alongside. I have no hesitation in saying that when the harbour is handed over to a board, that body, if it is the board I think it ought to be, will shape out the wharves that are required and the sheds that are required, and will reduce the cost to the merchant by a very considerable amount indeed, in rates and charges. I am satisfied that I shall be found to be correct in saying that in twelve months from the formation of a harbour trust in Fremantle, goods will be delivered at that port at 10s. a ton less than they are landed there at the present time. The question has been debated as to whether the sliding scale should be abolished, and I wish to touch on that subject very lightly. I can scarcely see how members of the Legislature in this State could ask that the sliding scale should be abolished at the present time. I may take a different view from most members, but not two years ago we were in the throes of a federal election, and it was a question whether this State should join the Commonwealth or not. Part of the agreement made in connection with joining was that there should be a sliding scale. At the present time the House of Representatives and the Senate are clutching one another by the throat as to what the tariff should be. I ask members, if the sliding scale is abolished, is it fair, having got the people of this State to join the Commonwealth, that one of the conditions should be ruthlessly thrown on one side. I say it is not fair or honest.

Let us at least be honest; let us see what the duties imposed will be before we consider whether we should do away with the sliding scale. If we can see our way to abolish it, by all means let us do so. I shall hail with delight the abolition of the sliding scale, but not before we see if we can do without the revenue. Before the tariff is fixed up by the Commonwealth it is distinctly unfair to ask that we should break the agreement made when we entered federation.

HON. R. G. BURGESS: Long before that it was agreed.

HON. R. LAURIE: It may have been long before that, but I only mention the time when we entered the federation. I pass on to a question that materially affects this State, the redistribution of seats; and I ask members if they feel satisfied that the Government are earnest in their desire for reform, and will bring a measure before the House such as that indicated by Mr. James in his speech in the Town Hall. I shall not vote for such a measure, and I say it emphatically. It is a matter of indifference to me whether I am here or not—my time could be spent better in my own business than here—but I will say that I shall not vote for a measure such as that indicated by Mr. James. I am prepared to show my desire for reform, and if the Ministry wish reform, then I am willing to agree to a reduction of the membership of this House if it is proportionate with the reduction made in another place. That will show whether the Government are earnest in their desire for reform. Let the Government reduce the number of members in the other House to 36, and let them reduce the number of members of the Ministry to four. If they do that it will show they are earnest in their desire to save money; but to reduce the membership of this House by ten and that of the other House by four is not the way to save money. It will be a paltry sum, as pointed out by Mr. Moss. The aim of the Leake Government was administration, and I take it that this State at the present time does not want legislation: what it wants is administration. If the members of the Ministry will pay more attention to the administration of affairs, if they will pay more attention to see that the promises they have made are carried out, there will be thousands

of pounds saved and no necessity for the so-called reform. If the Premier of this State brings forward a measure showing that he is honest in his intention for reform, on the terms which I have pointed out, then I will vote for it. There is a wave passing through the Eastern States in favour of reform. I have no hesitation in saying that reform is required in South Australia. The legislation passed in that State for many years has retarded the country to such an extent that at the present time they are looking round to see how they can get revenue, and what form of taxation they can impose. We are not in that condition. Our population is growing by leaps and bounds, and our revenue is increasing. What we want now is administration, not legislation. If the Premier is honest and if the Ministry are honest in their desire for reform, let a measure be introduced for a reduction of members in the lower House to 36 and in this House to 21. If the Government will do that, I shall vote for the Bill, and we shall see that the Ministry are earnest in their desire. If they do not, I shall vote dead against the reduction to 44 and to 21. I boldly state that, for it is only fair that the people who send us here should know what we intend to do, and we should give reasons for the manner in which we vote. It has been mentioned by Sir Edward Wittenoom and by Mr. Drew that we should subsidise steamers on the coast to carry cattle from the North-West. I am dead against subsidies of that class. Where there is business to be done there is enterprise to meet it, and I go farther. In paragraph 19 of the Speech it is stated that provision will be made for a dock at Fremantle. Build that dock, and you subsidise every steamship in Western Australia to the extent of £1,500 per annum. I will show how that will be brought about. At the present time there are about five steamers engaged in carrying cattle in the North-West trade. I will instance one steamer, the Tangier, belonging to Connor, Doherty, and Co. All ships have to undergo a yearly examination or they are not allowed to trade. That is necessary for the safety of life and of the ship. That being the case, any vessel employed on the North-West coast, or the South-West coast, has to proceed to the Eastern States for an

annual overhaul. To take a ship to the Eastern States and bring it back again cannot be done under a cost of £1,000. That is a clear subsidy of £1,000 to the shipowner trading on the North-West coast, if we provide a dock for his vessels at Fremantle. Farther, a ship has to run for 12 months before she will incur that expense of £1,000. It is known to every shipping man, and no doubt to hon. members generally, that after a ship has been in the water for three months its bottom becomes foul, and that as a result of that fouling the ship, instead of using 10 tons of coal per day, will use first 12 and eventually as much as 15 tons. Consequently, if we provide the means of docking there will be a saving of at least £500 or £600 per annum to be made by docking a ship every six months instead of every 12 months; and the more frequent docking will effect an annual saving of £500 or £600 in the coal bill. There is no doubt of it. I may tell hon. members that when, about 10 years ago, I was sent to this State to manage the affairs of a certain company which had four or five steamers running on the North-West coast, I felt myself called on to consider closely whether instead of sending the ships for docking purposes to one of the Eastern States I should not send them to Singapore. Hon. members will readily see that the sending of a steamer to Singapore meant a dead loss, because there would be freight neither to nor from that port. There was the farther consideration that if sent to Singapore, the ship would be far away from where those most interested could supervise the repairs. Therefore the construction of a dock at Fremantle is equivalent to an immediate and direct subsidy to the shipowner. I think I have made it perfectly clear that the shipowner will derive great practical benefit from a dock. Mr. Doherty, of Messrs. Connor and Doherty, assured the members of the Chamber of Commerce yesterday that such were the absolute facts. I believe I have succeeded in convincing the Chambers of Commerce that the reason I have stated in itself affords good ground for the construction of a dock. Now let me point out the advantages of such a dock to the State as a whole. The possession of the dock by

Fremantle would mean that the port would be on the highway from the Eastern States to India, to England, and indeed one may say to all parts of the world, and that it would also be on the highway from all parts of the world to the Eastern States.

HON. M. L. MOSS: We have heard that expression about the highway, before.

HON. R. LAURIE: Yes; probably. The hon. member, however, is not as large as some of the highway-men I have seen. The expression has, no doubt, been used; but still I may say the geographical position of Fremantle places it on the world's highway. At the present moment there are at Fremantle two ships which, if docking accommodation were available, would be placed in dock, and the probability is that each of those ships would leave an amount of £1,500 or £2,000 in Fremantle. A couple of months ago, there arrived at Fremantle two ships with broken shafts; one ship had lost its propeller, and in the case of the other, the propeller was falling off when the boat arrived at the port. Had docking accommodation been available, both those vessels would have been docked here, and, as a result, from £1,000 to £2,000 would have been circulated in Fremantle by each ship. Those amounts would have been spent with the local tradesmen, such as engineers, boiler makers, and others. I contend that undoubtedly a dock at Fremantle will pay. Probably Ministers feel some degree of uncertainty as to whether the time has arrived when the prospective returns will justify the building of a dock. My conviction is that if it is proposed to construct a suitable dock at Fremantle, the British Government will subsidise the work. The British Government are certain to subsidise a dock at such an important point as Fremantle. There is no dock capable of taking a warship of the size prevailing, between Singapore, Sydney, and the Cape of Good Hope. The State of Victoria is now expending a sum of £260,000 in the enlargement of its Alfred Dock. In Sydney private enterprise is building a dock capable of taking in a ship 800 feet long.

HON. R. G. BURGESS: Why did not private enterprise build it at Fremantle?

HON. R. LAURIE: The hon. member asks why private capitalists did not build a dock at Fremantle. In reply, I may point out to the hon. member that Fremantle has not yet arrived at Sydney's stage of development. The State of Western Australia, if one may be permitted to say so—and it is, in a broad sense, absolutely correct—is not yet 15 years old. In less than 15 years the population of Western Australia has increased from about 36,000 or 40,000 to over 200,000. Sydney, on the other hand, is pre-eminently the largest shipping port of Australia, and has behind it an immense country which has been largely developed. The State of New South Wales is singularly fortunate in possessing a harbour like that of Sydney. One of the results of its good fortune is that private enterprise has been able, within the last 40 or 50 years, to build not only one, but three docks, at Sydney. At the same time, I have to remind hon. members that the largest dock Sydney possesses is the Government dock situated on Cockatoo Island. That is at present the only dock in Australia capable of taking in a warship, and it is controlled by the State. From what I have said it follows that Western Australia is in exactly the same position as New South Wales. We are now about to get a State dock, and no doubt in due time we shall have smaller docks and slips owned by private persons. I trust that when the time does come, we shall have business for these private docks and slips. Meanwhile, I think it is the duty of the State to build a dock such as I have described. When that dock is built, I am perfectly satisfied sufficient business will be brought to the port, by reason of the presence of the dock, to return interest on the capital cost. Even, however, if the dock does not pay directly, the money left behind by the ships repaired at the dock will be quite sufficient recompense to the country; that is, regarding the matter from a broad, national standpoint.

HON. R. G. BURGESS: What is to be the cost?

HON. R. LAURIE: The question of cost is entirely one—

HON. M. L. MOSS: Don't give your estimate now: you may be paid for giving it later on.

HON. R. LAURIE: At the present moment we do not know to what extent the Imperial Government will be prepared to subsidise a dock. It will be entirely a matter for the Ministry to say what description of dock is to be built. I would, however, urge on the Government and the public that the dock to be built should be large enough to take in not only the largest vessels coming to Fremantle, but also any of the cruisers which may visit the port. I urge, farther, that before the dock is built, before even plans are drawn up, the Imperial Government should be approached and asked to what extent they will be prepared to subsidise a dock such as will answer their requirements. Then, when the amount of the subsidy is known and the probable revenue from the dock, outside those sources of revenue which private people will enjoy, has been computed, I have not the slightest doubt it will be recognised that from its very inception the dock will pay interest and working expenses, and provide a sinking fund as well.

HON. W. MALEY: Albany is the only place suitable for a dock.

HON. R. LAURIE: I have not the slightest doubt that Albany is suitable for a dock; but, still, one cannot alter the geographical position of a country. One cannot shift the trade of Western Australia down to Albany.

HON. W. MALEY: It all passes Albany.

HON. R. LAURIE: No doubt. But, unfortunately for Albany, the population of Western Australia is at this end of the country.

HON. M. L. MOSS: The trade passes Eucla, too.

HON. R. LAURIE: I did not intend to dwell longer on the motion now before the House, but Mr. Brinage has invited me to give some information about marine boards. I was one of five gentlemen—I wish to call the attention of the Minister to this fact—who were asked to sit in Fremantle as members of a Royal Commission appointed by Sir John Forrest to inquire into the working of marine boards, with a view to consolidation of the Shipping Acts of Western Australia. The functions of a marine board, I may mention, are in regard to sea matters pretty much what the functions of the Board of Trade are in England: the two

cases are practically on all-fours. The members of the commission held some 20 sittings. We had before us the whole of the Marine Board Acts of the various States ; we had all our experience to guide us ; and as the result of our work we had a report drawn up and all but ready for presentation. Then the chairman of the commission was advised—I believe by the then Government—simply to hold no farther meetings. The result was that the labour of those five commissioners was absolutely wasted. We had a measure almost ready for the Government draftsman, and I venture to say that the advice we were prepared to tender to the Government would have resulted in such a Shipping Act as would have been a pattern for the other States to imitate, since we had selected from the Acts of those other States their best features. We had profited by the good experience of one State, and by the troublous experience of another. However, after some 20 sittings devoted to the subject by business men well up in shipping matters, a request was made that the whole matter should drop. I consider it a disgrace to Western Australia that there should be no marine board, and another disgrace to this State that its shipping laws should be in their present condition. A shipmaster who has trouble with his vessel in Western Australia is brought up before a preliminary court, at which charges are made ; then the functionary who presided in the preliminary court and framed the charges there—

HON. M. L. MOSS : And who prosecuted.

HON. R. LAURIE : And who prosecuted, afterwards sits in judgment on the captain. Such a state of things is absolutely wrong. A man who frames charges against a captain after a hearing in the preliminary court, and then prosecutes the captain, is bound to find the captain guilty. There is no getting away from that.

HON. M. L. MOSS : The "City of York" case was quite enough.

HON. R. LAURIE : I have referred to no ship in particular ; but I maintain that gross injustice is frequently done to professional men. The master of a steamer or a sailing vessel should not be

placed in such a position. He has spent four years' time at sea, and has probably also spent years in a training ship before going to sea, and he has gradually worked his way up the ladder, with the result that when he comes to Western Australia he is brought before a board which, knowing absolutely nothing about shipping matters, cancels his certificate, or takes it away from him for, say, six months. Really, it would be far better for the captain to be sentenced to six months' imprisonment ; because depriving him of his certificate means taking away his bread-and-butter. It is a disgrace that we have no marine board. One of the reasons adduced for not proceeding with the labours of the Royal Commission, I afterwards heard, was that the Federal Government would take the matter up. I consider Western Australia to be in a better position than the Federal Government to manage its own harbours, lighthouses, and buoys ; at any rate, Western Australia should have some representation in the matter when these things are under the control of the Federal Government. But West Australia, instead of being given representation, will have none ; since the Federal Government will send over men from the other side to do that which our own citizens are capable of doing. I shall not take up the time of the House longer. I trust that during the session now before us every measure reaching this Chamber from another place will have its due meed of attention, and be dealt with in a just and honourable manner.

HON. W. T. LOTON (East) : After being away from the arena of political life for some time, one is apt to get a little bit rusty on political subjects. Members will, no doubt, be glad to hear that it is not my intention to address them at length on this occasion. I think we are agreed on several of the first paragraphs of the Speech : they contain matters not of a debatable character. I think I may say also that the whole of the members of the House will agree with the sentiments expressed therein. We could have all wished, I am sure, that the intelligence conveyed in the first portion of the Speech had been of a more encouraging character. Still, we have to take life as we find it, and the wisest course is to