

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 22nd September, 1948.

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The SPEAKER took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.

QUESTIONS.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL FRANCHISE.

As to Introduction of Legislation.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE asked the Premier:

(1) In view of the attitude of a section of the members of the Legislative Council, as demonstrated more particularly in connection with the Bill to control the sale of land, is he in a position to indicate whether the Government is certain to introduce a Bill this session to liberalise the franchise for the Legislative Council?

(2) If so, when is the Bill likely to be introduced?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied:

(1) Yes, but the decision was made prior to, and so had no relation to the circumstances mentioned.

(2) The introduction of the Bill will take its place in the Government's legislative programme for the session.

SERVICEMEN'S LAND SETTLEMENT.

(a) As to Administration of Scheme.

Hon. E. NULSEN asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) Is he aware that a goodly number of ex-Servicemen consider that the War Service Land Settlement Scheme is designed mainly for farmers' sons?

(2) Is there any truth in this allegation?

(3) Will he enlighten ex-Servicemen in regard to the above questions?

(4) Is he cognisant that interviews cost anything up to £30?

(5) Does he know that there is tremendous dissatisfaction with the administration and with the scheme generally?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) No.

(2) No.

(3) Answered by Nos. 1 and 2.

(4) Applicants are not asked to attend interviews for allotment of properties, unless they are being definitely considered for allotment of a property. Return railway fare is paid. All business can be transacted in one day.

(5) No.

(b) As to Properties Offered, Acquired, etc.

Mr. BRAND asked the Minister for Lands:

(1) (a) What number of properties in the area between Three Springs and Dongara have been actually purchased by the Soldier Land Settlement Board since its inception? (b) What are the names of these properties?

(2) What are names of properties in the above district which have been offered for sale, but turned down by the Soldier Land Settlement Board as unsuitable?

(3) (a) What number of properties of over 3,500 acres in size, have been sold privately during the last three months?

(b) If any, what are the names of such properties?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) (a) Four. (b) "Yanda," including gift property, Mingenew. E. Broad & Sons, Mingenew. Yarragadee, Nalbarra Pastoral Co., Mingenew. D. A. Grant, Yandanooka.

(2) Fairfield Estate (A.M.P.), Three Springs. Eastern portion of Yarragadee, Nalbarra Pastoral Company, Mingenew. R. D. Knight, Mingenew, Mingenew. N. Sagers, Mingenew.

(3) (a) Information not available. (b) Information not available.

HOUSING.

(a) *As to Use of Concrete Bricks.*

Mr. GRAYDEN asked the Minister for Housing:

(1) Is he aware that the concrete bricks demonstrated some time ago at Parliament House and known as the Tiecrete concrete brick have for some months been produced extensively at Guildford?

(2) Is he aware that those who have had homes constructed of these bricks speak very highly of them?

(3) Is he aware that the cost of these bricks in the walls has proved cheaper than the ordinary brick?

(4) In view of the low cost of these bricks, and the fact that they do not require experienced bricklayers to lay them, will he have a further inspection made of these bricks with a view to having Commonwealth rental homes constructed of them?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) No.

(3) No.

(4) Yes.

(b) *As to Appointing Full-time Chairman of Commission.*

Mr. NEEDHAM asked the Minister for Housing:

(1) Is it the intention of the Government to implement the recommendation of the Royal Commission on the State Housing Commission by the appointment of a full-time chairman of the State Housing Commission?

(2) If so, will the appointment be made at an early date?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) The Royal Commissioner recommended the re-organisation of chief executive position and appointment to that position of one with wide administrative experience as an alternative to the appointment of a full-time chairman. No appointment of a full-time chairman is in immediate contemplation, but means of strengthening the executive and administrative aspects of the Commission's work are being considered.

(2) Answered by No. (1).

EDUCATION.

As to Handicraft Competitions at Country Shows.

Mr. GRAYDEN asked the Minister for Education:

(1) Is he aware that for many years Government school children have taken part in writing, drawing, needlework and other contests on a competitive basis at country shows?

(2) Is he aware that in many Government schools children at the present time are permitted only to display their work and not to take part on a competitive basis at these shows?

(3) Is the development outlined in question No. (2) a direction from the Education Department, or from some other source?

(4) Will he make it clear whether children from Government schools are permitted to take part in these contests?

The MINISTER replied—

(1) Yes.

(2) The department has issued no instructions to teachers to prevent them from putting competitive work in agricultural shows. However, of recent years the competitive element has been eliminated from the Royal Agricultural Show, Claremont, and in most country shows.

(3) Answered by No. (2).

(4) Answered by No. (2).

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.*As to Prescribing Alternative Days.*

Mr. GRAYDEN asked the Minister for Labour:

(1) In view of the fact that Christmas Day and Boxing Day holidays this year fall on a Saturday and Sunday, and that these two days are prescribed holidays in many awards, has the Government given consideration to prescribing two other holidays in their place in order to ensure that they will not be lost to working men and women?

(2) If the answer to question No. (1) is "No," will the Government give early consideration to the matter, as it is desirable that the holidays be known well in advance?

The MINISTER replied:

(1) and (2) The matter is receiving consideration and the Government will make an announcement in due course.

STATE SHIPPING SERVICE.*As to Schedule of "Dulverton."*

Mr. RODOREDA asked the Minister for the North-West:

(1) When is the State ship "Dulverton" expected to arrive at Fremantle?

(2) What is the cause of this ship taking such an exceptionally long time to complete her first trip?

(3) Is it anticipated that after arrival at Fremantle the "Dulverton" will be able to maintain a regular schedule?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied:

(1) The 25th September.

(2) "Dulverton" was delayed on northwards journey owing to breakdown of main engines, necessitating repairs while anchored off Derby, and further extensive repairs at Darwin.

(3) Yes, after the vessel has been inspected and essential adjustments and repairs have been carried out at Fremantle.

GOVERNOR OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.*As to Allowances, Status, etc.*

Mr. GRAHAM asked the Premier:

What difference, if any, is there in salary, allowances, status, powers, or otherwise, on

account of the appointment of a Lieut.-Governor to the position of Governor of the State?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION replied:

The Constitution Act provides for the payment of £4,000 per annum for the office of Governor.

The Letters Patent constituting the office of Governor provide that in the event of the office of Governor becoming vacant, or of the Governor being incapable, or of his departure from the State, the Lieut.-Governor shall exercise the powers of the office of Governor.

Regulations provide that the Lieut.-Governor, while administering the office of Governor during the absence or incapacity of the Governor, or during the vacancy of the office, shall receive one-half the salary of the Governor, plus an allowance at the rate of £300 per annum, from the 15th October, 1947, when a corresponding increase was made to certain other statutory salaries.

BILLS (4)—THIRD READING.

- 1, New Tractors, Motor Vehicles and Fencing Materials Control.
 - 2, Hospitals Act Amendment.
 - 3, State Housing Act Amendment.
 - 4, Northampton Lands Resumption.
- Transmitted to the Council.

MOTION—FISHING INDUSTRY.*To Inquire by Select Committee.*

MR. LESLIE (Mt. Marshall) [4.39]: I move—

That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the condition of the fishing industry in Western Australia and means whereby greater supplies of local fish at reasonable prices can be made available to the consumer.

In case there might be a suggestion or idea that, because I happen to represent a rural constituency and this motion deals with an industry which is operated along the coast-line, I might be somewhat presumptuous in bringing the motion forward, I desire to say that any question of national or State-wide importance is the concern of any member, regardless of the constituency he represents and that it is his prerogative to act

accordingly. However, I also bring the motion forward in the interests of my constituents, that is, from the consumer angle. A third reason for my bringing the motion forward is that I have been directly requested to do so by the Rehabilitation Committee of the R.S.L., whose request was endorsed by the State Executive of that body.

Hon. J. B. Sleeman: If the Minister had done something in the matter, there would be no reason for the motion.

Mr. LESLIE: The request was made as a direct result of a communication received from one of the district committees of the R.S.L. It reads—

This Committee is of the opinion that a large number of ex-Servicemen who invested in valuable boats and equipment with Government assistance are likely to find themselves going down hill if they are unable to dispose of their catches within a reasonable time. The appearance on the market of much lower priced imported frozen fillets is said to be chiefly responsible for the recent slump in sales of local fish and a big accumulation of supplies in cold storage. This is ample proof that there is a big demand for fish at a reasonable price, and the more imported fish that appears on the market the lower will become the turnover of local fishermen, possibly with disastrous results for some of our ex-Servicemen who still owe large sums on their boats.

I propose to deal later with the ex-Servicemen who are engaged in this industry and who have been assisted to establish themselves therein. At this stage I am concerned with a suggestion that the importation of fish is a danger to the stability of our fishing industry. I therefore intend to deal with two points: (1) the stability of a primary producing industry; (2) making the product of that industry available to consumers in adequate quantities and at a reasonable price. This question has been before Parliament on several occasions. I have examined the records, and find that as early as 1898 the first suggestion was made that there should be an inquiry into the industry.

In that year Mr. Lindsay Thompson was appointed a commissioner to inquire into and report upon the fisheries in the estuaries and sea coast of the South and South-west portions of the Colony. Mr. Thompson carried out his investigations by making a personal inspection of many of the estuaries and rivers and part of the coastline of the State. He made a comprehen-

sive report to the Government of the time. That report dealt largely—as did subsequent reports of other inquiries—with the conservation of fish, or the protection of the fishing industry, with a view to ensuring that no method should be adopted in the catching of fish which would eventually denude our waters of fish; but all the reports dealt with the question of distribution and marketing. In his report Mr. Thompson made reference to fish markets, and said—

A central market must be a principal factor in connection with any scheme for the regulation of the fisheries, and for several reasons, the foremost being the safeguard it offers to the public health in securing the effective inspection of fish by qualified officers before it passes into distribution for consumption.

From an economic standpoint also, and viewed in the interests of catcher and consumer alike, a central station where sellers and buyers can meet, where the question of demand and supply can be gauged, and where fish can be assorted according to quality, and over-supply stored in cool chambers, where a check can be maintained upon the display of immature fish, and where also transactions can, to an extent, be controlled, or at least regulated by official authority, suggests advantages the value of which cannot well be over estimated.

Little action was taken following on that report. Legislation was placed on the statute book, adopting some of Mr. Thompson's recommendations, but these dealt entirely with the protection and preservation of the fish in our waters. No action was taken in regard to marketing. It must be evident to members that the problem of making fish available to consumers at reasonable prices and in reasonable quantities was, even at that early stage in the Colony's development, a real and serious one. I now come to the year 1906, when a Joint Select Committee was appointed by Parliament to inquire into the condition of the fishing industry with a view to determining (1) the circumstances that prevent the supply of fish to the public at a reasonable price and (2) the causes which debar persons of British origin from engaging in that industry. I do not propose to deal with the latter question; but reference to my motion will show that the problems that existed then in relation to this industry are facing us today. In the report of the 1906 committee, it was stated—

It is hard to state specifically all the causes which contribute to make fish dear to the public; but, amongst others, the evidence tendered to your committee indicates as one—the

system of private buying of fish, together with the arrangement by which boats are engaged for a season by a firm or individual. It is possible for one or two such firms to buy up any surplus when a large catch is made, with a view to keeping up prices. There is no evidence of the existence of a ring in the fish trade—if "ring" be taken to mean an organised body of dealers working under a specific agreement; but the same effect, so far as the public are concerned, is reached because of the very slight competition amongst the large traders, owing to their limited number. It appears, too, that the Italian and Greek fishermen undoubtedly give a preference to their compatriots. Some of the fishermen cannot, it is stated, speak English, and their transactions are necessarily arranged in their own tongue. The boycott has occasionally been applied in the case of British fishermen. The scarcity or plentifulness of fish does not at present materially affect the price to the consumer.

But an attempt was made, just prior to the issue of this committee's report, to remedy the position when, in 1905, a fisheries law was placed on the statute-book. That, again, only dealt with the protection of fish in the waters, and nothing was done to overcome the great difficulties of marketing and distribution. The law provided that fishermen and their boats were to be licensed, that they were to operate only in certain waters, that only certain sizes of fish could be caught, and that all catches should be landed at certain places. No action was taken with regard to distribution and control. Subsequently, however, a central marketing spot was established—the fish markets at Fremantle—and part at least of the recommendations of these committees was adopted. In more recent times—in 1922—a Select Committee of the Legislative Council was appointed to inquire into the fishing industry, and the operations of the Fremantle fish market. That market was evidently set up as a result of the recommendations that had been made, that there should be a central marketing place.

From information I have been able to gather, it appears that at the outset the market operated quite successfully, inasmuch as all the fish brought in was offered there by public auction. But, somehow, the control of the market seemed to pass from the hands of the Government. The revenue from the fish market to the Government was, at one time, substantial, but it dwindled to such an extent that the Government seemed to want to rid itself of a liability, and the market passed to the

Fremantle Council. As far as I am aware, the latter has paid the electric light bill and, perhaps, been responsible for some repairs and maintenance work, but I do not actually know that it has done even that much. The fish market appears to be nobody's baby. In spite of the fact that this problem has existed all these years, we have made no progress. The commission in 1922, dealing with the fishing industry, and particularly the operations of the fish market, made this report on the question of supply and demand—

Regularity of supply to the public is an essential of success. Without it the demand cannot be expected to grow as it should. It is recognised that the quantities of fish brought to market under existing conditions do not permit of certainty of service to the customers.

It also has this to say—

In order that the vital matter of distribution may be put on a proper basis, municipalities or approved co-operative societies should be encouraged to establish retail shops in Perth, Fremantle and Midland Junction simultaneously with the taking over of the wholesale business, and others should be opened from time to time when required, arrangements being made whereby dealers may obtain quantities of fish at customary trade rebates.

It goes on as follows:—

Close investigation has convinced your Committee that the general complaint against the high prices of fish is well founded.

It had this to say about the Fremantle fish market—

Your Committee have made extensive inquiries regarding the operations of the market, and are definitely of opinion that the Government should take control and charge to the fishermen, or their agent, a percentage on all gross sales. At present the markets are leased by the Government to the Fremantle Council at a nominal rental of 1s. per annum, and, although the council has received £2,500 net profit since its occupancy of the markets, little or nothing has been spent on the upkeep of the building and jetty. The whole of the profits have been paid into the general revenue of the council, and in the past the Public Works Department have had to bear the cost of keeping the jetty in repair, which, in the opinion of your Committee, should have been borne by the council. At present the building and jetty are in a state of disrepair, and, if something is not soon done, it will cost hundreds of pounds to restore the building and jetty to the purpose for which they were originally intended.

I have inspected the building, and, whatever the conditions may have been then, I find—whoever is responsible for keeping it

in order—that it is in a good state of repair. There is a good refrigerating plant, and fish can be, and are, safely and well stored. On the other hand, the mole that protects Fishermens Bay, and on which there is a landing stage for the larger boats, is in a sorry state of disrepair. I do not think that is a council job at all, but one for the Public Works Department. It is necessary for that work to be done urgently if the fishermen with the bigger boats are to have reasonable use of that facility. I turn again to the recommendations of the 1922 Select Committee, as follows:—

Your Committee, therefore, recommend that:—

1. The Fremantle fish market be taken over by the Government, and special cold storage facilities be arranged or erected.
2. A board should be constituted, giving equal representation to the Government and the fishermen, with an independent chairman—such board to control the fishing industry.
3. Regularity of supply to the public should be provided by the methods hereinbefore set forth.

All these years have elapsed, and precisely the same problems exist today as were present then. At that time fish was at an inordinately high price to the public—it was about 4d. or 5d. a lb. Today it is anything from 1s. 8d. to 3s. 6d. a lb. If it was inordinately high then, what is it today? I do not know what the fishermen received in those early times, but I do know that the return to them today—and I am speaking of those in the northern part, and not the men operating south of Fremantle, and at Mandurah and Albany—is not such as to encourage them to continue in the industry. So, I believe the time has arisen when a comprehensive survey must be made into the industry, and some action taken to place it on a firm footing. I do not say that the recommendations made by the committees I have mentioned are the ones that should be adopted, or that they are the remedies that should be applied, but I do say it is time we discovered what remedy is required. It is very evident that some form of marketing, other than that which exists, is necessary. Fish are dear. Goodness knows, they are well beyond the pocket of the average householder, with the result that many people are denied them.

The proceeds from the sale of fish are not going into the hands of the fishermen, and it is a job for Parliaments or Governments

to remedy that position, if it is possible. Not only that, but fish in adequate quantities are not available to the public, regardless of the high price. It has evidently been like that in the past. It is a fallacious argument, from the inquiries I have made so far, to suggest, as has been done by the R.S.L. District Committee, that the loss of opportunity to our fishing industry today is due to the importation of cheaper fish. The facts prove it to be otherwise. But at the same time there might be some substance in the suggestion that the importation of fish, and its price, may be limiting the purchase of local fish by the average householder. It is a fact that people will go for the cheaper article, and if they get preserved fish which they consider to be of equal quality to fresh fish they will buy it and leave the fresh fish alone.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: It is not always fresh.

Mr. LESLIE: Unfortunately, as the member for Geraldton suggests, a considerable quantity of the fish that is sold over the counter of the retail shops today is not always fresh. It is quite the reverse and I will probably tell the House something about that later on.

Hon. J. T. Tonkin: The consumption of imported fish is emphasising the value-price factor with regard to the consumption of local fish.

Mr. LESLIE: That may be possible. I am not an authority on nutrition, but I do know that nutritionists and authorities on diet consider that fish is a necessity in our diet. This is not only because of the change that it affords to a nation such as Australia which is essentially a meat-eating nation, but because fish contains certain vitamins or nutritive elements that are highly desirable. The average pre-war consumption of fish in Great Britain was 49 lb. per head per year. I quote the pre-war figure as we cannot accept the wartime figure in any of those countries because of the interference to the fishing industry as a result of wartime conditions.

Pre-war, the average Australian consumption by comparison was 20.7 lb. per head of the population, which is less than half. Of the 20.7 lb. per head, 9.3 lb. was local fish and 11.4 lb. was imported fish, which includes tinned fish and smoked or processed fish. It will be seen that a greater

quantity of imported fish was consumed in Australia prior to the war than our own local fish. That indicates a desire on the part of the people of Australia to have a substantial quantity of fish included in their diet. If fish could be supplied at a reasonable price there would be no difficulty whatsoever in disposing of it, provided we were able to set up adequate means of distributing it. I will refer to the consumption figures later on.

As members will have heard from the report of the 1922 Royal Commission, the Fremantle fish market was handed over to the Fremantle City Council. As a result of inquiries I find that for a considerable time all fish, or most of it, was disposed of at those markets by the auction system. That practice ceased because a system grew up known as the lot supply system. This had been in operation in connection with the sale of stock, and it meant that only one buyer would operate and would purchase all the fish that was offered. There would be no competition and the buyer would obtain the fish at his own price. He would then distribute the fish, again at his own price, to those to whom he had agreed to distribute. It is on record that because of the control of the distribution of fish, the auctioning system has disappeared entirely. There are British people who are unable to obtain an adequate supply because they are obliged to go to those of foreign nationality, who have control of the fish as it comes into the ports.

At present the fish market at Fremantle is controlled—and I say controlled because I do not know of any attempt by the Fremantle council to control it—or operated by a fishermen's co-operative society. From the reports that I have had this society appears to be doing a reasonable job. It is comprised of about 88 members and about 10 or 12 of them are Britishers and the rest are foreigners. The fishermen bring their fish into the markets, hand it over to the co-operative society and the fish is then sold on a retail basis to anybody who wishes to buy it. Otherwise it is distributed according to the whim of the manager to retailers who have put in their orders for it. So we find that the whole purpose for which the Fremantle market was originally set up has gone by the board.

Very little opportunity is afforded to people to obtain fish on a competitive basis, if a competitive basis is considered a desirable one for disposing of the fish. Ex-Servicemen in the co-operative society are satisfied that this is the best means, at present, for disposing of their fish when it is brought to Fremantle and when they have been operating in areas outside Fremantle. They are quite satisfied that they are getting a good spin from the co-operative society which actually paid them the fixed price less the amount of commission charged for handling during the period it was controlled under price control regulations. Nothing could be better than that. Once the control over the price of fish disappears it will be a serious question as to how much will actually be paid to the fishermen, and whether the co-operative society will be able to control the distribution or the price to such an extent that the fishermen will receive a reasonable return for the fish they bring into the market.

I have said that certain retailers of fish in suburban areas have been unable to obtain supplies of fish in spite of the fact that frequently an ample quantity is available, either fresh or from cold storage. It should be known to members that the retailing of fish in our State is almost wholly in the hands of foreign nationals. They have a habit of sticking together and protecting each other. I have no objection to their engaging in any particular trade or industry, but I do think that at the present time there is something in the way of a ring, a monopoly or control, with regard to the distribution of fish to retail establishments which is precluding the possibility of anybody else getting a chance of retailing fish.

A report reached me during the week advising me that a British company, which was attempting to distribute fish on a wholesale basis to retail shops on the Goldfields, found that by the time they had completed the arrangements for their fish to be taken over by those shops, and others in country districts, certain foreign buyers, or people interested in fish distribution, had got in and bought up the shops or entered into contracts with them. This British company cannot get the Western Australian fish but instead are being supplied with imported South African fish and also with fish from New Zealand.

Another point that will have to be inquired into is the transport of fish. Within recent months big ships have been operating in the Shark Bay area and it has been the practice for the owner-companies, for whom the fisherman work, to take the fish by truck to Geraldton and then rail it to Perth. It is subsequently distributed to the various retail centres. I find on inquiry that the average cost of roading the fish from Shark Bay to Geraldton is anything from 2½d. to 4d. per lb. or an average of about 3½d. I have had detailed costs prepared but it is difficult, when dealing with road vehicles, to arrive at just what actually are operating costs. The question of accidents, blow-outs, mechanical break-downs and various other matters enters into it. For ordinary operations it can be said that the average cost would be about 3d. per lb., another 1d. per lb. for transport to Perth by rail, and approximately another ½d. to 1d. per lb. from the reception depot here to the retail shops in Perth.

Hon. E. H. H. Hall: A lot comes down by boat from Geraldton.

Mr. LESLIE: The cost of fish coming down by road from Geraldton would be about 3½d. per lb., which means about 8d. per lb. for a load of fish coming from Shark Bay to Perth by vehicle. It is impossible to average it out because some loads come down on a different route from others. So an investigation must include an inquiry into means whereby fish can be more economically transported to the point between the shore nearest the fisherman, and the markets. I understand loading arrangements and facilities were made available by the Government to some of the larger vessels operating in the Shark Bay-Geraldton area to load on some of the State ships—I believe the "Dorrigo" was one—but not all ships are equipped with facilities for loading, as this must be done at sea. The lighter at Shark Bay is not always available for hire when fishermen require it, consequently the fish must be sent by road and rail to Perth. Apart from the fact that the fish cannot receive equal treatment or be as well preserved as when it comes down in a freezing chamber on a ship, the position is not one which provides a remunerative return to the fishermen.

During July and August we were told that there was glut of fish in Perth. From

my own personal observations I did not see any more fish in the shops than I had seen previously. With most products a glut is usually indicated by a reduction in the price.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Not with fish.

Mr. LESLIE: As the member for Leederville says "not with fish." However, I find that the position did arise where there was a glut at that time. One company in Perth, a wholesale distributing company, operates a fleet of boats in the North and sells the fish acquired by those boats, as well as handling fish obtained from fishermen all over the State. At one stage in July and August over £3,000 worth of fish was in cold storage at Robb's Jetty. For one month the company paid £65 in storage charges and for the next month £91. Eventually, it reached the position where all its stores were full and it had, of necessity, to inform its own fishermen, as well as fishermen from whom it was customarily purchasing fish, that it could accept no more. Accordingly, fishing boats were laid off for periods of three weeks up to one month.

The Attorney General: They would not take any reduction in the price.

Hon. A. H. Panton: The fishermen?

The Attorney General: No, this particular wholesaler.

Mr. LESLIE: The fishermen were obliged to accept any price they could get, but this wholesale firm and others were not prepared to take any fish. So far as the reduction in the price is concerned, let me inform the Minister that I have seen some of the invoices of this firm and I find that it actually did sell the fish at anything from 3d. upwards below the maximum wholesale fixed price. After making inquiries from the Prices Branch in no case can I find that this fish was retailed at below the fixed price. In other words, the retailer got away with a rake-off. Had the reduction in price been handed on to the public, it would, at that time, have enabled the fish-shops to sell fresh fish to the public as cheaply as the imported fish which is supposed to be threatening our fishing industry today. Instead of the shops selling it at a lesser price, they sold it at the maximum price specified under the price-fixing regulations.

Mr. Reynolds: Has the price gone up since controls were lifted?

Mr. LESLIE: Yes. I see from the Press that it has gone up; but fish is not being caught now to the same extent as it was formerly. These boats are laid off because there is no market for the fish and the owners are taking the opportunity to put their boats on the slips and to overhaul them. I feel that had the reduction, which occurred at that time, been handed on to the public it would have given a better indication of the demand which exists for fresh fish today than we can obtain from the quantity that is being sold at the present high prices. Not only have I found that no reduction in the price of fish is being handed on to the public, but I find it is quite a frequent practice in many of the fish-shops to sell fish entirely under a wrong heading. Shark, for instance, the price of which may be anything from 10d. to 1s. a lb., is sold as schnapper.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Or dhu-fish.

Mr. LESLIE: Yes. Bream, which was fixed at a wholesale price of 10d., was filleted and sold at schnapper prices. Those factors need looking into, for they are the cause of preventing the public from obtaining fish at a reasonable price and in adequate quantity. From the inquiries I have made, I am certain of the facts. Members themselves, from their own experience, and the public generally, will endorse the view that fish as distributed today is not available to the public either at a reasonable price or in adequate quantities. There are times when supplies are available but they are not put on the market or into the retail shops, possibly because of the desire to maintain a continuous supply for sale over the counter. I suggest that that may not be as advisable as it might appear.

Fish deteriorates very rapidly even in cool storage and, if we are to give the public the best that we can possibly offer, then fish must be processed in the best possible way and made available to the public without delay or at least in that condition when the public is able to see that the fish were alive when caught. Very often the fish seen lying on the counters of the shops today are so bleary-eyed that one could be forgiven if it were suspected that a net had been cast to the bottom of the sea and the fish hauled up dead. Those who stand between the consumer and the fisherman are endeavouring to make more and more, and are certainly attempting to get an un-

fair share of remuneration from this industry.

I know, and I think the House should be made aware of the fact, that the Government has, through the Department of Industrial Development and the Rural Bank, provided a considerable measure of assistance to the fishing industry. This assistance has been rendered in particular for the re-establishment of ex-Servicemen. No less than six large boats—I do not know their tonnage—were acquired from the Munitions Department and the Navy at a cost of about £9,000 each. These vessels have been made available to ex-Servicemen's syndicates who have found portion of the money, and the balance has been financed by the Department of Industrial Development and the Rural and Industries Bank at the usual rate of interest. The money advanced is not by way of a gift; I do not want anybody to get the idea that they have been given something for nothing. It appears to me that the Government, in doing even that—it has helped in other directions—has given assistance to a somewhat hazardous undertaking and that such assistance may not be available to ex-Servicemen launching out in other industries.

I feel, too, that there is at the present time an inclination on the part of some of those interested in the fishing industry to look to its possible extension into the realms of export. The committee, if appointed, can inquire into that possibility. At this stage, I suggest that charity begins at home and our task is to see that our own people are adequately provided for. If it is necessary for us to import more than the quantity we are able to produce from our own coast, that is, 11 lbs. of imported fish per head per year, as against 9 lbs. per head per year of our own fish, how can it possibly be advanced—at this stage, anyhow—that we can look within a very short time to being exporters of fish to any extent. In any case, I offer the suggestion that if imported fish at 1/9½d. lb. is going to cripple our industry because of its cheap price, how in the world are we going to export fish on a competitive basis if we cannot sell our own fish at a reasonable price to our own people?

I have not touched on the question of fishing grounds and fishermen. The terms of my motion are sufficiently wide to per-

mit the committee to inquire into that aspect. I have purposely raised this question at this stage because I feel it is likely to be mentioned during the debate. I consider that the activities of the Government, the Fisheries Department, the Department of Industrial Development and all those concerned with the fishing industry have been directed too much to making sure that we have fish in our waters without any regard being paid to making the fish available to the public. That appears to be 90 per cent. of the trouble. It is useless having our waters teeming with fish unless we are assured that they will be retailed to the public at a price that is within their means.

It is impossible for people in my electorate to obtain fresh fish. I know that assistance was given to a number of men to distribute fish by motortruck, but that venture has now faded out simply because those concerned—a number of whom were ex-servicemen—were unable to obtain supplies on account of the existence of some hidden hand which is keeping a control over the distribution. If fish are to be distributed that hidden hand must be removed and the control taken away. All these things are in the minds of the people of the State. The object of the committee will be to find out what has happened. It will be the committee's job to ensure that the evil existing today—and it is an evil—that is depriving the people of fish is removed, and to recommend, if necessary, what Government action should be taken. I hope the motion will have the support of the House.

On motion by the Attorney General, debate adjourned.

MOTION—TIMBER INDUSTRY.

As to Benefits for Workers.

MR. REYNOLDS (Forrest) [5.30]: I move—

That in the opinion of this House, the timber workers of this State are entitled to the same benefits as the Collie miners are receiving under the Collie Miners' Amenity Fund proclaimed in March, 1948.

I have pleasure in moving the motion. Last year I was overwhelmed with joy at hearing the Chief Secretary make a statement when moving the second reading of the Coal Miners' Welfare Bill, as recorded in "Hansard" at page 2180, for I realised that at

long last something was likely to be done for the timber workers to give them that to which they have been entitled for many years. The Chief Secretary said—

It is universally acknowledged that increased amenities should be, and will in due course have to be, provided for workers in all industries. It is therefore fitting and proper that a start should be made in an industry so essential to the State as coalmining, which is not attracting sufficient recruits to meet its needs and which, as Mr. Wallwork pointed out in his report, requires a factual indication that it can be made a congenial occupation.

Then he continued to expound the many virtues of the Bill. It appears that a board has been created, known as the Collie Miners' Welfare Board of Western Australia, a body corporate charged, subject to the Minister, with the administration of the fund. The board consists of three members. I hope the Government will introduce a measure for the timber workers along similar lines. A royalty of 1½d. per ton of coal produced during the year was to be paid on the 1st January and the 1st July of each year into an account created at the Treasury. Of the three members of the board, one represents the Government, one the Collie miners and the other the employers. Evidently the coalminers, through their executive, will put up suggestions to the board and advise how the money should be spent.

I suggest that a measure along similar lines be introduced providing for the payment of 18d. per load in the square produced at the various mills. It would work out in this way, taking the Banksiadale mill as an example. That mill produces 50 loads of timber in the square daily, and the amount on the basis I have mentioned would be credited on the 1st January and the 1st July to an account at the Treasury standing in the name of the Banksiadale mill, and the men employed at the mill would advise the executive of the Timber Workers' Union how the money should be spent.

In April, 1946, a Royal Commission was appointed to investigate the housing conditions of employees in the timber industry. Messrs. Styants, Hoar, Holman, Mann and Willmott were appointed a Select Committee which was afterwards converted into a Royal Commission, to consider the Bill then before the House, with Mr. Styants as chairman. We all know those gentlemen

and realise that they were charged with a heavy responsibility. They were out to do their best to give the House a report that would be comprehensive and reliable in fact and detail. I propose to quote extracts from the report to show the deplorable conditions disclosed by the inquiry, not only in the matter of housing but also in other directions. At page 4, the following statement appeared:—

Your committee visited and inspected housing conditions at almost every important timber-milling centre. As a result of hearing evidence from the workers and employers and our own observations, we arrived at the conclusion that, generally, the standard of housing was poor, and if men and women are required to work and live on the mill sites and bush camps, much better housing should and must be provided to induce them to remain there.

Some very good, comfortable and attractive houses were seen, and these shone as an example of what can be done to decently house these workers and their dependants, but unfortunately these dwellings were in the minority.

At the other side of the picture, many deplorable hovels designated as houses were inspected, and it is regrettable that action has not been taken in the past to provide better housing in these cases. . . .

In many cases, the mill-owners, by their evidence, clearly showed that they realise something better will have to be provided in the future than has prevailed in the past if they are to get and retain a sufficient number of good-type employees. Lack of tradesmen and materials has been a difficulty in keeping up repairs during the war and is still a problem.

Later on, the report stated—

It would be an advantage if bush camps were abolished and the men transported to and from their work daily. This is being done in many centres now.

Roads and footpaths were conspicuous by their absence in most centres, and at many mill sites the houses are spread about over a very wide area, with no pretence of town planning, adding considerably to the costs of providing certain services to them.

Members will note the statement that roads and footpaths were conspicuous by their absence. That is an appalling condition of affairs in these so-called enlightened days when city-dwellers take for granted the existence of amenities in the shape of good roads and footpaths, and yet bush workers who are producing the timber so urgently required have to put up with poor housing conditions and lack of roads and footpaths.

Mr. Yates: What was the date of that report?

Mr. REYNOLDS: April, 1946. The report continued—

At every centre visited, keen interest was taken, especially by the womenfolk, in our visit, and every witness for the employees and each housewife, when questioned, stated that they would be prepared to pay a higher rental for a better class of house rather than continue with the old dwellings and low rents.

Now listen to this—

Leaking roofs were the greatest cause of complaint encountered, with insufficient and inadequate water supplies as a close second.

Would any member ask his wife to live on a timbermill and put up with the discomfort and inconvenience arising from lack of an adequate water supply? Early this year, when visiting one of the mills, I saw on a notice board a request to timber workers to cut down on the water supply. If they did not do so voluntarily, the company would compel them to do so because of the shortage of water. Continuing, the report stated—

There is no legitimate reason why a plentiful supply of water should not be available at all mill sites, although in some localities it is not very palatable.

I think that applies to many of the mills in the timber areas. One of the hardships that the womenfolk have to submit to is that they cannot get sufficient water to use for growing vegetables or keeping a decent garden, and often the clothes are discoloured by the water. The report continues—

In these latter cases, rain water tanks should be provided for culinary and drinking supplies. An abundant supply of water will often offset many other disadvantages.

Great concern was shown by all representatives of mill-owners in regard to what they considered to be insecurity of tenure, due to the practice of the Forestry Department granting renewals of permits for a period of 12 months only.

I mention this because mill-owners will probably advance it as a reason why they cannot afford to provide these amenities for the workers.

After hearing the evidence of Messrs. H. V. Telfer, Registrar, and A. C. Shedley, Assistant-Conservator of the Forestry Department, your Commissioners are of the opinion that sufficient guarantee of continuity of permits is provided under the existing practice.

Therefore, the mill-owners could not very well offer that excuse.

The yearly issue is regarded only as a means for ensuring that the terms and conditions of the permit are being observed.

I propose now to deal briefly with some of the mills to explain the conditions under which timber workers live while doing their best to stimulate production for our much-needed, mammoth, house-building programme.

Holycake State Mill: The estimated life of this mill is five years. Here were seen single men's huts that measured 12ft. by 10ft., had ceilings only 8ft. high, and windows 20in. by 18in.

Would anyone ask his sons or daughters to live in such hovels?

We inspected a house that had been untenanted for about eight months, and was a fair sample of the larger type of dwellings let to employees. It consisted of four rooms, 12ft. by 12ft. Ceilings in front rooms were 11ft. high, and 10ft. high in the back rooms. Front windows 2ft. by 5ft. of the type that slides up or down. Back windows, 3ft. by 2ft. Front verandah 6ft. 6in. by 24ft. Back verandah the same, but had been closed in at one end (about 10ft.) and an open fireplace built.

The rent for this type of house is 17s. 4d. per month. Shower and bath are provided, but no heater, and the room is unlined and unceiled . . . All these houses were taken over by the State Sawmills when the mill came into their possession. A slightly better type of house, only a few in number, were built by the State, the rooms and windows being larger but the verandahs were only 6ft. 6in. wide.

No electric light is available in any house, and complaints of poor pressure in the water supply were general. As plenty of water was available in the storage tanks, the trouble is probably due to mains of insufficient capacity, or corrosion in the reticulation pipes. It would be difficult to make these houses comply with the specifications set out in the Bill presented last session.

I have quoted those facts to indicate the hard conditions under which timber workers in this State are labouring; and it is very obvious to me, and it was no doubt obvious to the commissioners and others who have visited the place, that these men, women and children are having a very tough time. When I heard the Minister introducing his Bill to provide amenities for the Collie miners, I realised that he was exhibiting statesmanship. I felt that he was sincere and was genuinely trying to give the men in the coalmining industry a sense of security. However, I see no reason why one section of the community should receive amenities that are denied to another.

I feel certain that no self-respecting Government would attempt to introduce sectional legislation in this House whereby one part of the community would receive privileges which another section did not enjoy. The type of work done by those in the timber industry differs very considerably from that performed by coalminers. The latter are entitled to the benefits given them; no-one would deny that. I am aware of the kind of labour in which they are engaged.

On a number of occasions I have gone into coalmines and seen what takes place, in order to make myself conversant with the type of work undertaken by a coalminer. Likewise I know exactly what each and every man engaged in the timber mills has to do; and I can assure members that those employed in the timber industry work equally as hard as those in the coalmining industry. The coalminers live in one town whereas timber workers are employed at various mill centres and sometimes are 20, 30 and 40 miles from any large centre. To visit the town they have to pay a considerable amount. They make such visits once every two or three weeks, or perhaps once a month, to secure benefits which those who work in large towns and cities obtain almost every night.

When city workers knock off for the day they can go along and have their jug of beer, to which they are entitled. I enjoy mine and I like to see others enjoy theirs. Unfortunately, if men employed in the timber industry want a drink, it costs them 5s., 10s., or 15s. to travel to the nearest siding to obtain one and to enjoy other things that people in the city take for granted. No-one can deny that during the war the men employed in the timber industry did a gallant job. It was the only industry whose workers did not receive a war loading. Had I been in Parliament, representing those men, I would have fought most strenuously for them to be given that right.

Further, during the whole of the war, the men in the timber industry did not strike, which I think was very commendable. We have had strife in other industries; but, despite the hard conditions under which these men work, they have continued to serve their country loyally during peace as in war. I feel certain that the members of this House, as well as the Government, will see that the timber workers receive

the same amenities as those enjoyed by the Collie miners. I have been to some pains to prepare figures which I think will be of interest to members. There are a good many of them, but I think they should go on record and that they will be worth reading in "Hansard." Table 1 shows the timber production of the Commonwealth during 1943-44. It is as follows:—

State.	Logs cut Loads per 1,000.	Sawn timber output Loads per 1,000.	Percentage recovery.	Net value of forests products per head of mean population
N.S.W.	433	271	62.36	£ s. d. 1 3 1
Victoria	370	204	55.14	0 19 7
Q'land	452	302	66.81	2 13 4
Sth. Aust.	75	48	64.00	1 13 3
West Aust.	445	180	40.45	2 16 11
Tasmania	240	125	53.33	3 2 7
Total ...	2,015	1,133	56.23	1 10 10

This table demonstrates that Western Australia has the lowest recovery of any of the States. The value of the timber output per head of population is second only to that of Tasmania. As I intend to touch on the aspect of recovery when speaking on the Estimates, I will not enlarge on it now. I mention it to prove to members that the net value of forest products per head of mean population is the highest on the mainland of Australia. I come now to Table No. 2.

Mr. SPEAKER: Will the hon. member connect these tables with the motion?

Mr. REYNOLDS: Yes. The figures indicate how vitally important is the timber industry in the economic life of this State and how essential it is that amenities should be given to the men engaged in it, so that we will have continued peace and harmony in the timber industry. Table No. 2 deals with the value of Western Australian timber production and the value of exports. It is as follows:—

Year.	Wholesale value at mills expressed in thousands of pounds.	Value of exports of timber and wood manufac- ture expressed in thousands of pounds.	Percentage of value of exports of value of production.
1928	1,847	1,533	93
1939	1,140	766	67
1944	1,253	639	51
1945	1,257	597	48
1946	1,407
1947	1,683

The value of exports does not give a true representation of the proportion of Western Australian timber sent out of the State, for the value of production is the wholesale value at the mills and the value of exports is the selling price abroad. The decline in the percentage value of exports implies that a greater proportion of native timber is being used locally. The source of my information was the State Statistician and the report of the Forests Department for 1945. I now come to Table 3:—

Analysis of Cost of Sawmilling Operations in the Forest Sawmills of Western Australia.

In units of £1,000.				
Year ending 30th June	1937	1942	1946	1947
Royalties, leases, etc.	114	120	128	154
Haulage to mill	149	131	227	*297
Logging wages	198	220	251	274
Mill wages	418	427	480	585
Fuel, water, lubricants	21	30	37	43
Repairs	37	48	51	59
Other costs and profits	172	215	244	295
Total value of output	1,108	1,152	1,418	1,691

* This item includes cost of other logs and timber purchased and other materials.

These figures are from statistics provided by the State Government Statistician. I have endeavoured by fair and reasonable means to obtain the balance sheets of the various millowners in this State, but have failed. Despite the fact that I communicated with some of my friends in England, who endeavoured through their solicitors to obtain the balance sheets, I was unsuccessful. It is obvious that they are well protected and, as is the case with the gold in the vaults of London, we cannot get at them. I have also endeavoured to obtain the balance sheets of Millars, Bunning Bros., Whitakers, and other large timber firms, but have been unable to do so.

The executive of the Timber Workers' Union over a period of years has tried to obtain copies of those balance sheets but has been unsuccessful. Only the other day I went to the Supreme Court to see if I could get a copy of one balance sheet, but was told I could not get it until April of next year. Probably by that time the firm will have become a proprietary company and will have evaded me again. I will touch on that more extensively on another occasion. Reverting to costs and profits, let us assume the overhead at about 20 per cent, which I think is more than reasonable. If I were asked for

an opinion I would put the overhead down at from 13 per cent. to 15 per cent., and I have handled many balance sheets both in this State and in other parts of the Commonwealth. Taking the overhead at 20 per cent., we find that in 1946 the sawmillers of this State must have made a profit exceeding £200,000, and in 1947 a profit of at least £230,000. The mill wages for 1946 are shown at £480,000, so the profit is just half of what was paid in wages.

I am convinced that at least some of the big mills are making well over 20 per cent. profit. I have been at great pains to extract full information, but these firms have very clever solicitors and clever people who prepare legislation and regulations to enable them to avoid divulging all the facts and figures. I debated the item of haulage to the mills with one of the officers of the Government Statistician, as I thought the figure too high. For 1937 the figure of £148,000 was given, and by 1947 it had jumped to £297,000, which is altogether out of proportion. I discovered that that item includes the cost of other logs and timber purchased and other materials, as I have already mentioned. I come now to Table 4:—

Employment at Western Australian Forest Sawmills (excluding Logging) in Age Groups as at the 15th June each Year.

Year.	Persons employed.		Total.	Percentage under 21.
	Under 21.	Over 21.		
1940	260	1,515	1,775	14.5
1946	187	1,742	1,929	9.7
1947	212	1,818	2,030	10.4

This information was obtained from the State Government Statistician. The table shows one of the sad things that is happening in the timber industry. Visiting the mills in my electorate—just as does the member for Nelson—I have noticed over a period of years that the young men are leaving the industry because the proper amenities and social conditions are not available in those areas. The men come to Perth, where they enjoy all the social services and amenities as well as higher wages. I will deal later with the wages obtaining in the industry, where there is a significant decrease in the proportion of junior workers employed. Efforts should be made to improve the con-

ditions and amenities so that young men may be retained in the industry for the good of the State as a whole.

I hope the Minister will give thought to these figures, and I have no doubt he will realise that something must be done to retain the young men and women in the industry. Otherwise in later years we will be faced with a serious problem, as it takes a long time to train benchmen and other key operators. Today a large number of young people among whom are a number of Balts, are entering the industry. I am satisfied that probably only 20 per cent of them will remain after they have completed the period of two years under the terms of their contract with the Commonwealth Government. In Queensland last year I visited the mills of Hancock and Gore, Brown and Broad, and others. I was astounded at the large percentage of women working beside the men at those mills, and I feel certain that something of that nature could be achieved in the industry here.

A few days ago I was speaking with Mr. Huxtable, manager of the Banksiadale mill, who said he thought he should try to get the commissioner to install planing and moulding machines, etc., so that they could employ more young men and women in the industry at all the big timber centres. They could turn out scotia, mouldings, etc., to meet the requirements of the building trade. If that were done I feel certain it would go a long way towards preventing the yearly exodus of young people from the mills. Table 5 is as follows:—

Average Number of Employees in the Western Australian Timber Industry for each Year, together with Wages Paid.

Year.	Total employees Mills and logging.	Wages paid in units of £1,000.	Average wages per head per annum.	Average wage per head as percentage of annual equivalent of W.A. basic wage, South-West land division.
1920.....	3,673	697	190	...
1926.....	4,816	1,135	236	107
1931.....	1,829	350	194	96
1940.....	2,722	604	221	102
1946.....	2,716	730	269	103
1947.....	2,969	839	282	102

This table indicates that the loss of skilled and unskilled labour in the timber industry has not been made up since the depression years of 1930-33. The employees listed here include managers, tradesmen and bush work-

ers, as well as juvenile workers. The average wage in the industry is slightly above the basic wage. No figures are available to show the distribution. While the nominal wage in the industry has risen during the 14 year period, the real wage shows no significant change. These figures were obtained from the State Government Statistician.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Mr. REYNOLDS: The next table I shall deal with shows the average number of men employed in logging operations in the timber industry, the wages paid to them, the average annual wage per head and the average annual wage percentage of the annual equivalent of the basic wage for the South-West Land Division. The table is as follows:—

Year.	Average number of men employed in logging operations.	Wages paid in units of (£1,000).	Average annual wage per head in units of (£1,000).	Average annual wage per cent. of annual equivalent of W.A. basic wage for South-West Land Division.
1926....	*1,300	*312	*240	108
1931....	600	125	210	105
1940....	837	201	240	110
1946....	806	251	311	119
1947....	838	274	327	118

*Estimate.

I have prepared this table to show that the earnings per head disclose a consistent rise but the earnings, when expressed in the terms of a percentage of the basic wage, indicate a tendency to fall. The wages of men employed in logging operations are on the average higher than those of men employed in the mill. Members generally will realise that men engaged on the logging side have a more strenuous time than others in the industry and their prospects of life are shorter. It will be understood that the men are mostly on the axe and, later on in life when they reach 45 or 50 years of age, they suffer from heart trouble, blood pressure, rheumatics or various other ills. Their anticipation of life is much shorter and their work is less congenial because they are so isolated.

Frequently the men are 10 to 20 miles distant from the mills, and invariably they go to their work on Monday morning and return on the following Friday. In some instances they live for two, three or four

weeks on the job, and it costs them so much extra per week or month, according as the period may be during which they remain in the bush, when they visit the nearest township to enjoy the amenities available there. On the other hand, those who live in towns like Collie can enjoy that privilege immediately they knock off work each afternoon. In order to avail himself of these amenities, the cost to the logger is very much higher. The next table I shall deal with is very interesting and refers to firewood produced at forest sawmills and shows the cost per ton. The table is as follows:—

Year.	Firewood produced in units of 1,000 Tons.	Value in units of (£100).	Wholesale value at mills per ton in shillings.
1939	119	£ 217	3.6
1943	141	372	5.3
1946	140	405	5.8
1947	146	424	5.8

This discloses the increasing use of jarrah for firewood. The consequent increase in the demand for sawn blocks has led the sawmillers to place a higher valuation upon that part of their production in their statistical returns. The sawmillers, however, have been experiencing great difficulty in obtaining railway trucks, which necessitates double handling. I stress that point particularly to the Minister for Railways, because three or four months ago I tried to get the Government to do something to help the sawmills in that direction. The absence of adequate supplies of trucks meant that the handling costs were increased and my object was to assist in keeping down the price to the consumer. The next table deals with the exports of timber and of articles manufactured from it. The table is as follows:—

Year.	Timber exports in units of £1,000.	Exports of wood manufactures in units of £1,000.	Total exports in units of £1,000.	Percentage exported in manufactured state.
1927	£ 1,651	9	£ 1,660	% 0.5
1933	263	20	343	24.0
1943	605	32	632	5.1
1946	570	27	597	4.5

The volume of timber exports, it will be seen, shows a decline from the 1920's onwards, but it is interesting to note that during the depression, the exports of wood

manufactures disclosed a large increase. The last table I shall quote deals with the value of the principal products of forest saw mills during the years 1937, 1945 and 1947, the figures being in units of £1,000. The table is as follows:—

	1937	1945	1947
	£	£	£
Rough sawn timber	743	738	992
Sleepers, sawn and hewn	138	245	268
Pickets, palings and shingles	19	5	18
Boards, linings, etc.	100	93	132
Fruit cases and boxes	45	112	183
Firewood	13	34	42
Parquetry and paving	6	1	7
Staves	2	11	22
Joinery	3	8	4
Charcoal	21	10	2
Other			
Total	1,104	1,237	1,683

I think the position regarding boards, linings and so on should be investigated.

The Minister for Lands: What has all this to do with amenities?

Mr. REYNOLDS: Quite a lot. I am pointing out how vitally important a part the timber industry plays in the economic life of the State. Those engaged in the industry are doing a great job, and I am giving reasons why the Government should agree to the motion I am moving. The object of these figures is to show the marked increase in the production of sleepers and fruit cases at a time when there should have been an increase in the production of boards and linings.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member is not now making out a case for amenities. He is discussing general questions. He should try to get back to the subject-matter of the motion.

[Resolved: That motions be continued.]

Mr. REYNOLDS: I have practically finished quoting figures. They are essential in order to show the importance of the timber industry. Adverting to the report of the Royal Commission on the housing position, I desire to deal with the Chadoora mill, owned by the Worsley Timber Co., to show that the conditions of the men employed in the industry are really bad and that no men are more worthy of improvement in their conditions and amenities. As my worthy colleague on my right says, the industry at present can afford to pay for amenities for those working in the industry, because I have explained in no uncertain

terms that tremendous profits are being made from it. I have been at great pains to present the figures I have given; but, as I said earlier, it is unfortunately impossible for even the timber workers' union, or the executive of that union, to obtain copies of the balance sheets of the companies. If the Minister could obtain one for me, I should be elated, as I could then make a searching investigation.

The Minister for Housing: They do not give me their balance sheets.

* Mr. REYNOLDS: The time has arrived when we should insist on these balance sheets being presented, because only some little time ago the Government gave great consideration to the cartage of timber and made special concessions to the companies in that respect. Before such concessions are made, the companies should be asked to produce their balance sheets to disclose their exact position. The report of the Royal Commission states—

The quality of the water here is very bad (referring to the Chadoora Mill), being unfit for drinking, and has to be treated with lime to make it suitable to wash clothes. If not treated heavily with lime, it discolours the clothes, making them a pronounced brown. It is obtained from a well for four months of the year, when the supply from a brook dries up. No rain water tanks are supplied by the company.

I tried to obtain the balance sheet of this company, which I am fairly confident is making about £4 per man per week.

Mr. May: How many men does the company employ?

Mr. REYNOLDS: From 38 to 40. The report continues—

There are about a dozen houses on the mill site. The history of most of them seems to be that they were built by the employees with timber supplied free by the company that originally owned the mill, and the present company owning it charges an average rental of 3s. per week.

Mr. Speaker, you should have a look at those huts and hovels. The report continues—

The only way in which the housing here can be described is to say that it is deplorable. The squalid and unsuitable nature of it has to be seen to be believed.

I do not wish to weary members with all this evidence.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Hear, hear!

Mr. REYNOLDS: The hon. member likes to have his say, but I am in charge at present and am going to have my say.

Mr. May: Hear, hear!

Mr. REYNOLDS: The report continues—

Yarloop. Some of the oldest houses here are very unsuitable; the rooms being too small, window space insufficient, ceilings too low, although the general condition of the houses was much better than those at Chadoora and Tullis.

I have not mentioned Tullis, but what I have quoted I think is sufficient. The report continues—

Here some houses had been re-lined with asbestos, and it is interesting to read the evidence of Mr. Craig, Superintendent of Millars' Timber & Trading Co., in which he states that the cost of lining and ceiling houses with asbestos is not greater than doing the job with timber or other suitable material. Bathrooms, baths, showers or stoves are not provided by the company.

Mr. Bovell: Tut, tut!

Mr. REYNOLDS: The hon. member may say "Tut, tut!" If I went to his home, I should probably find that his wife and family enjoy all modern conveniences and comforts. These men are doing great work and they did a great job during the war. However, they did not receive a war loading. It is because I realise that these men have done a great job that I am doing the best I possibly can for them, in making an effort to see that they obtain conditions and benefits comparable with those enjoyed by workers in other industries. I know other members will probably speak to the motion, but I should like to quote from Mr. Craig's evidence as it is most important. Mr. Craig was asked by the Chairman—

I understand that bathrooms, baths, coppers, troughs and stoves are not provided by the company in its existing buildings?

The witness replied, "That is so." The report of the evidence then proceeds—

What would be the attitude of the company regarding their provision in new buildings?—The company would provide them in accordance with the requirements of the Bill and in cases where the ownership was already in the hands of the people, we would take over the ownership ourselves.

In reply to Mr. Hohnan, the witness said—

There are lighting facilities here, but, with one exception, at other centres we have visited the houses are not provided with electric lighting.

Just fancy, only one mill in 16 in my district provides electric light! In this enlightened age, timber workers are still in a state of darkness. The evidence continues—

The general practice is for men to do their own repairs to their houses, the company providing certain materials. Under the Bill the onus will be placed on the employer to keep the houses in a reasonable state of repair?—Here we regard it as our duty, seeing that we receive rent from the occupiers, to carry out necessary repairs. Some men are handy with tools and, in order to avoid delay in having repairs effected, are willing to do the work themselves.

An excuse, I may say. Continuing—

There are others who are unable to do such work and they have to wait their turn for their repairs to be attended to. Our general policy is to repair the houses ourselves with our own carpenters. I do not want to see men carrying out structural alterations. Such work should be left to us.

I have quoted fairly extensively from the report of the Royal Commission and from the evidence, because it is authentic. I know these commissioners were determined to do a good job, and, having read the evidence, I am quite convinced that they presented a report which was both fair and square. I received the following letter from the president of the Timber Workers' Union:—

Following on the consultation between the General Executive of the above Union and yourself re the desirability of securing amenities for timber workers similar to those recently given to Collie miners, we consider that because of the isolation peculiar to the industry it is essential that more amenities should be available to make the industry more attractive if the present drift to more congenial employment is to be halted.

In a table which I submitted to the House I showed the decrease in seven years in the number of men under 21 years employed in the industry. Mr. Nail, the general president of the union, is anxious to do all he possibly can to prevent this drift. In my opinion, it would be arrested if suitable amenities were provided for the young men living on the mills. Mr. Nail's letter continues—

Apart from the usual community halls, there is very little else offering and in many instances the revenue from these halls does not meet the expenses of upkeep and improvement; subsequently deterioration is the result. While members of my union are being asked for increased production to stimulate the home

building in the State (and in many cases are compelled to live in sub-standard houses themselves) it is only equitable that they should be granted something to make them feel a little more appreciated.

I think that is a vital point, as they would be happier and more contented if amenities were provided for them. Continuing—

On occasions, timber workers have been commended for the way output has been maintained, and we feel this commendation will be sincere if something more concrete than words is forthcoming. One has only to quote such centres as Hakea, Chadoora, Treesville, Mornington, Lyalls, Nyamup and, with the projected mills at Shannou and Quinnanup, to show how mill centres have to rely on local activities to secure any sort of social life at all.

All those centres are far away from civilisation and, in some cases, 30 or 40 miles from a township. It might cost the worker 10s. each way to go to Dwellingup to see a football match or have a jug of beer. The letter continues—

Even the advent of a large number of displaced migrants (the writer refers to Balts) will prove to be only a temporary relief, as they, too, will find better conditions when they are free to choose their own calling.

The Balts have recently come into the industry and, as I have said, they are an excellent type of men and doing their best. Of course, they are inexperienced; but, after having worked in the mills for two or three years, they will have gained experience and will then be valuable workers. Most of them have come from good homes and are educated. No doubt they will subsequently look elsewhere for employment. I was at Dwellingup on one occasion when a young fellow came to me and said, "Mr. Reynolds, what are you doing about bringing these fellows into the country? Are you not going to stop them?" I looked at him and asked, "Why do you want me to stop them?" He gave his reason. He then said to me, "Come on, say something." I replied, "I am just thinking." He asked, "What are you thinking?" I said, "I was just wondering where you would have been had your mother and father been forced to remain in Italy." He realised that he had been quite wrong, and smiled and said, "Come and have a drink."

Mr. Bovell: Did you go?

Mr. REYNOLDS: Most certainly I did.

The Minister for Housing: I think that is an amenity within the motion.

Mr. REYNOLDS: The letter continues—

With an amenities fund in operation it would be possible to put down tennis courts of a good standard, bowling greens, rifle ranges, miniature as well as .303, and, where facilities exist within a reasonable distance, workers' clubs which, if once started, can be made as profitable as those already in existence.

At Collie there is a workers' club, and I have been there on a number of occasions. It is wonderfully well fitted up and conducted. There are billiard tables and a library. If there were a workers' club at Banksiadale, Hakea, Holyoake or Mornington, these people would really think they were in clover. The letter goes on—

Another amenity greatly needed is an up-to-date library. Lending libraries do exist at some centres, but the material available can best be compared to that found in most dentists' waiting rooms. Another way in which a fund, as suggested, would help is in regard to helping along children who show promise of being brilliant, but owing to financial circumstances the parents are unable to give their children the chance they are entitled to.

That also is important. Some little time ago I was at Mandurah where I met the schoolteacher who said he had a particularly brilliant boy who would, with training on the right lines, become a man such as we want in this State. I talked to the young fellow, and I am quite satisfied that if he were given a reasonable opportunity he would become a credit to Western Australia. The letter goes on—

Bursaries could be established to help these cases. There are many other ways in which the fund could be used, and my experience over more than 25 years in the timber industry has shown that where employees have been contented and happy, industrial trouble has been slight, and I am convinced that if the amenities fund is established it will eventually pay good dividends.

I feel likewise. I am confident that the Government, seeing it has already granted amenities to one industry, would not discriminate against this industry. I have here a schedule of the rates of pay of those employed in timber working. I am not going to weary the House with them, but it is important to know that the basic wage is £5 17s. 1d. a week. The top man in a mill is the log band sawyer. If he operates a Symonson turner, the maximum he receives over the basic wage is £2 6s., so that his weekly pay would be £8 3s. 1d. He would probably be receiving that after 12 to 15 years' experience in the industry. If such a

man studied to become a doctor he would, in eight years, probably be receiving about £3,000 per annum. Many men in the timber industry have the brains and ability to become doctors, but some of them lack education and have not had the opportunity to acquire it.

On the 15th December last, an increase was given to the timber workers in the industry, but only on the margins—a matter of 33 1-3 per cent. Unfortunately, not all workers in the industry receive margins. The firewood docker did not receive a penny piece as a result of the 33 1-3 per cent. increase. That shows some of the difficulties of these men. I noticed the other day that men who, after only three or four months' experience in a bar, become professional barmen, receive about £7 10s. a week, and they can get as much beer as they want without having to pay for it. The tailor-outs and assistants on the No. 4 bench do not receive a margin. Whilst some workers in the industry received increases, quite a number did not. I could enumerate them, but I do not want to weary members.

I think I have traversed quite a number of the troubles and complaints of these people. The matter is important, and I have endeavoured to make my remarks fairly comprehensive. I have probably wearied the House with my figures, but if they are studied it will be seen that they were prepared and presented with an object, namely, to give an over-all picture of the disabilities of those engaged in the timber industry. Despite the fact that the figures show there has been an increase in wages, unfortunately the real wage today is less than it was in 1926. I ask the Government, and members generally, to give consideration to what I have said. I have only one desire—to do the best I possibly can for those in this industry—because I want to see peace in industry and increased production. We have a mammoth building programme ahead; I envisage the day when we in this State will be constructing 8,000 to 10,000 homes a year. We have to get into our heads that if we are to receive the migrants we hope for—that is 15,000 to 20,000 per annum within the next few years—we shall have to provide homes for them.

I am trying to encourage men to go into this calling. I have spoken to many in

Perth and asked them to go into it, and I have gone to their wives and told them there are possibilities in the industry. Many people have come to me at my home to see if I would take up their cases in connection with the shortage of housing. I have said to them: "In the timber industry there are homes, although certainly they are shacks, but if you go into the industry you will get a home." I have done my best to get men to go into it, and I am now asking the Government to do its best to keep them there because, today, men can walk out of the industry and receive a higher wage as well as have their Saturday afternoons free to go to football matches, races, and trots in the evening. In addition, they can have their choice of beer, doctors and whatever else they want. Most members know the conditions obtaining in the timber industry. In conclusion, I suggest that the Government introduce a Bill along the lines I have suggested, for the maintenance of peace and harmony in this important industry.

On motion by the Minister for Housing, debate adjourned.

BILL—BRANDS ACT AMENDMENT.

Returned from the Council without amendment.

PAPERS—WATER SUPPLIES.

As to Port Hedland Scheme.

Debate resumed from the 15th September on the following motion by Mr. Hegney:—

That all papers dealing with the Port Hedland water supply be laid upon the Table of the House.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. V. Doney—Williams-Narrogin) [8.6]: My remarks need but be very brief. I find myself in agreement with pretty well all the submissions made by the member for Pilbara, when he asked the House to allow him to have all the papers dealing with the water supply at Port Hedland laid upon the Table. I am anxious to facilitate his access to the appropriate papers, but I find I am forced to seek a compromise with him. He asked that all papers dealing with this matter be laid upon the Table. That is a somewhat taller order than it seems to be on the face of it, because there are some 30 files dealing with the subject, and they

might represent half a cwt. of paper to lay on the Table of the House. I am pretty sure the hon. member would not like to find himself faced with the task of going through them all. It is only to be expected that there would be a huge accumulation of papers, because this question has been a live one for the past 30 years, or thereabouts.

Hon. A. H. Panton: It could not have been very much alive.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: As members may imagine, the more up-to-date of these papers are in pretty constant use. That being so—and the hon. member will understand, this—the department would find itself at sixes and sevens when it came to dealing with matters pertaining to water supply questions in the North if files were placed on this Table. It is on that basis I seek a compromise with the hon. member—and it is going to be extremely awkward if he does not agree. I am hopeful, therefore, that he will concur in an arrangement whereby he, or any other member for that part of the State, can go to the Public Works Department and have all the relevant files placed at his disposal so that he can browse amongst them to the extent he wishes.

I do not know that I need traverse the history of this subject. The hon. member himself did not go very far in that direction for the reason, I presume, that he realises the Government has already embarked on the task of giving an ample and regular supply of good water to that particular town. He understands, too, I think, that at long last—after about 30 years, during which attempts have gone wrong—the people will have a water supply as soon as we can manage to give it to them, at a cost of £50,000. That is a great deal more than is warranted, on economic grounds, for a place with a population so small, relatively, as that of Port Hedland. I understand that the population is no more than about 300 people but to that number must be added the two or three hundred from the country thereabouts who go to Port Hedland, possibly because it is their seaside resort but more likely because it is their business centre. Although the cost stated at the moment is £50,000, most members will understand that that sum is likely to be fairly heavily exceeded for the reason that

the extreme shortage of piping will not allow the Government to start the job for some considerable time.

There has been constant trouble in the coalmines, and because of that there has been a shortage of steel plate, which in turn has caused a shortage of steel pipes. The shortage of steel pipes means that this particular job, and scores of other similar jobs throughout the State and throughout Australia, must bide their time.

The Minister for Education: You mean the coalmines of N.S.W.?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I want to make this point quite plain or else I am likely to see a trace of excitement on the opposite benches, that the trouble to which I am referring does not occur at Collie but it occurs all too frequently in certain parts of the Eastern States. I am not wishing to create the impression that the Opposition, when it was the Government, made no attempt whatever to meet the water supply needs of Port Hedland and other Northern towns. Over the lengthy period that I mentioned, the Opposition has put up attempts to get water from the Turner River, the 12-mile Creek, the 4-mile Creek, Boodarie Soak, Meeranda-ganna Pool, Moorambine Well, Toms Well and a number of other places. These attempts have been going on for the past 30 years or so and all possible sources of water have been investigated, but with either negative or dubious results.

Thus, briefly, I have referred to the position as I know it to exist at Port Hedland. I am anxious now that the member for Pilbara should agree to amend his motion so that it may accord with the suggested arrangement to which I have referred. I intend to move to amend the motion by deleting the words "laid upon the Table of the House" and insert in lieu the words "made available to the member for Pilbara." I move an amendment—

That the words "laid upon the Table of the House" be struck out.

On motion by Hon. A. H. Panton, debate adjourned.

BILL—BUSH FIRES ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 15th September.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. L. Thorn—Toodyay) [8.20]: I know that the member for York has introduced this Bill with the best of intentions and in an endeavour to assist the farming community who seek cover for their crops by way of insurance. The Bill aims to reduce such premiums by 25 per cent. where the particular road board district has a suitably equipped bush fire-fighting unit and brigade. However, I find difficulty in supporting the Bill because it bristles with problems. It provides for a declaration by the Minister of the whole of a district under the control of an applicant local authority as an approved area. The Bill, however, does not give him power to declare any less portion than the whole of the district.

It will be appreciated that in some of the huge areas covered by road boards there may be only one or two fire-fighting units in the whole of one area. Fires may occur in many parts of that district with no hope of fire-fighting units coming into operation to make a save as far as the farmer is concerned. Yet, in the face of that, the Bill requires the insurance companies to agree to a 25 per cent. reduction in their premiums if a particular road board area is approved by the Minister as having suitable fire-fighting units. How could the Minister possibly approve of that road board district being declared a suitable area?

Mr. Hoar: Could you not approve of a section of it?

The **MINISTER FOR LANDS**: No, under the Bill the Minister must approve of the whole road board district or none at all. That is where the difficulty comes in. To ask for a reduction in premiums when the Minister knows perfectly well that the protection is not offering, is not fair to the companies accepting the risks. This type of business is conducted on a competitive basis. The tariff companies admittedly have an agreement and they fix the rate for this class of insurance, but the non-tariff companies are competing and I know from information that the premiums do differentiate. I have been told that in one instance there may be a rate of 8s. per £100 and in another instance a rate of 10s. per £100 may be levied. That illustrates that the business is competitive. In the member for York's own district the Bruce Rock road board has two fire-fighting units only in the whole area.

Mr. Perkins: You are not right there.

The **MINISTER FOR LANDS**: I claim I am.

Mr. Perkins: Then your information is entirely wrong.

The **MINISTER FOR LANDS**: If the hon. member can prove that I am wrong I will be quite satisfied, but there is a very efficient set-up regarding bush fire brigades and the figures are taken from statistics submitted by local authorities.

Mr. Perkins: Then they are very old.

The **MINISTER FOR LANDS**: The hon. member has had his say. Corrigin, for instance, another important wheatgrowing area, has one unit, Cuballing has one unit, Cunderdin has five units, Dowerin has one and so on. They are all most important wheatgrowing areas yet they are by no means fully equipped.

Hon. A. A. M. Coverley: Which makes their insurance much higher.

The **MINISTER FOR LANDS**: The member for York admitted when introducing the Bill that the fire risk in the wheat-belt is gradually increasing. If that is the case, I want some very good ground for asking the insurance companies to reduce their premiums. I must have some evidence of the protection that the hon. member speaks about. At the last Royal Show I had the privilege of seeing those two fire-fighting units on exhibition. They were very fine units indeed, and quite capable of handling a decent sized fire provided the brigade was in the district and that facilities and men were available to get on the job quickly.

Mr. Kelly: Very few districts are equipped.

The **MINISTER FOR LANDS**: Yes, in the event of two or more outbreaks occurring simultaneously the efforts of the brigade would be almost futile, and the same circumstances might apply no matter how many units a district possessed. Under the provisions of the parent Act bush fire brigades are formed by a local authority and registered at the Lands Department. However, the Act does not stipulate the standard of equipment before such a brigade is registered. It only provides that its membership shall consist of no less than a captain, a first and second lieutenant, with as many additional members as the local authority may appoint. The equipment in

many cases is scattered about the various farms and may consist of knapsack sprays and rakes. The insurance business is conducted by the tariff companies and the non-tariff companies and, as I have already mentioned, it is conducted on a competitive basis. It can, therefore, be seen that with the different underwriters charging different rates those rates are competitive and it would be most difficult to approve of a straight-out reduction of 25 per cent. on all premiums charged.

The premiums are assessed on an actuarial basis from statistics and past experience. The advantage of organised bush fire brigades must be reflected in those figures which are available. I have been informed that they are examined from time to time, and the statistics of the different years taken into consideration as well as the number of fires and the damage caused, and the premiums are fixed on that basis. Section 7 of the Act provides for the appointment of an advisory committee and the representation on that committee is as follows:—One member from the Underwriters' Association, three members from the Road Board Association, the Under Secretary for Lands, the Chief Civil Engineer of the W.A.G.R., the Under Secretary for Agriculture and the Conservator of Forests. So members will see by the composition of the advisory committee, that local authorities are well represented and although this matter has come before this committee for consideration on many occasions, it has never seen fit to seek an amendment of the Act because they feel that it cannot be enforced. Their reasons are the same as I have already given, that is, that the fire-fighting equipment is not in the country districts—it is just not there—and so those districts have not a claim on the insurance companies in asking for this reduction of 25 per cent. in the premiums.

Mr. Perkins: Would it not be at the discretion of the Minister?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I admit that it would be at the discretion of the Minister but I would also say to the hon. member, "Why place legislation on our statute book when we know that we cannot operate it?" That is what I want to avoid and if the hon. member is prepared to reconsider the position and have a Bill drafted that will meet the situation, it will provide a different outlook altogether.

The clauses of this Bill, give no discretion at all and therefore I feel that I would have no other option but not to declare these road districts and so I repeat, "Why place this legislation on the statute book when we feel that we cannot operate it?" I say that in all sincerity. I remember discussions that we have had in the past as political parties whereby we have endeavoured in many ways to see if we could give some relief by way of reduced premiums to our farming community. I agree with that principle and I know that that is the principle which the hon. member has in mind in introducing this Bill. However, I again claim that the Bill does not bring about the desired effect that the hon. member wishes. The Bill also provides that the inspections are to be made by a forest officer. Again I do not feel that this is practical because it would be necessary to transport our forestry officers all through the wheatbelt inspecting equipment where necessary, which would be very difficult and rather expensive.

If this work is to be done it should be done in a practical way only. This fire-fighting equipment should be inspected only to make sure that it is in proper working order. Bush fire brigades are registered on behalf of the local authorities covering the greater part of the State, while the Forests Department is only interested in the State forests. This means that it would be rather an onerous job for a forest officer to have to inspect all brigades, and at the present time 323 of these have been registered. This inspection would also have to be undertaken each year as all brigades are registered voluntarily, with the result that applications for new brigades, in addition to cancellations of existing brigades, are being constantly received. Also, the standard of existing brigades may deteriorate. If this reduction of 25 per cent. were to become part of the Act it would mean that the additional money to come from the insurance companies would be in the form of a subsidy. If the insurance companies find that an Act of Parliament forces them to reduce their premiums by 25 per cent. and they know that they cannot possibly undertake this class of insurance at that premium rate there is nothing in the wide world to stop them increasing their premium rate; nothing at all, and they would be quite justified in doing it.

It is not often that I find myself fighting the battles of insurance companies, but if, under the conditions and under statistical figures they found that they could not cover this type of insurance at that rate of premium they would be quite within their rights in re-considering the premium rate and increasing it. As I said before, whilst I am in sympathy with the hon. member on the principles of the Bill I feel that in practice it will not bring about the desired effect. I hope he can see some reason in the points I have raised and I repeat that it is with no pleasure that I oppose the Bill. As far as I am concerned, until the hon. member can place more substantial evidence before this House that equipment will be provided in the country to justify this decrease in insurance premiums to the extent of 25 per cent., I feel that, I must oppose the Bill.

MR. KELLY (Yilgarn-Coolgardie) [8.38]: I have given a lot of consideration to the Bill and I am not fully satisfied that in its present form it will accomplish what the hon. member has set out to do. It is bristling with difficulties and I would not envy any Minister who was responsible for a measure drafted in the manner this one is. At the same time, I desire to express to the hon. member for York the co-operation to which I think he is entitled for introducing a measure designed to bring relief to the local governing authorities of the State to whom it would be applicable, and also to the many hundreds of farmers who are yearly paying very high premiums. If this Bill, or another Bill introduced on improved lines, were to accomplish the desired effect it would first be necessary for the equipment of many road boards to be brought to a uniform standard.

The Minister mentioned that difficulty would arise because of the many points and the great areas in some districts that would have to be policed by a measure of this kind. I think there are two ways of looking at that objection and one is that the districts which the Minister had in mind, where fully populated, would enable the insurance companies operating in that area to afford the decrease in premiums that the Bill desires to bring about. Again, if the districts were large and not thickly populated, that too would be covered, because the greater

portion of the district which was unpopulated would definitely not be a fair risk to any association or insurance company.

The subject-matter of this Bill has been frequently discussed by many of the local governing authorities and I think that over a period of years—long before coming to this Chamber and when I was associated with the Yilgarn Road Board—we had frequent approaches to the different insurance companies handling the business of the Yilgarn Road Board for some reduction in the premiums that were being paid by that board. However, on no occasion has much consideration been given to that board's requests, and repeatedly a negative answer has been received. This Bill must commend itself to this House because where these volunteer bush fire brigades have been working—and I can assure members that there is a vast amount of enthusiasm and application shown by the various boards who are represented in this matter—material assistance is rendered by them and the degree of risk is thus minimised in the various districts. Therefore, I feel that there is much to be said for either a reduction in premium or a reduction in some form by the insurance companies.

There is no doubt in my mind that any emphasis placed on the importance of the work performed by the various volunteer fire brigades cannot be overdone, and the underwriters should give serious consideration, even if this Bill does not succeed, to reducing the premiums, particularly in those areas where these brigades are operating. Again, the initial equipment is provided and the actual cost is being borne by the various local governing bodies which, in many instances, is met by a separate rate levied by some boards on the farmers in those districts. Therefore, as regards the road boards, I think it only right that they should seek on behalf of settlers some reduction in the premium. I do not think it is to the credit of the insurance companies that they have for so long side-stepped what I consider is an obligation on them to reduce premiums to reasonable limits. The member for York would be well advised to re-draft his Bill, and accept the assurance of the Minister that he would be prepared to give further consideration to a suitable measure providing for some form of relief.

MR. HOAR (Nelson) [8.46]: I was sorry to hear so much opposition from the Minister, although I appreciate many of the points he raised. No doubt there exists a number of difficulties which I feel sure the member for York has fully realised, but nevertheless most of the points raised by the Minister could be overcome by amending the Bill rather than by following the suggestion of the previous speaker and having a new measure brought down at a later date. If that course were followed, I fear that the Bill would not be likely to receive consideration this session.

I should like to think that some effort was being made by this House to resolve this problem, which had its origin, I suppose, long before bush fire brigades were thought of. To satisfy the Minister's mind on one point, let me refer to his remark that he was not aware of any bush fire brigades in the State that were of a standard of efficiency to justify the measure. I have only to refer him to portions of my electorate.

The Minister for Lands: I did not say that.

MR. HOAR: That is the impression I gathered.

The Minister for Lands: My point was that there are not sufficient bush fire brigades of that standard to warrant the Bill.

MR. HOAR: I appreciate the point he made that there are some districts so extensive in area that the existence of one brigade would not warrant the passing of such a measure. That is one of the things I had in mind when I suggested that the Bill could be suitably amended. Surely it is possible to zone districts according to the efficiency of the brigades within them so that they could come within the measure, rather than throw the Bill out.

The Minister for Lands: As a matter of fact your district has 22.

MR. HOAR: I am aware of that. The annual meeting has just been held. In the Upper Blackwood area 15 delegates from 15 districts met in Boyup Brook, and discussed equipment and means for ensuring efficiency and the planning out of zones for the coming summer. There is an area which in my opinion would be competent in every way to come under the provisions of the Bill.

The Minister for Lands: Your brigades would be engaged to a large extent in fighting forest fires, would they not?

MR. HOAR: No, I am referring to the Boyup Brook area which, by the way, has unwittingly been omitted by the member for York, but I hope it will be included when he realises that farmers growing flax pay the same insurance premium as do those growing wheat and other crops. In that area are fire-fighters who are keen in every way to protect themselves against the hazards of fire in their district. Rather than discuss this Bill in a hostile manner and wipe it out for the time being, we should support it, because it does seek to establish a principle that so far has never been recognised, namely that the bush fire brigades do indeed substantially reduce the fire hazards in their areas, and the fact that they do so must necessarily substantially reduce the claims on insurance companies and underwriters.

MR. PERKINS: That is the point.

MR. HOAR: That is the core of the Bill, for which the hon. member seeks recognition by this Chamber, and he is fully justified in so doing. It is not of much use appealing to underwriters or insurance companies. If we asked for a rebate or for a reduction in premium, we know what the answer would be. They are business men and it suits their book to have bush fire brigades working for them at no cost to themselves. There is no shadow of doubt that the activities of fire brigades in the country lead to the underwriters having far less to pay out annually in claims than they would have to pay if brigades were not established.

The Minister should not be unduly influenced by the opinions of the insurance companies, but should view the proposal in its true perspective. We should not start from any opinion expressed by an insurance company and work down to the farmer. We should start by considering the agricultural lands where the farmers are voluntarily engaging in fire-fighting for their own protection, but at the same time protecting the insurance companies and their investments. I believe that we have a good case because the work undertaken by fire-fighting units in various parts of the State is of great advantage to the insurance companies and underwriters, and there should be some reduction in the premiums to compensate these voluntary workers and en-

courage them to extend their efforts in this direction.

There is organised protection throughout my district at present, and nobody can tell me that all the work done each summer does not reduce the number of fires and the severity of damage by fires. Anyone who has had practical experience in the rural areas knows that many a crop, pasture, barn and home has been saved as a result of the efforts of these men, who often spend their weekends fighting fires on the properties of neighbours when otherwise they could be playing cricket or some other game, and they give up their time voluntarily because their hearts are in the work. I ask the Minister not to discard the Bill in a carefree manner, because the central core is valuable and it is a measure that could be amended.

MR. MARSHALL (Murchison) [8.54]: Whatever may be the fate of the measure, it should be obvious to members that some action ought to be taken by the Government to meet the situation disclosed by the member for York when moving the second reading. The Bush Fires Act has been on the statute-book for 10 years or more, and seemingly all it has accomplished has been to inspire those who wish to protect their own interests to organise themselves and provide protection for their properties. This is a very noble and worthy cause. On many occasions these voluntary workers assist to prevent destruction on the properties of their neighbours, and it would be interesting to know from members representing the wheatgrowing districts how many fires have thus been extinguished and the estimated value of the savings made.

An individual, when protecting his own property, is really providing profits for the insurance companies, because every bushel of wheat or stook of hay saved by his efforts represents a benefit absorbed by the insurance companies without any liability on their part. That is a lesson I have learnt from the introduction of this Bill. I hope I am on the right track.

Mr. Perkins: Entirely.

MR. MARSHALL: So I feel with the member for Nelson that it is not fair for the Minister simply to say that this is impossible, that that is impracticable and that something else cannot be done, and that the Government will in due time give considera-

tion to other means of meeting these requirements. If we do not take action we shall carry on for another 10, 15 or perhaps 20 years, as we have done in the last 10 years. So long as these people protect their own interests, nothing will be done to assist them, and wealthy and elaborate institutions like insurance companies will prosper at the expense of these individuals.

If these individuals merely protected their own interests and did not at the same time safeguard the profits of insurance companies, I should have little to say about the Bill, but I am prepared to do what I can to compel the Government to give some support to the measure. Even if we passed the Bill and it contained some provisions that appeared to be impracticable, it could remain on the statute-book inactive, as the parent Act has done, and then some day we may be able to force another Government to take action. The parent Act has been a dead letter insofar as affording relief to the farmer is concerned. He takes all the risk and, when fires occur, does all the work to the benefit of the insurance companies.

If we make up our minds to take action, something can be done, but it would have been better had the Government agreed to meet the wishes of the member for York. I am prepared to support the Bill on this ground alone, that if it is placed on the statute-book we may be able to force the Government to do at least a semblance of justice to the farmers who apparently are expected to do all the work to make profits for the insurance companies.

On motion by Mr. Ackland, debate adjourned.

MOTION—WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT.

To Disallow Amendment to Regulation 9.

Debate resumed from the 8th September on the following motion by Mr. Marshall:—

That the amendment of Regulation 9, made under the Workers' Compensation Act, 1912-1944, published in the "Government Gazette" of the 16th July, 1948, and laid upon the Table of the House on the 28th July, 1948, be and is hereby disallowed.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION (Hon. A. F. Watts—Katanning) [9.0]: I think there is only one part of the observations of the member for Murchison that were made a fortnight ago that I can

readily agree with, and that was where he stated in effect that he was convinced that the Minister in charge of the Workers' Compensation Act was not sufficiently inhuman to do something that was going to react to the great detriment of the worker, which he alleged had been done in the alteration to this regulation. I can assure both him and the House that there was certainly neither any intention to do any such thing to any worker involved under these regulations; nor, in actual effect, has any such thing been done. There were very sound reasons for the alteration of this regulation, which I think, upon explanation, will satisfy the hon. member and be acceptable to members generally.

The point is that the regulation provided that if an employer disputed a certificate which was received from the worker's medical adviser, he could, within seven days after receiving it, give notice to the worker and the clerk of courts that there was a dispute and that he desired the matter referred to a medical board. There was a proviso that the clerk of courts might extend that period of seven days by ten days, making a maximum period after the receipt by the employer of the certificate of the worker's medical adviser of 17 days. If within that period of 17 days, for reasons I will mention in a few moments, the employer was unable to decide whether there should be a dispute and a reference to the medical board, the employer was under the obligation to pay the amount of compensation which might amount to as high as £750, without any further prospect of redress.

Why was it that that state of affairs could have arisen? Western Australia is of course a very large area. Goldmining is carried on in widely scattered parts of the State. Although the regulations deal with all compensable industrial disease cases, the vast majority of such cases are those which claim compensation in respect of the industrial disease of silicosis. As a matter of fact there has been no case brought before a medical board under Regulation 9, so I am informed, which did not deal with silicosis. When a claim is put in, the certificate which is obtained by the worker, must, in all instances away from the city of Kalgoorlie, be obtained from the worker's own medical adviser. The employer is entitled, and very properly, to rely on the certificate

of the medical officer in charge of the Commonwealth Health Laboratory at Kalgoorlie. In consequence, when the employer receives this certificate from the medical adviser of the worker, he is obliged, in order to decide whether a dispute should take place, to submit the matter to the medical officer in charge of the Health Laboratory at Kalgoorlie—who is responsible for the medical examination of all miners when entering the industry; who undertakes at varying periods afterwards the examination of such miners again; and who is recognised as the authority on silicosis in this State.

The worker himself, by a little delay—and this, I am advised, has happened in one or two cases—is able to run through the 17 days without the slightest difficulty; because no certificate which would enable the employer to judge his position would be issued by the officer in charge of the Commonwealth Health Laboratory unless and until the examination had taken place. So by the time the worker has forwarded his certificate to the employer, and the employer has approached the medical officer of the Health Laboratory and the worker has been called up and transported to Kalgoorlie at the employer's expense, 17 days have actually expired in a number of cases before the certificate of the medical officer in charge of the Health Laboratory has been available to the employer.

Mr. Marshall: Why would the employee have to go to Kalgoorlie before the medical board is created?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: The employer is entitled to obtain—very properly, I think, in order to ascertain whether he should claim there is a dispute—a certificate as to the incidence of this disease in the individual case from the medical officer in charge of the Commonwealth Health Laboratory at Kalgoorlie, which is recognised as the authority on silicosis in this State.

Mr. Marshall: That is not provided for in these regulations.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: It is not provided for in the regulations; but there is no possibility of the employer's establishing his dispute or any ground for it successfully unless he can obtain such certificate. In the absence of such certificate, or if no such certificate is obtainable

that the worker is not suffering from silicosis, the claim, I understand, is always paid. In those cases where the laboratory certificate states that the claimant was not incapacitated by industrial disease, a dispute exists, which dispute must be determined by a medical board appointed under the provisions of Subsection 9 of Section 7 of the Act; but if there has been a lapse of time on the lines I have indicated, quite outside the control of the employer, he is consequently debarred from having the case determined by a board. I am going to give the hon. member and the House two or three cases where this delay has arisen. They are as follows:—

S. Lalich. Medical certificate received from the claimant on the 4th March. Medical certificate not received from the Kalgoorlie laboratory until the 25th March.

That was 21 days later, and therefore four days over the maximum time within which the dispute might be claimed.

I. Turich. Medical certificate from the claimant received on the 14th February. Certificate from the laboratory received on the 20th March.

G. Bogunovich. Claimant's medical certificate received on the 11th February. Medical certificate from Kalgoorlie received on the 25th March.

In each case the delay was due to the fact that the Laboratory officer in charge required the claimant to visit Kalgoorlie for the purposes of examination. As I said, there was no actual evidence in these cases, but it could have been possible by a little delay on the part of the claimant in reaching Kalgoorlie for a great portion of the 17 days allowed to be wasted. It will be seen, therefore, that in view of past experience some amendment of the regulation was justified. The statement was made that the claimant does not receive compensation until the dispute is settled. In actual fact, I am informed, in very few instances do the men cease work on the mine until their claim has been determined and, in any event, compensation is made retrospective to the date of the worker's medical certificate or the day following the date of ceasing work. Any delay therefore certainly does not benefit the employer; and as the payment is made retrospective, or alternatively the worker did not leave his employment until the claim was determined, it does not react to the detriment of the worker.

The member for Murchison in pointing out the amendment to the regulation indicated that, in his opinion, because of it the clerk of courts would be able to permit an absolutely unlimited time and therefore postpone the finalisation of the decision on the matter indefinitely. As I said, the regulation as originally gazetted provided for seven days, with a maximum allowance which the clerk of courts could give of an extra ten days, making 17 days in all. I believe I have reasonably established that that 17 days' period was certainly not sufficient; that there were a number of cases where it was absolutely necessary, in order that a fair opportunity might be afforded both parties of settling their respective positions, that that time should be lengthened; and I have indicated quite clearly that the lengthening of that time does not benefit the employer financially nor cause the worker to suffer in the same way. Now the regulation provides that the clerk of courts may, on good cause being shown, extend the period within which the said notice by the employer may be given after the one month now proposed as being the first period of time allowed by the regulation, and that such extension may be granted although the said period of one month should have already expired.

To suggest that the clerks of courts in every case are going to grant some unreasonable extension of time is first of all to lose sight of the fact that they are by this regulation only to grant this extension on good cause being shown; and then to indicate that the persons appointed as clerks of courts, so far from being in all cases, that I am aware of, and certainly in by far the great majority of cases, responsible officers of the State, anxious to ensure that impartial justice is done, are people who would readily make themselves available to some chicanery which would have the effect of injuring the workers' rights. I do not think the House, from its knowledge of clerks of court, can bring itself to believe that that is so. I am convinced that there would be no case in which the employer would get an extension over and above the month unless he could show that he had taken every reasonable action to ensure that the necessary documents were available to enable him to decide whether he proposed to dispute the claim within that time.

I am also convinced that the clerk of court would require to know within what time it was expected the documents would be available. It is clear—I think it is substantiated by the figures I gave—in one case, that of Mr. Bogunovich, that the medical certificate was received on the 11th February from the claimant, and the certificate from the Commonwealth Health Laboratory was not received until the 25th March, a matter of 42 days later. That shows that it might be necessary to extend the time beyond the period of one month. And so I submit there is absolutely no evidence of a tangible or practical nature that this regulation is likely in any way to deprive the worker of any rights or injure him in the recovery of his just dues, or enable the employer to take undue advantage of the delay, which is not his responsibility. The employer is not responsible for the issue of certificates from the health laboratory, but he is entitled to obtain those certificates before he enters upon a dispute with the worker as to whether he is prepared to admit the claim for compensation.

I therefore suggest that, in view of the experience of the State Insurance Office, in particular, of the incidence of the regulation as it existed, the House is justified in rejecting the motion of the member for Murchison and in allowing this regulation, which is aimed at settling the position in such a way that there will be no hardship on either side, to remain as a regulation in force and effect.

MR. MARSHALL (Murchison—in reply) [9.18]: The debate seems to have developed into a difference of opinion between the Minister and me. I am sorry the Minister is not well informed on the situation.

The Minister for Education: I think I am.

MR. MARSHALL: The Minister has not by any means a grip of the situation. He has not even reached the verge of it. I challenge the Minister, or any departmental officer, to show me where, in this Act or these regulations, after the employer has received from the employee the medical certificate claiming compensation, the former has the right to direct the employee to go to the Kalgoorlie Health Laboratory. Where is that provided for?

The Minister for Education: The laboratory does it.

MR. MARSHALL: The laboratory has nothing to do with it. I wished to know why this change was being made, and in the whole of my experience—I was in this House before these regulations were promulgated and before the measure became an Act of Parliament—I have never met such a case. These regulations and this section of the Act apply to all industries.

The Minister for Education: Yes.

MR. MARSHALL: And not just to the Kalgoorlie laboratory or to the miners.

The Minister for Education: No such dispute has taken place for many years except in respect of claims with relation to silicosis.

MR. MARSHALL: An employee of Cum-
ing Smith's might contract a complaint disabling him from further employment in his occupation. He would submit a certificate from a medical practitioner to the effect that he was entitled to compensation, having contracted one of the diseases mentioned in the first column of the Third Schedule of the Workers' Compensation Act. He would submit that to the employer who, in turn, might dispute it under Subsection (9) of Section 7 of the Act. Would the employer then have the right to send the employee to the Kalgoorlie laboratory?

The Minister for Education: No, but I approached the matter on the basis that no case except with relation to silicosis has been dealt with under Subsection (9) for many years.

MR. MARSHALL: That is why I warned every member representing individuals employed in industry within the categories covered by the Third Schedule to be watchful of these regulations.

The Minister for Education: Do you suppose a clerk of court would grant an extension if there was no need for it?

MR. MARSHALL: I do not know what a clerk of court might do.

The Minister for Education: We must have confidence in somebody.

MR. MARSHALL: My point is that the whole of the Minister's contribution in defence of these regulations was based upon the fact that it was an obligation under them for the employer, when he received the certificate from the employee, to send that individual to the Kalgoorlie Health Laboratory.

The Minister for Education: I said nothing of the kind. I said the employer could not base his dispute until he had a certificate.

Mr. MARSHALL: None of these regulations—I know them well—gives the employer the right to dictate to the employee.

The Minister for Education: The employer does not do it. He simply asks the laboratory at Kalgoorlie if it can give a certificate and the laboratory asks the worker to attend for examination.

Mr. MARSHALL: I tried to explain the position when I moved to disallow the regulation. Subsection (9) of Section 7 of the Workers' Compensation Act provides that the employer shall have only the right to dispute a medical certificate from an employee.

The Minister for Housing: I think you are putting up a legal quibble.

Mr. Styants: And putting it up in a decent fashion.

Hon. A. H. Panton: By one who knows.

Mr. MARSHALL: I would tell the Minister that recently it cost me 12 guineas for a legal quibble and I only wish I could earn money at the same rate; I would not be here too long. If it is a legal quibble it is definitely what is set out in the regulation. Under the authority this particular employer has when he receives that certificate he can dispute it and, if he does so, he has the right under the regulation to make the necessary representation for an organisation to create a medical tribunal consisting of three doctors. That is all the right he has and that is the finish of his authority.

The Minister for Education: What is the use of his going to the trouble of getting the certificate?

Mr. MARSHALL: It is no good the Minister asking about that now; I am not worried about certificates. The Kalgoorlie authorities have no jurisdiction under this regulation. It is the medical board that has the final say.

The Minister for Education: Then the Kalgoorlie authorities are just wasting their time.

Mr. MARSHALL: Even an individual has no right to send a certificate to the Kalgoorlie Laboratory when he disputes it and the workers' compensation organisation has

no right to spend money for that purpose either. Neither has it the authority to spend money to give the employer the right to save his purse by getting the State Insurance Office to have the examination made at the Kalgoorlie Laboratory, when under this regulation all the power and authority he has is to refer it to a medical board. It is this process of getting it to the board to which I take exception. The Minister has not a grip of the situation at all.

The Minister for Education: Yes he has; a very excellent grip.

Mr. MARSHALL: I agree with the Minister to this extent: I do not suppose a clerk of courts or a friendly society would deliberately delay, but this provision—whether the State Insurance Office interprets it in the same way as the Minister does or otherwise—is definitely wrong, because it does not set out the position to provide compensation for an employee but to investigate whether the employer is liable. That question is then decided by a medical board, and if the board decides the employer is liable then it must determine whether he shall pay the compensation or not.

The Minister for Education: The employer does not want to start the dispute.

Mr. MARSHALL: Through these regulations the employer has the right to call for a medical board, but he has no right to go to the Kalgoorlie Laboratory nor is the right given to the State Insurance Office to do so.

The Minister for Education: It is a long-standing custom.

Mr. MARSHALL: I know that. If the Minister had said that before, the argument would have been shortened.

The Minister for Education: I did not say the regulation gave the right; I said it was the practice.

Mr. MARSHALL: The practice should be stopped immediately because it is the employer's liability to pay those costs. The Minister is now granting a month instead of a fortnight. He made another mistake. He said the maximum time is 17 days but it is more than that, due to the wording of the regulation which reads as follows:—

Provided that the Clerk of the Court may, on good cause being shown, extend in any case by not more than ten days the period within which the said notice by the employer may be

given; and such extension may be granted, although the said period of seven days shall have already expired.

So at the expiration of 17 days the clerk of courts could quite easily grant him another 17 days extension. That is the position. Actually, there is no limit to what can happen as this regulation is very wide.

The Minister for Education: There was no limit before and there is no limit now, according to you.

Mr. MARSHALL: We have some protection as the regulation now stands. If the Minister deletes the words "not more than ten days" then we have no protection; but, if that is done, we do not know when the employee's claim for compensation will be decided. I am sorry the Minister came forward with this argument. I wanted to know why this was to be done and how it would affect miners working in the outer goldfields. If there is any argument as to whether they have contracted silicosis or not, that can be decided without the interference of the employer because the miners are examined at least once every two years. Seemingly we are making provision, without legal sanction, for employers to send any person who claims compensation from them to some doctor or to the Kalgoorlie laboratory.

The Minister for Education: That is the only case.

Mr. MARSHALL: It will not be the only case because there will be places like Cuming Smith's, the Welshpool and other industries whose employees may contract one of the diseases mentioned in the Third Schedule, and the regulation may operate more freely there than on the Goldfields because we have some protection.

The Minister for Housing: Is it not to a man's interests to go to the laboratory and be examined?

Mr. MARSHALL: Yes, but what I take exception to is an employer having the right to send employees there before he accepts liability.

The Minister for Education: He does not do it.

Mr. MARSHALL: All that the regulations do is to provide for a board to be brought into existence to establish whether or not an employer is liable to pay compensation. No reference is made to the Kalgoorlie laboratory. When a dispute occurs, these

regulations provide the machinery for settling it. Those are the cases the Minister desires to get over, but in fairness he should amend the regulation to apply to the outer Goldfields only. For those in close proximity to Kalgoorlie, facilities are already available and the regulation will be far too comprehensive.

The Minister for Education: I think yours is an unwarranted fear, but nevertheless I will give that point consideration.

Mr. MARSHALL: If it were the North-West and the outer Goldfields that were causing the State Insurance Office concern, we might take no exception to the amended regulation applying there but, for the immediate vicinity of Kalgoorlie, the original regulation should stand because it is elastic and very liberal, having regard to the wording. I wanted the Minister to explain what has inspired the proposed amendment. In all my experience I have not been called upon to use that section of the Act or these regulations, and I think I have been asked to take action under all other parts of the Act and mainly under the Third Schedule. The employer has no legal right to use this section of the Act or the regulations to send an employee to the Kalgoorlie laboratory, especially at the expense of the State Insurance Office, because these regulations provide for the introduction of a medical tribunal, no more and no less. If the Minister gives further consideration to the regulations, he will probably find a way to overcome the difficulty. The Minister would be definitely wrong in allowing the State Insurance Office to pay the expenses of a man to go to the Kalgoorlie laboratory when the regulations provide for the appointment of a medical tribunal consisting of three doctors. In view of the Minister's assurance that he will consider the matter, I ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

MOTION—ELECTRICITY ACT.

To Disallow Supply Authorities' Fees Regulation.

Debate resumed from the 15th September, on the following motion by Mr. Cornell:—

That new Regulation No. 278 made under the Electricity Act, 1945, published in the "Government Gazette" of the 25th March, 1948, and laid upon the Table of the House on the 27th July, 1948, be and is hereby disallowed.

MR. KELLY (Yilgarn-Coolgardie) [9.35]: Having heard the member for Avon moving the motion I felt that it would probably be passed after a short contribution by the Minister, but I was astounded to find the Minister raising objection. After listening to his speech, I came to the conclusion that he had not advanced one real reason to justify a continuance of the regulation.

The Minister for Works: I offered the hon. member what he asked for.

Mr. KELLY: Then it took the Minister a long time to do so.

The Minister for Works: I spoke for a brief period, but gave the undertaking he wanted.

Mr. KELLY: It took me half an hour to read the Minister's remarks.

The Minister for Works: Then you must be a slow reader.

Mr. KELLY: The Minister told the House that the bulk of the regulations were a carry-over from the war years. This being so, I consider it an excellent reason why the regulations should be amended and why in some cases they should be disallowed. Last session this House disallowed a number of the regulations, and rightly so. The Minister went on to say that both Houses must take some responsibility for the launching of these regulations. I do not know that members on either side of the House would have any objection to that so long as they were free to deal with them. Anyhow I consider that the motion by the member for Avon was a step in the right direction.

In my opinion the reasons offered by the Minister for opposing the motion carry no weight. He proceeded to cloud the issue, but directed most of his remarks to the annual payment of 5s. and made much of that point.

The Minister for Works: That was the only major objection the hon. member raised to the regulation.

Mr. KELLY: The major objection to the regulation is the 1s. registration fee.

The Minister for Works: That has been removed.

Mr. KELLY: But there are 54 authorities that do not come under it. The Minister will recall that 57 were given the benefit of that 1s. last session when the regula-

tion was disallowed at the instance of the member for Murchison so that they do not come into the picture at all on this occasion. It is on behalf of the other 54 stations that the member for Avon introduced this motion. I think the Minister must, therefore, admit that he was trying to cloud the position by making far too much play about the 5s. fee rather than about the more important regulation under which these various supply authorities are asked to contribute 1s. per consumer per year.

Mr. Marshall: In my district, the fee is 1s. 5d.

Mr. KELLY: The hon. member's district may be privileged in that respect.

Mr. Marshall: Persecuted, not privileged.

Mr. KELLY: The Minister, in trying to justify this fee of 1s., intimated that the Commission was not required to give a great deal in return for it.

The Minister for Works: I did not say that at all. You cannot possibly read that into what I said.

Mr. KELLY: I read very thoroughly what the Minister said.

The Minister for Works: I gave you a list of the benefits that were given in return for that payment.

Mr. KELLY: I have not completed what the Minister said. He said that not only was the Commission not required to give a great deal, but that—and he emphasised this—it did give a great deal in return.

The Minister for Works: That is all right.

Mr. KELLY: The Minister should have waited until I had reached that point. He went on to say that the return was by way of expert staff and answers to a host of technical questions. All the stations now operating were in existence before the Commission and could obtain all the information they required from the distributing agents of the various types of plant and equipment to be found in these stations. The assistance to which the Minister referred has always been available to them.

The Minister for Works: It might have been the kind of assistance one gets from high-pressure salesmen, information that is not always reliable.

Mr. KELLY: They would naturally be keen to give accurate information.

The Minister for Works: No.

Mr. KELLY: And helpful information on most occasions, if not on all. The Minister further credited the Commission with having a complete inventory of all plant and equipment. How did the Commission get it? In only one way, by application to the 111 stations which, each in turn, gave the Commission the information and stated what its requirements would be.

The Minister for Works: Was the Commission not justified in taking the word of the supply authorities?

Mr. KELLY: Is the Minister justified in informing the House that the 1s. fee is in payment for wonderful information that the Commission is amassing? In my opinion, this is not relevant to the motion.

The Minister for Works: I am not permitted to speak again, but you may approach me privately.

Mr. KELLY: The Minister is having a fair bit to say, anyhow. He also said—

I believe some objections are being raised to the registration of those who repair electrical apparatus, but we would be foolish to agree to any move to do away with that regulation. I do not think the collective good sense of the House will allow that to be done, whatever may be in the minds of a few members.

I cannot understand the Minister's making that remark, as there is nothing relevant to it in Regulation 278. So the remark would appear to be another red herring drawn across the trail. I ask the House to disregard it.

The Minister for Works: A similar regulation is in force in all the other States of the Commonwealth, and I believe in other countries of the world also.

Mr. KELLY: Because the other States have made a mistake, that is no reason why we should. It is a good reason why we should make up our own minds. If we find our local governing bodies are being adversely affected by this regulation, then it is time the Minister fell into line and agreed to its disallowance. There is no means by which the 54 supply authorities I have mentioned can get anything out of the fee payable under the regulation we are seeking to have disallowed. It has been the subject of much

discussion by the various supply authorities, and I have received many requests from them to support the motion. I have much pleasure in doing so.

MR. MARSHALL (Murehison) [9.47]: As I was one of the members who took some action in regard to these regulations last session when they were introduced, I feel obliged now to make some reference to the one under discussion, although it has since been re-drafted. I still am very strongly opposed to it, and always will be. Last year I told the Minister I did not consider it fair, proper, right or just to impose this extra financial liability upon the small stations spread over the whole State.

The Minister for Works: You realise that, as far as the small stations are concerned, the charges have been lifted?

Mr. MARSHALL: Yes, to the extent of those stations which have less than 120 consumers.

The Minister for Works: Yes.

Mr. MARSHALL: Apart from them, no.

The Minister for Works: You would not exempt them all?

Mr. MARSHALL: That is where we differ.

The Minister for Works: You did not differ on that point last year.

Mr. MARSHALL: The Electricity Commission desires to rope in all and sundry, in order that it might have extra money to employ draftsmen who cannot see beyond the Darling Range, and in order to draft more regulations and get Acts amended to apply to those on one side of the Darling Range, but not to those on the other side. This House should not be prepared to give the Commission finance to keep a staff constantly persecuting the people who live in the back-blocks and are trying to develop industries there. There is one privately-owned supply station in my electorate but most of the others are controlled by local authorities; and I think we are unlucky in that we have just over 120 consumers.

I would not be prepared to support any regulation for the imposition of this tax on any authority that has less than 500 consumers. We pay 1s. 5d. and 1s. 6d. a unit for electricity; and although this is a very small premium, as the Minister would say, being 1d. per month, unfortunately on

every occasion when a seller or a supply authority has justification for increasing the price, that price is invariably increased to a greater extent than was anticipated, because it is argued that fractions cannot be considered. Take the tariff on tobacco! An increase is made per pound but buy it by the ounce and see how much the increase is! The increase then becomes about three times as much. The same thing will happen in this instance; though it is only 1d. per month by the end of the year it will be a great deal more.

The Minister for Works: Where will it come from?

Mr. MARSHALL: The supply authority will impose it. The supply authority will not pay it.

The Minister for Works: You realise that there is protection under the regulations. How can they put it on before next year because—

Mr. MARSHALL: I do not care what year it is—

The Minister for Works: Of course you do not care, but what you have said is not correct.

Mr. MARSHALL: It is correct. The supply authority will pass this on.

The Minister for Works: That is not the point. You said the Electricity Commission would increase the amount. I say that you are protected by the regulations. You say you are not.

Mr. MARSHALL: I am talking about the supply authority passing it on to the consumer, not the Electricity Commission.

The Minister for Works: That may easily be so.

Mr. MARSHALL: I am pointing out that in every case where there is an increase in a tax the seller always asks more of the consumer than the actual tax or tariff imposed. The supply authority will pass this on. I admit the 5s. per annum is of little consequence, but the 1s. per head per consumer will be of consequence to these small centres.

The Minister for Works: I have said several times that in regard to the small authorities it has been taken off. There is no question of passing it on.

Mr. MARSHALL: The smaller power stations have not had it removed. I do not

agree with the Minister. The tax should not be imposed on any centre with under 500 consumers.

The Minister for Works: You are unreasonable. A halt must be called somewhere.

Mr. MARSHALL: Make it 500 consumers and I would be prepared to agree.

The Minister for Works: The Commission would have no income at all.

Mr. MARSHALL: That would be just too bad! Let the Minister look at the Estimates and he will find that £42,000 has gone overboard to keep the Commission in existence and it has not generated a unit.

The Minister for Works: You are moving to the absurd.

Mr. MARSHALL: The Commission is busy enough making regulations. It has not created anything except annoyance by constantly hampering people. We are getting too much regulation and control. I thought members opposite would discard such things when they took office, but they have imposed greater controls than the Labour Party. Members opposite are unappeasable. We cannot satisfy their hunger for controls.

Mr. Bovell: Who made these regulations?

Mr. MARSHALL: I do not give a continental—

The Minister for Works: The hon. member assisted more than anyone else.

Mr. MARSHALL: I never did.

The Minister for Works: Pardon me!

Mr. MARSHALL: I give this undertaking: that if I had known that these regulations had been tabled, I would have moved for the disallowance of more of them.

The Minister for Works: You were not wide awake.

Mr. MARSHALL: We have far too much government by regulation. We seem to have no other purpose than to create regulations.

The Minister for Works: You have had that sort of thing since Parliament started.

Mr. MARSHALL: Well I am starting to go the other way.

Mr. Bovell: Come over here.

Mr. MARSHALL: Let the hon. member come over here and vote against these regulations.

Hon. A. H. Panton: The Legislative Council has wiped them out.

Mr. MARSHALL: Someone has said, "Thank God for the Legislative Council!" We in the backblocks are paying enough for electricity now, and I compliment the member for Avon in moving for the disallowance of this regulation.

HON. A. R. G. HAWKE (Northam) [9.55]: I am sorry the member for Avon condemned the members of the Electricity Commission in such a severe manner because, from personal association with the members of that Commission, I am sure that they in no way deserve some of the language he employed to condemn them. For instance, at one stage he said that they were high-handed bureaucrats churning out reams of regulations and none of them had received Parliamentary sanction. Under the procedure that applies to regulations, no regulation can receive Parliamentary sanction until it has, in the classical language of the member for Avon, been churned out.

Mr. Cornell: I would say they have been approved by default.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: A regulation is churned out in the first place, and after it is so churned out it receives the consideration of the appropriate Minister. If it passes his examination successfully and is of sufficient importance, it has to be considered by the Government as a whole; and if it is then approved by Cabinet, it has to be published in the "Government Gazette," and as early as possible comes before Parliament for consideration. The hon. member also referred to members of the Commission in his super classical way as "this bunch of blundering bureaucrats." The efforts of the hon. member on the basis of alliteration were quite special ones, but I suggest to him and to other members that condemnation of this kind is in no way justified. I am not aware whether members know that the chairman of this Commission is the Director of Works, Mr. Dumas. Every one who knows Mr. Dumas and has had experience of him and with him will know he is a most reasonable individual and a highly qualified and capable individual. He is one who has done great things for Western Australia and who will continue to do similar things for this State.

The Minister for Housing: Hear, hear!

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I suggest that it must be most discouraging to a man of his capacity to find that even one member of Parliament would be so unjust as to refer to him in the language I have just quoted. I am sure, too, that Mr. Dumas, in his capacity as chairman of this Commission, would be the strongest member of it, and would exercise very great influence in its deliberations. He would not be out to impose unjust burdens on electric power supply authorities, irrespective of whether they were located in the metropolitan area, in the near country areas, or in the most outback portions of the State. Neither would he, in my judgment, impose any unreasonable financial burden or penalty upon those supply authorities, or the consumers who trade with them. This Commission has been given very great and far-reaching authority, and it has a vital and comprehensive task to tackle and, if possible, to carry through successfully.

It is the first time in the history of Western Australia that this problem has been tackled in a skilled and comprehensive way. Although individual electric power authorities throughout the State might not have gained any material advantage up to date from the existence and activities of the State Electricity Commission, I am convinced, as a result of my knowledge and experience, that such authorities will, with the passing of time, reap increasing advantages, financial and technical, from the fact that the Commission operates, and because it will continually come into possession of valuable information in connection with the generation and distribution of electric power. The Commission is constantly obtaining the most up-to-date information available from all parts of the world. It will, as time goes on, co-operate even more fully with all supply authorities throughout the country and, as a result, it is quite certain that every supply authority in the State will benefit from the information and practical assistance that will be made available to them by the Commission. It is, of course, natural that any authority or individual when called upon to hand out 1s., £1 or £5, as the case may be, feels some reluctance.

We have the same situation, in a much larger sphere, in Australia as a whole when the Commonwealth Treasurer im-

poses taxation, because most people complain about having to pay it. They say that their money is being taken by way of taxes and they are not getting anything in return. I quite understand the reluctance of at least some local authorities to be at all satisfied or happy about paying the amount proposed to the State Electricity Commission. They are not anxious to pay out any money at all to the Commission, but would prefer that the traffic should all the time be the other way—that the Commission should be expending its funds, as obtained from various sources, and that the local supply authorities all over the State should be getting the financial and technical advantages that would accrue from the expenditure of large sums of money in obtaining increasingly up-to-date information about power generation and distribution. I am satisfied in my own mind that local authorities will, and in the not distant future in the great majority of cases, obtain more than fair value for the amount which they will be called upon to pay under these regulations.

The Minister for Works: That has been the general experience in other parts, too.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: I admit that this regulation, as tabled last year, was somewhat excessive, inasmuch as there was no exemption in regard to the smallest supply authority. But I think the greatest ground for objection to last year's regulation was in the fact that there was a minimum which the biggest power supply authority would be called upon to pay.

The Minister for Works: I agreed to remove that, and did remove it.

Hon. A. R. G. HAWKE: That, in my opinion, was extremely unjust, because the regulations were most generous towards the biggest supply authority in the State which, of course, is the wealthiest, and which could afford to pay £2,000 or more, ever so much more easily than some of the very small authorities could afford to pay £5 or perhaps even £3. However, those two vital objections—as contained in last year's regulation have been overcome this year and I therefore find myself unable to raise any serious objection to the regulations as framed. I desire to indicate my intention to vote against the motion.

MR. PERKINS (York) [10.8]: I intend to support the member for Avon in this

matter. Neither the Minister nor any other member has made clear what advantages any of these local authorities receive in return for the capitation fee they are called upon to pay to the State Electricity Commission. From instances that I know of where local supply authorities have called on the State Electricity Commission for advice, that advice has been given, but if any expenditure has been incurred by the Commission, the local authority has been called upon to recoup the amount.

The Minister for Works: That has occurred in certain cases, but not all.

Mr. PERKINS: In one specific instance that I know of, it did occur.

The Minister for Works: That might well be. They were travelling expenses, perhaps.

Mr. PERKINS: Yes, partly travelling expenses. If these charges are going to be raised against the local authorities when they require advice, then why raise against them the fees that are mentioned here? If, whenever the State Electricity Commission is out of pocket, because of advice or any other assistance that it is required to give to a local supply authority, it is going to make a charge, surely that should be sufficient to recoup it without the addition of an annual capitation fee. For some reason there has been a bit of conflict between the State Electricity Commission and certain of the local supply authorities. I know that some of those authorities in this State regard the advice given them by the State Electricity Commission as bad. In some cases where that advice was accepted, wholly or in part, the authorities concerned consider that it cost them money, in view of later expense that they had to incur in order to bring other plans into operation.

The Minister for Works: Will you name those cases so that I can check up on their correctness?

Mr. PERKINS: I do not know that it would be of any use to do that at this stage. Some of those cases have been raised with the department, but it has made no effort to rectify the position. There was the case of the Bruce Rock Road Board, which at one stage wished to buy certain generating units from the Commonwealth Disposals Commission. It was advised by the State Electricity Commission that the units were unsuitable and that it should wait for other equipment. The other equipment was ob-

tained at a later stage, but at a capital cost so much greater that that authority has serious doubts whether it would not have been better advised to have bought the units from the Disposals Commission in defiance of the advice of the State Electricity Commission.

The Minister for Works: I am glad you admit there is some doubt about it.

Mr. PERKINS: If the advice of the State Electricity Commission is as authoritative as the Minister would have the House believe, it should not be possible for such doubts to arise.

The Minister for Works: It must be borne in mind that in this case someone was dissatisfied.

Mr. PERKINS: That is not the material point. I mention it only in passing, as it does not enter into this argument to any great extent. Either the Minister or some other member should state specifically what advantages local supply authorities are to receive in return for this capitation fee. The member for Avon put forward a good case in bringing the motion for the disallowance of the regulation before the House. I have no doubt he has other material with which to buttress his case and rebut certain of the statements made by the Minister when speaking against the motion. However, I can leave that to the member for Avon to state for himself. Unless the Minister or some other member states what advantages are to be received in return for the capitation fee I and perhaps many other members will vote in support of the motion.

THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING (Hon. R. R. McDonald—West Perth) [10.15]: I do not think the Minister has opportunity of intervening further in the debate, as he has already spoken, and I cannot speak with authority in reply to the question raised by the member for York, but I would join with the Acting Leader of the Opposition in saying that I regret the terms in which the member for Avon referred to members of the Commission. I understand and appreciate his right and duty to raise issues of this kind, especially where apparently a number of local supply authorities in the country areas have questioned the propriety of a charge of this kind being levied by the State Electricity Commission, but it is important to remember and appreciate that the Commission is composed of

men of responsibility—charged with a great duty—who are endeavouring to carry out their functions and are doing so with real ability.

In particular I join with the Acting Leader of the Opposition in his remarks about the Chairman of the Commission, Mr. Dumas, because I have been long enough in my present position to know that there are few public servants with such ability and such singleness of purpose in pursuing and furthering the development of the State. The Electricity Commission is an organisation the importance of which it is impossible, to my mind, to exaggerate. It has a huge task to perform and the possibilities of the value of its work, both industrially and to rural communities in this State, are great indeed. From my little experience of the work of the Commission I think it is largely looked to as the authority to which local supply authorities can refer their problems and from which they can seek advice when in difficulties.

It is the first time in this State that there has been a body of that character able to assume the role of adviser in matters relating to electrical problems and development. As the regulation now stands amended, following the motion last year of the member for Murchison, I think its form is no longer seriously objectionable, and that the local authorities might rather feel that they can fulfil a duty to their districts and to the State by lending their co-operation to the smooth working of regulations of this kind.

MR. CORNELL (Avon—in reply) [10.18]: I accept the mild strictures of the Acting Leader of the Opposition and the Minister for Housing. When I referred to the Electricity Commission in the terms that I used I was possibly taking a leaf out of the book of Rudyard Kipling when he spoke of "Flunnelled-fools and muddled oafs." When asked why he had said that he replied that if he did not exaggerate in this world no-one would take any notice of him. Mr. Dumas is like a lot of other tall poppies in the Public Service and is unfortunately placed on far too many boards, with the result that he is unable to keep his feet on the ground and loses touch with what some of his under-strappers do. It was mainly with reference to them that I used the terms that have been objected to. When

speaking on Wednesday last the Minister for Works said that it was in my mind—he must possess a greater degree of clairvoyancy than I do—that the present Government was the father of Regulation 278. He said that that was not so. I would point out that the father of an adopted child has the same responsibility towards it as he has to his own progeny.

The Minister for Works: I allow that point.

Mr. CORNELL: Despite the fact that this regulation may have been conceived out of the wedlock of the present Government, it was nevertheless born beneath this Government's benediction, and the Minister must accept some responsibility for it.

The Minister for Works: I realise my responsibility.

Mr. CORNELL: To say that this particular regulation is a carry-over from the war period is not quite correct. There may be other regulations coming within that category, but I do not think Regulation 278 is in that class.

The Minister for Works: I spoke generally in regard to the whole 316.

Mr. CORNELL: In point of fact, I do not think I made any attempt to establish the parentage of Regulation 278 as being attributable to this or any other Government. It seems to be the particular baby of the State Electricity Commission and a baby with a fairly healthy appetite. The imposition of the additional fee of 5s. per annum was objected to by me in fairly mild terms but my real complaint, as the member for Murchison has said and in which I am glad to say he acquiesces, is the shilling per consumer per annum which local authorities and other suppliers of electricity in the country have to pay to the State Electricity Commission. The question of passing on a meagre 5s. to the consumer hardly arises because this seemingly precludes it being satisfactorily handed on. A levy of one shilling per consumer, however, is quite capable of being passed on and I am sure that an attempt is being made to do so.

The primary consideration in giving attention to Regulation 278 is that it provides a substantial fee to the Electricity Commission. That is a large premium which these suppliers of electricity have to

pay, and have paid for a very negligible return. The Minister, in his remarks the other evening, said that he would describe some of the work done by the State Electricity Commission in return for the fees received by it. He then proceeded to say that the Commission had a complete and up-to-date inventory of all plant and equipment of all the supply centres in Western Australia. When I asked how the Commission came by this information and inventory the Minister retorted by saying it is hard to take an inventory except on the spot, thereby inferring in my opinion—

The Minister for Works: No. I did not say it was taken on the spot.

Mr. CORNELL: The Minister said it was hard to take an inventory except on the spot.

The Minister for Works: You have got me wrong.

Mr. CORNELL: I will refresh the Minister's memory later on. The inference from the Minister's remarks was that officers of the State Electricity Commission went from place to place to collect all the data and information necessary for the taking of such inventories. Nothing is further from fact. The necessary forms were forwarded by the State Electricity Commission to each supplier of electricity throughout the State. The forms, when completed, were returned to the State Electricity Commission and filed in the office. The service rendered by the State Electricity Commission in this instance was negligible. In his attempts to enumerate the services the Commission was rendering to supply authorities and other people generally the Minister appeared to be, if I might say so, batting on a very sticky wicket and when one of his best batsmen was bowled he declared the innings closed and vacated the field. None of the services rendered by the State Electricity Commission are free. Regulation 279 sets out what fee shall be charged if any supply authority requests, and the Commission considers it necessary, a report, valuation or major inspection. That regulation sets out what fees shall be charged for the service. Regulation 280 goes a little further and states—

(a) The Commission may require the Supply Authority to meet the cost of travelling and other expenses incurred by the Commission in making such reports, inspections and/or valuations.

(b) For any service rendered by the Commission to a Supply Authority, local authority or any other authority which cannot be classified under any of the items as mentioned in Regulation 279, the Commission will impose a reasonable charge for the service rendered.

Mr. Marshall: They do nothing for nothing.

The Minister for Works: The point is that Regulation 279 is not under discussion.

Mr. CORNELL: The main motive underlying Regulation 280 is to provide revenue. The Minister last Wednesday inferred as much, but he definitely said so by interjection this evening.

Mr. Marshall: They provide regulations to pay their wages.

Mr. CORNELL: I have received letters from various supply authorities in the country areas which indicate that the amounts they will be asked to pay to the Electricity Commission by reason of this regulation are out of all proportion to the size of the business and to what they will receive in return. The supply authority at Bridgetown will be called upon to pay £19. The municipality of Narrogin, which is the supply authority, will have to pay £38. The municipality at York will be called upon to pay £19 and the Merredin Road Board will have to pay £24. The Busselton Municipality will be called upon to pay £16 and the Preston Road Board £10. The Wagin Municipality will pay a sum of £18 and the Pingelly Electric Supply £14, the Municipality of Northam £66, the Municipality of Bunbury £90, the Dundas Road Board £31 and the Kalgoorlie Electric Power and Lighting Corporation £67. All these figures are the amounts paid per annum.

One surprising fact which has resulted from my inquiries is that the Katanning Flour Mills, which supplies current to the town of Katanning, operates under a private Act, by virtue of which it appears to obtain immunity from any contribution to the State Electricity Commission.

Mr. Marshall: Hullo! That is not bad.

Mr. CORNELL: I am informed by the managing director of the Katanning Flour Mills that as the Katanning Electric Light and Power Act of 1904 was in operation prior to the Electricity Act, pursuant to which Regulation 278 has been made, that company does not pay to the State Electricity

Commission the levy of one shilling per consumer.

The Minister for Works: Not until it gets taken over.

Mr. CORNELL: That is an admission that it does not pay for the time being. The Minister states that that will not occur until it is taken over, which action must be contemplated by the State Electricity Commission. However, certain other supply authorities have to pay in the meantime.

Mr. Marshall: Of course they do. How do Wagin and Narrogin get on?

Mr. CORNELL: I have not inquired into that but the municipality of Wagin pays £18 and the municipality of Narrogin pays £38 yet the private concessionaire at Katanning gets away without a fee. If the Minister desires to provide the State Electricity Commission with more revenue, then instead of endeavouring to raise it by cheeseparing methods such as this he should do something to modify the existing agreement with the Perth City Council. The agreement which is still in force enables current to be sold to the Perth City Council at less than it costs to produce. That instrumentality in return re-sells it to consumers at a considerable profit.

The people in the country who pay as much as 1s. 6d. per unit for electricity are subsidising the supply of cheap current to the metropolitan area to very much the same extent as the subsidy Legislative Assembly members pay to Legislative Councillors. These people have the dubious satisfaction of subsidising a supply of cheap electric current to consumers in the metropolitan area, and will continue to do for another 18 years unless some steps are taken to bring about modification and, if necessary, abrogation of the regulation. Regulation 278, as I have said before, is designed purely for the collection of revenue for the Commission and on the state affairs I have just mentioned it brings into bold relief a position which cries aloud to be rectified. I urge members, and particularly those representing rural constituencies, to support this motion to disallow Regulation 278 under which suppliers of electricity pay substantial fees to the State Electricity Commission and get nothing in return.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.32 p.m.