

Legislative Council.

Tuesday, 26th October, 1948.

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

QUESTIONS.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT.

As to Court Claims.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) How many claims under the Workers' Compensation Act have been before the courts during the past two years?

(2) How many of such claims have failed?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) and (2) I have been informed by the Attorney General that workers' compensation cases are heard in a great many courts within the State, and that a separate record of these cases is not available.

RAILWAYS.

(a) *As to Electric-Diesel Locomotives.*

Hon. H. A. C. DAFFEN asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Before the Chief Mechanical Engineer of the W.A.G.R. (Mr. F. Mills) left for England, did he have instructions to investigate the recent trend and present availability of electric-diesel locomotives?

(2) If not, in view of the increasing use in America, and the probable useful employment in our own system of some electric-diesel locomotives as distinct from the present diesel-electric coaches in use here, will the Commissioner of Railways instruct Mr. Mills to investigate accordingly?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) Answered by No. (1).

(b) *As to Garratt Oil-Burners, Norseman-Esperance Line.*

Hon. G. BENNETTS asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Is the Minister for Railways aware—

(a) that since the Garratt engines on the Norseman-Esperance line have been converted from coal-burners to oil-burners, they are causing grave concern among enginemmen, businessmen and the travelling public;

(b) that these oil-burners are compelled to stop several times in sections to regain steam;

(c) that they are unable to pull their full loads and are compelled to put off loading at different sidings en route, causing additional trains to run under load to pick up loading left, thus occasioning extra expense and inconvenience;

(d) that these delays on this line cause delay to the Goldfields express and other trains throughout the service—also inconvenience to the travelling public and long hours to enginemmen?

(2) In view of the above circumstances, will he have an inquiry made—

(a) into the cost of maintaining these engines;

- (b) to ascertain if improvements can be made; and as to
- (c) the possibility of having them converted back to coal-burners?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

- (1) (a) No.
- (b) No. Occasional trouble has been experienced where some mechanical defect has developed en route.
- (c) No. They compare favourably with coal-burners for steaming and haulage qualities.
- (d) On a few occasions owing to engine trouble on the Norseman line the Kalgoorlie-Perth express has been delayed but such trouble has not been confined to Garratt oil-burners.

- (2) (a) In view of the answers to question (1) an inquiry is not considered necessary.
- (b) An improved design of oil-burning equipment is now in course of manufacture at the workshops.
- (c) Reconversion is not difficult but owing to the coal position is not considered desirable at the present stage.

PUBLIC TRUST OFFICE.

As to Revenue and Expenditure.

Hon. H. K. WATSON asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) What was the total revenue derived by the Public Trust Office during the year ended the 30th June, 1948?

(2) What was the total expenditure incurred in administering such office during that period?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

- (1) £14,919 11s. 9d.
- (2) £23,091 10s. 4d.

HOSPITALS.

As to Improvements at Kellerberrin.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Has any decision been reached in respect of additions and improvements at the Kellerberrin District Hospital, viz:—

- (a) New kitchen staff dining rooms;
- (b) hot water service;
- (c) additional ward accommodation?

(2) If any or all of these additions have been approved, will any local contribution towards the cost thereof be required?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

- (1) (a) Approved.
- (b) Proposals under discussion with board.
- (c) Not approved at present.
- (2) No.

SERVICEMEN'S LAND SETTLEMENT.

As to Land Purchase Board Members, etc.

Hon. L. A. LOGAN asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Is the Land Purchase Board which was set up specially in connection with the purchase of properties for the War Service Land Settlement Scheme still in existence?

(2) If still in existence, were any changes made in the membership of the board following the inquiry made into the War Service Land Settlement Scheme by the departmental committee appointed for this purpose by the Government last year?

(3) If so, who are the present members of the board?

(4) Do the members of the board receive any fees, allowances or expenses?

(5) If so, what were the amounts paid respectively to members of the board from their appointment up to the end of February, 1948?

(6) Are these payments, if any, a charge against the Commonwealth or the State?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) A land purchase board was not set up specially in connection with the purchase of properties for War Service Land Settlement.

Properties offered for the scheme are considered by the Land Purchase Board set up under Section 120 of the Land Act, 1933-1946.

(2) The chairman of the Land Settlement Board, Mr. G. K. Baron Hay, was appointed chairman of the Land Purchase Board, and Mr. A. R. Barrett and Mr. E. A. Miller, members of the Land Settlement

Board, were added to the membership of the Land Purchase Board.

(3) The present board consists of—Mr. G. K. Baron Hay, chairman; Mr. W. V. Fyfe, Surveyor General; Mr. V. L. Steffanoni, Chief Valuer, Taxation Department; Mr. B. C. Chambers, Representative of Returned Soldiers' League; Messrs. W. L. Devitt, A. R. Barrett, E. A. Miller, C. L. Clarke and C. L. E. Orton.

(4) The Government officers on the board are not paid fees, but both fees and travelling expenses are paid to private members.

(5)—

Member.	Board Fees.	Travelling Allowance.	Motor Mileage.	Total
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
Chambers, B. C.	1,257 18 0	922 5 0	727 12 4	2,907 15 4
Orton, C. L. E.	327 12 0	251 4 6	342 1 11	920 18 5
Diver, J. W.	29 8 0	6 0 0	....	35 8 0
Bostock, L. N.	52 10 0	21 7 6	....	73 17 6
Clarke, C. L.	651 0 0	384 13 0	474 2 5	1,509 15 5
	....	....	....	£5,447 14 8

(6) Land Purchase Board costs are borne by the State.

STATE ELECTRICITY COMMISSION. *As to Tabling Reports and Balance Sheets.*

Hon. A. THOMSON asked the Chief Secretary:

(1) Why have the annual reports and balance sheets of the State Electricity Commission for the financial years 1947 and 1948 not been presented to Parliament as prescribed in Section 58 of the Act?

(2) Will the Minister see that these reports are laid upon the Table of the House forthwith?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

(1) Heavy unavoidable delays in compilation.

(2) It is anticipated these reports will be laid upon the Table of the House within seven days.

SOUTH FREMANTLE POWER HOUSE.

As to Duty on Imported Machinery.

Hon. A. THOMSON asked the Chief Secretary:

Is the Government paying customs duty on the machinery being imported for the South Fremantle power house?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied:

Only on the sections of the equipment which are not admitted duty free. The Electricity Supply Association has been requested to negotiate with the Customs Department regarding standardisation of duty on major power station equipment.

MOTION—INCREASE OF RENT (WAR RESTRICTIONS) ACT.

To Disallow Court Proceedings Regulations.

Debate resumed from the 19th October on the following motion by Hon. Sir Charles Latham:—

That Regulations Nos. 10, 11, 12 and 15, made under the Increase of Rent (War Restriction)

tions) Act, 1939-1948, as published in the "Government Gazette" of the 3rd September, 1948, and laid on the Table of the House on the 14th September, 1948, be and are hereby disallowed.

HON. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM (South) [4.43]: I propose to support the motion. I am unhappy about the present position with respect to these regulations, inasmuch as it appears to me that we are perpetuating a hardship. Many have said that the hardship falls on the evicted parties. I admit that anyone who is evicted from a house must suffer a certain amount of hardship; but my argument is that the people who own such properties have been, in almost every case quoted so far, the greatest sufferers.

The persons who have been in possession of rented houses for some years and who are protected by these regulations are young people with families. That has been mentioned as a reason why their eviction would cause hardship, but the very fact that these people have families constitutes, to my mind, the best qualifications possible for their applying for, and obtaining, Gov-

ernment rental homes. On the other hand, the aged people who in many cases are the owners of the properties housing these young people, have no qualifications for applying for Government assistance.

Hon. G. Fraser: They are able to participate in a ballot.

Hon. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM: It is only recently that that has been permitted.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: And if they own property they are excluded.

Hon. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM: The elderly people to whom I have referred, who have no family or whose families have grown up, cannot obtain homes and are prevented from occupying their own properties. In addition, they fear having to take legal proceedings against the occupants of their homes. I can quote an actual case, with which I am very familiar, of an old couple who, just prior to the war, came into possession of a leased house. The old lady, through health reasons, went to the goldfields area to live with relatives. While there, she became worse and was away for some time. Her husband, who was in Perth, in order to avoid the house being vacant, allowed a young couple with a baby to occupy it temporarily. In the meantime, the war intervened and that couple were immediately protected by these regulations. The man implied that he was joining one of the Services and was thus doubly protected. Since then the young couple have raised a family. They have four children and that gives them the right to stay where they are. According to the new regulations, they cannot be shifted.

Hon. G. Fraser: People should be encouraged to have more children.

Hon. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM: Exactly! But this man who was protected by the fact that he was believed to have been in one of the Services did not, in fact, join up but has been sheltering behind the regulations.

Hon. G. Fraser: He has given service to Australia by having four children.

Hon. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM: Yes, but at someone else's expense! The people who own the house cannot get into it. They are aged folk, with medical certificates indicating that in no circumstances should

they remain in the place they are sharing at present. But what can they do about it? Under the present regulations they must take the occupants of their home to court if they want to seek redress; but they are on pensions and are not in a position to do that.

So they have no protection whatever; whereas the man who for years has sheltered behind regulations under which he had no right to be protected, cannot be evicted. He has done what I have known to be done in other instances: he has brought to the notice of the owner of the house a vacant building in an outer suburb and told him to go out there. He does not want to do so himself because the rent is 32s 6d. a week, whereas the house in which he is living costs him only 17s 6d. a week. The owner of that house is paying 22s 6d. a week rent where he is living and is thus losing 5s. a week on the deal. All these years he has hung on to his property in the hope of one day obtaining possession of it.

Hon. G. Fraser: You are proposing to remove some of the means of helping these people to get back to their homes.

Hon. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM: No. The regulations are perpetuating a hardship upon those who can least afford to bear it.

Hon. G. Fraser: You read the regulations you are proposing to disallow.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM: I have read them.

Hon. G. Fraser: Read them again.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. J. M. A. CUNNINGHAM: I am in favour of the disallowance of the regulations. I contend that a man with a family to maintain has the best qualification for securing a home of his own, more suited to his circumstances, and thus permitting the owners of the property in which he is living and who, to my mind, have a more genuine and moral right to the premises, to repossess them.

HON. G. BENNETTS (South) [4.48]: I intend to oppose the motion. There are two sides to this question. There are landlords who would be only too pleased to

evict working men from their houses and put in their place friends from whom they might obtain a little more rent. I know of some very deserving people who should not be put out of the houses in which they are living. I have recently had two cases brought to my notice—one yesterday and the other on the train this morning. I expect to receive a letter tomorrow asking me to do something about one of these cases. There should be some way of amending these regulations so as to obviate the difficulty.

I propose to mention the case that was brought to my notice yesterday. There is a man at Kalgoorlie suffering from miners' phthisis. He is now in a bad state of health. He is a returned soldier with a wife and two children and he bought a home in the metropolitan area a few years ago. He is now renting a room and a kitchen. Both he and his wife have been instructed by their doctor that they must get away from the Goldfields and he will be hard put to it to pay rent for accommodation for the period during which he is unable to get possession of his own home.

I know of another case where the man concerned can work only part-time, due to a disease contracted while employed underground. His eyes are inflamed and his arms are swollen, his condition being such that he cannot work full time. He also bought a house in the metropolitan area and spent his life's savings on it, but he cannot now get the tenants out of the premises.

This morning while on the train I met a widow whom I know. She is 63 years of age and owns a house at Fremantle. She has been advised to leave the Goldfields, but she let her house some years ago for 15s. or £1 per week rent and now cannot get the tenants out of it. As the house is fairly large and she is a widow, it will be very hard for her to get it back. The returned soldier, whom I mentioned earlier, let his house to an elderly couple who have now brought their children home and have them occupying the verandah, which makes it still more difficult for the owner to get possession of his house. I believe that if we agree to do away with these regulations, we shall find that there are cases where people will be penalised on the other side. For that reason, I have outlined the position as I see it. I cannot support the disallowance of the regulations.

HON. H. K. WATSON (Metropolitan) [4.53]: I feel there is much merit in the case put before the House by Sir Charles Latham, and I agree that, from a strictly legal standpoint, there is a great deal in what has been said by the Chief Secretary. The difficulty faced by the House on occasions such as this is that it cannot amend regulations and has therefore to take negative action in order to achieve positive results. If Regulation No. 10, as tabled, had contained a proviso such as I will presently read out, I believe Sir Charles would not have taken the objection he has raised to the regulations, and that the House, generally, would have been satisfied. The proviso I would suggest is as follows:—

Provided that where an application is made on any of the grounds specified in paragraphs G (1) or K (1) of subregulation (5) of Regulation 3 of these regulations the court shall not refuse to make an order but may in its discretion where special circumstances exist suspend such order for a period not exceeding three months from the date upon which the order was made.

It is not within the province of this House to insert such an amendment in the regulation. All it can do is, by means of a motion for the disallowance of the regulations, either wholly or in part, to indicate to the Government that it would like to see included in Regulation No. 10 a proviso such as I have suggested.

Hon. G. Fraser: As a matter of fact, that is the way in which the court operates.

Hon. H. K. WATSON: I disagree. It does not operate in that way.

Hon. G. Fraser: I said that the court operates in that way.

Hon. H. K. WATSON: That is not so. It is said that an Englishman's home is his castle, but there are many people in Western Australia today whose homes are other people's castles, and the court does not operate in the manner suggested by Mr. Fraser.

Hon. G. Fraser: Then my experience is different from yours.

Hon. H. K. WATSON: On the other hand, I agree that the mere disallowance of Regulation No. 10 would not get us far, because that is the regulation which, even as it stands at present, gives the court discretionary power to grant an order to the owner of a home to obtain possession of it.

In my opinion, the mere disallowance of that regulation would not get us anywhere.

Hon. A. Thomson: Except that the Government might then introduce a regulation with a proviso such as you have suggested.

Hon. H. K. WATSON: It might serve that purpose. If the House is desirous of expressing itself more clearly and effectively on the point, the motion might be amended to include Regulation No. 3 as well as Regulations Nos. 10, 11, 12 and 15. Regulation No. 3 seems to be the critical one because it states—

Except as provided by these regulations the lessor of any premises shall not give any notice to terminate the tenancy.

I suggest that if Sir Charles would agree to the inclusion of Regulation No. 3 in the motion for disallowance, it would necessitate action on the part of the Government to bring down new regulations, as the whole of the regulations would otherwise run the risk of being inoperative. I move an amendment—

That in line 1 after the word "Nos.," the figure "3" be inserted.

HON. SIR CHARLES LATHAM (East—on amendment) ([4.58]: I have no objection to the inclusion of Regulation No. 3. I would have included it originally, but for the fact that it contains many things with which I agree, and I was tempted, therefore, to restrict my motion to the regulations the disallowance of which would solve the problem. I have no objection to the amendment.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban—on amendment) [5.0]: The inclusion of Regulation No. 3 would create an extraordinary set of circumstances. Proceedings have to be taken under it, and no order for ejectment could be made except under that particular regulation. If it were struck out, the result would be that Rafferty rules would apply as regards the procedure to be followed, because Regulation No. 3 sets out what notice shall be served and the circumstances under which action shall be taken. In fact, it provides the whole of the machinery.

If Regulation No. 3 were disallowed, it would result in the parties rushing to the court and on their arriving there, the magi-

strate would say to them, "Well, I will just do what I like and will continue to do as I have done before, which seems to have worked, so far as I am concerned, very well." No-one will know where he stands. No lawyer or agent will know and each—this might include the court as well—will make up his own rules. There will be all sorts of difficulties arising as to how the notice shall be served, and I fear it will entail undue hardship in many instances. I trust, therefore, that none of the regulations will be disallowed.

On motion by Hon. G. Fraser, debate adjourned.

BILL—THE WEST AUSTRALIAN CLUB (PRIVATE).

Received from the Assembly and, on motion by Hon. H. K. Watson, read a first time.

BILL—BUILDERS' REGISTRATION ACT AMENDMENT.

Report of Committee adopted.

BILL—WESTERN AUSTRALIAN TROT- TING ASSOCIATION ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 19th October.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [5.5]: This is a Bill that looks simple but, in effect, it is a request to allow more trotting meetings in the metropolitan area. At the present time the number of trotting days are fixed by Act of Parliament. Under the Racing Restriction Act of 1917, which has been amended from time to time, Section 3 provides in Subsection (2), inter alia—

The number of trotting meetings to be held in the metropolitan area, inclusive of the trotting meetings of the West Australian Trotting Association, shall not exceed thirty-five in any year

Then the subsection was amended at a later date and these words were inserted after the word "thirty-five"—

Outside the Fremantle district and 10 within the Fremantle district within any year.

In addition, the following proviso was included at the end of the subsection:—

Provided that the Treasurer may, at the request of the West Australian Trotting Association, authorise trotting meetings to be held on not exceeding two additional days in any year, in aid of any public hospital, or other charitable or patriotic purpose.

"Fremantle district" means the area within a radius of five miles from the town hall, Fremantle, so that under that Act the authorities are permitted to hold trotting meetings in Perth on 35 days and in Fremantle on 10 days, which makes a total of 45. Further, the Treasurer is permitted to allow two additional days within the Fremantle district and five within the metropolitan area outside the Fremantle zone.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: I think it is three.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: There are seven additional days under the Act for charitable purposes. Now the Western Australian Trotting Association Act overrides that arrangement. Section 15 provides—

The Minister may establish a Country Clubs' Benefit Fund, which shall be held by the Association and placed in a separate account and may—

(a) direct a club in a metropolitan area to devote the whole or any portion of the profits of one specified ordinary trotting race meeting in any year to the benefit fund;

(b) authorise one meeting in any year additional to those provided in section 3 of the Racing Restriction Act, 1917, to be conducted by a club in the metropolitan area the profits of which shall be devoted to such fund.

The Bill proposes to alter that so that the Minister may direct a metropolitan club to devote the proceeds of three specified ordinary meetings to a benefit fund, and further to allow the Minister to authorise three additional meetings instead of one in any year. As I have pointed out, at the present moment there are, I think, 53 meetings—

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: I do not think that is correct, with the additional ones.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: There are 35 meetings allowed outside the Fremantle area and 10 within that area but the Treasurer may grant seven additional dates for charitable purposes, which brings the total up to 52. Under paragraph (b), which I have just quoted, the Minister may at pre-

sent authorise another one. Now we are asked to authorise two more in the metropolitan area for the purpose of providing funds for the country clubs. If it so desires, there is nothing to stop the Western Australian Trotting Association, which is in charge of trotting, from giving as much money as it likes to encourage the sport in the country.

The association has plenty of money and there is no reason why it should not devote some of the proceeds of its ordinary meetings to the country clubs. Without good cause, I doubt very much whether any Minister would be prepared to direct the Trotting Association to devote the proceeds of two of its meetings to the country clubs; but the country clubs could approach the Minister with a request to direct the association to devote the proceeds of one meeting to their benefit. We are asked now to alter the law so that it will authorise the Trotting Association, if it so desires, to hold three meetings, instead of one additional meeting, for country clubs. In other words, the Bill is simply to grant two extra days trotting in the metropolitan area.

As the Bill was submitted by Sir Charles Latham, many people thought that it would be for the benefit of the country clubs. So it is, but I venture to say that some members thought that without the Bill the country clubs could not get the money. Leave the law as it stands—and I suggest that members do that—and then the Trotting Association may devote the proceeds of one of its meetings that will be specially held for the help of the country clubs. Last season the association held a meeting for the country clubs and £1,000 was raised.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: They gave £200 towards it.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: They made up £200 in addition to the takings of £800, so the country clubs obtained £1,000 from that meeting. If the Trotting Association so desires, it can give more money to them. It can give as much as it likes.

Hon. R. M. Forrest: How many country clubs are there?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Seventeen, I think. Under the Act there were three district councils that received the money. The money does not go to the country clubs but to the district councils. The councils were:

The Great Southern District Council, the Eastern Goldfields District Council and the South-West District Council.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: That was altered last year.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Yes, the North-Eastern District Council was substituted for the Eastern Goldfields District Council, so there are still three district councils. The money is paid to the councils, which divide the money amongst the clubs. I do not think the Goldfields participate, as I fancy they have some better arrangement with the association by which they receive more. The balance sheet of the association is enlightening. Although the association and racing clubs pay an enormous sum in taxation, nevertheless they still have a large amount available.

Hon. G. Bennetts: When will these extra races be run, on two nights in a week?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: As Sir Charles Latham said, they would probably be held in July when very few people would attend, on account of the wet weather. Whether that course would be followed or not, I cannot say.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: You would not oppose it?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: It is a matter of indifference to me; the association can hold the races at any time it pleases, provided it does not exceed the number of racing days permitted.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: The association cannot hold these meetings on special days.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Not at Easter or Christmas.

Hon. H. Hearn: Not on Sundays.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: No. The association cannot charge for admission on Sundays. Last year the association made a net profit of £11,799.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: That includes an amount carried forward. It is not the profit for the year.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I shall mention the figures in order to show members the large sum of money that is expended by the people on trotting. The association's accounts show that it spent £169,627 and carried down a balance of £35,964. Out of this latter sum the association made provision for the following:—

	£
Income tax	4,000
Country clubs	1,000
Agricultural shows, club and breeding subsidies	1,939
Fremantle Trotting Club	10,181
Meetings, donations	4,203

I do not quite know what the last item means, but believe it refers to charity meetings. Then follows an allowance for depreciation and so on, leaving a net profit of £11,799. I venture to assert, therefore, that the people who support trotting are now paying sufficient to allow the association, if it so desires, to make additional advances to the country clubs without doing itself any harm. I personally do not like the idea of increasing the number of meetings. I do not mind how many of the ordinary meetings the association devotes to charity or country clubs or any other specific purpose. To increase the number of meetings does not appeal to me; we have quite enough trotting now, and, as Sir Charles Latham pointed out, in July—and I think we can safely include June—the weather is too wet for trotting at night. Therefore all the meetings would be crowded into the other part of the year. Personally, I shall vote against the Bill.

HON. SIR CHARLES LATHAM (East—in reply) [5.20]: I am sorry the Minister is opposed to the Bill. All the information he gave to the House I think I gave as well. There is nothing to hide. It does not matter what money the association has; we know that all it gave to country clubs was £1,000, of which £800 was provided at a special meeting and £200 donated by the association. I am anxious that the sport should be de-centralised and my wish is to see the country clubs enjoying the same privileges they would have were it not for the parent Act. In addition, there is at present a restriction on petrol, with the consequence that the country clubs are not getting horses in their districts. The country clubs should be given an opportunity to breed horses in the rural areas. I do not think the Minister has any justification for his opposition to the Bill. The association cannot be ordered to provide money for the purpose I have mentioned, as it has many commitments. It is responsible for the Fremantle course, which I understand is being repaired. The association also helps the Kalgoorlie club.

The Chief Secretary: The Fremantle club made £10,000 profit last year.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I understand it has cost the Fremantle club a considerable sum of money to put its ground in order.

The Chief Secretary: That may be.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: According to the association's balance sheet, Kalgoorlie received only £500.

The Chief Secretary: Would the Kalgoorlie club get any more if there were two extra trotting nights?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: The association is prepared to back Kalgoorlie. There is some mutual arrangement between the association and the Kalgoorlie club with which I do not wish to interfere. Kalgoorlie is entitled to have its own club. The House will agree with me that night trotting has become the popular sport in Western Australia.

Hon. L. Craig: Not in July.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Many country towns are conducting night trotting meetings. I instance Wagin, Harvey and York. Kellerberrin is to have night trotting.

Hon. A. Thomson: Katanning has night trotting.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Yes. Of course, it all entails much expenditure; it cannot be done for nothing. I hope the House will not adopt a selfish attitude, as this is a question of city funds being used to develop this sport in the country. I hope the House will look at the Bill from that angle. The Minister said that 35 meetings were held in the metropolitan area and I think he said two were charity meetings.

The Chief Secretary: No, five.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Yes, the Minister subsequently said five. I am prepared to admit that I may have made a mistake, but as far as I know the number was three, but it may be five. If the measure passes, it will not mean that we will have trotting every night of the week, because at Easter and Christmas two or three meetings are held in the one week. There will be about four Saturdays in the year when no meetings will take place. I do not know how many meetings were devoted to charitable purposes last year, but the association distributed over £4,000 to

charities during that period. In addition, the association assists other sporting bodies.

I am doubtful whether the distinguished athletes who attended the Olympic Games could have gone without the assistance they received from the association, which contributed a considerable sum towards their expenses. I do not think trotting injures any one at all. My object is to encourage trotting in order to improve the breed of horses. Our country shows today are attracting people because of the racing events that are held. I hope that members will at least give this measure a trial; if it proves to be unsatisfactory we can amend it, as it is not absolutely final.

Question put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	..	..	..	..	13
Noes	..	..	..	..	10
Majority for					3

AYES.	
Hon. G. F. Baxter	Hon. L. A. Logan
Hon. J. M. Cunningham	Hon. W. J. Mann
Hon. E. M. Davies	Hon. C. H. Simpson
Hon. G. Fraser	Hon. A. Thomson
Hon. H. Hearn	Hon. F. R. Welsh
Hon. E. M. Heenan	Hon. E. H. Gray
Hon. Sir Chas. Latham	(Teller.)
NOES.	
Hon. L. Craig	Hon. J. G. Hislop
Hon. H. A. C. Daffen	Hon. H. S. W. Parker
Hon. J. A. Dimmitt	Hon. H. K. Watson
Hon. R. M. Forrest	Hon. G. B. Wood
Hon. Sir Frank Gibson	Hon. W. R. Hall
	(Teller.)

Question thus passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt in the Chair; Hon. Sir Charles Latham in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1 and 2—agreed to.

Clause 3—Amendment of Section 15:

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I would like to strike out the whole of paragraph (a).

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: That would kill the Bill.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: No. Section 15 is a rather peculiar one. It provides that the Minister may establish a country clubs' benefit fund, and may direct a club in the metropolitan area to devote the whole or any portion of the profits of one specified ordinary trotting meeting to that fund. I do not know that there is any Minister, unless he were vindictive, who

would say to the Trotting Association, "You must devote the whole of the proceedings of your meeting on Saturday night to the country clubs." What the hon. member wants is authority for two extra meetings, and, if paragraph (b) of Clause 3 is carried, the Minister may authorise them. I want to take away from the Minister any power to direct that the proceeds of a trotting meeting shall be devoted to the funds of the country clubs. He would do it only when the country clubs asked for it and the Trotting Association refused. I suggest an amendment setting out that in line 2 after the word "by" the following words be added:—"deleting paragraph (a)."

The CHAIRMAN: Does the Minister intend to insert something in its stead?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: No. My idea is to do away with the authority of the Minister to direct.

Hon. G. FRASER: I want to ask the Chief Secretary if there is anything in the Act which sets out that the Trotting Association shall draw up a yearly programme and submit it to the Minister. If there is not, I think the usual procedure adopted not only by the Trotting Association but by the Western Australian Turf Club is to make out a yearly programme which would, of course, be submitted to the Minister. If this paragraph is allowed to remain in the Act, it will simply mean that if the association failed to make provision in its yearly programme for three meetings to be conducted for the benefit of the country clubs, then the Minister could be called upon to direct the association. I do not think the position outlined by the Minister would arise at all. Is the paragraph (a) referred to by the Chief Secretary the one appearing in the Bill or in the Act?

The CHAIRMAN: It is paragraph (a) of the Act.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I want a ruling. The suggested amendment seems to be introducing quite new matter. If the Minister wants to move an amendment in this way, he should recommit the Bill.

The CHAIRMAN: I suggest to Sir Charles Latham that he move to report progress so that the authorities can be reviewed on the matter, and we can then continue the Committee stage.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I am prepared to go on. If the Minister desires to force this through and you, Sir, are prepared to accept his proposed amendment, the discussion can take place now.

The CHAIRMAN: I would rather defer it. I think there should be a new clause.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I think so, too, and that is why I asked for your ruling.

Progress reported.

BILL—BUSH FIRES ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

HON. SIR CHARLES LATHAM (East) [5.43] in moving the second reading said: This is a simple Bill, which has been sent here from another place. Its purpose is to encourage the establishment of bush fire brigades. In the last two or three years a number of brigades have been formed in the agricultural areas, and their introduction was the outcome of some terrific fires in the eastern wheat belt a few years ago. The Bill asks Parliament to agree to instruct fire insurance companies to give a rebate of 25 per cent. on fire insurance premiums. The object is to encourage local authorities and people in country districts to establish fire brigades. As I have already said, there is already a number in existence. The Bruce Rock Road Board, for instance, has spent about £3,500 on fire-fighting equipment, including engine-pumps on trucks with an adequate water supply, which have proved very useful. At Wagin, there is a 5,000-gallon tank which is used for fire-fighting.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: Is that on a self-propelled vehicle?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Yes, It is desirable that we should encourage in every way those people who are prepared voluntarily to work for the prevention of fire. I hope the House will agree to the Bill.

Hon. W. J. Mann: What effect will it have on fire insurance premiums?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It will instruct the companies to make a reduction of 25 per cent. on premiums.

Hon. W. J. Mann: On existing premiums?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Yes. It is proposed that the equipment shall be inspected by a qualified man from the Forests Department to determine whether it is satisfactory or not. If the bush fire brigade covers a portion of a district only, then that portion would be the only part of the district subject to the rebate of premiums from the insurance companies. I understand that the companies are agreeable to the proposal because in the past there have been volunteers only whereas now, whenever there is a fire, there is a genuine attempt on the part of everybody possible to help extinguish the outbreak. It is not an easy job—it certainly was not easy when it was a question of boughs and bags—to put a fire out especially where it occurs in heavy pasture country or in cereal crops. However, with the new fire-fighting equipment it will be much easier.

Some road boards have already increased their rate by one farthing in the pound to meet the cost of this equipment. It is true that under the Road Districts Act they are not permitted to strike a special rate for that purpose. There may come a day when that power will be given to local authorities but the money provided for the equipment is at present taken from their ordinary revenue. I do not think there is very much more that I can say about the Bill except to leave it to the commonsense of members. I know the legislation will appeal to them because it attempts to assist the building up of equipment for fire-fighting in country districts in order to avoid the great damage caused by bush fires.

The year before last quite a considerable sum of money was paid out by fire insurance companies, more particularly in districts where no fire-fighting appliances were available. It is not a question of the individual going out to assist but a question of having the necessary up-to-date equipment available. This equipment when mounted on motor trucks and with adequate water supplies, is very helpful. In many places throughout the agricultural areas water is provided at certain points so that it can be picked up whenever there is a fire. I think Bruce Rock has three trucks properly manned and equipped, and in most districts they are now either starting in a small way or have the equipment available. As I pointed out before, the Bill is intended to

encourage local authorities and also to reduce the premium rates on fire insurance.

Hon. H. Hearn: How did you arrive at the 25 per cent. rebate?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I think it was only taken haphazardly. I do not think it was actuarially ascertained but there is no doubt that most insurance companies if they knew there was a proper fire-fighting unit available in the district, would be very glad to allow that reduction. During the hazardous period from November to February, the premiums for fire insurance are high, but after that period they are reduced considerably.

Hon. A. Thomson: How does the rate of 25 per cent. compare with the reduction provided where there is an efficient water supply in the town?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: There has been no reduction in the past. The only fire brigades recognised are those within the city and town areas or where there is a properly established and permanent water supply. In such cases the Government, the local authorities and the insurance companies all make contributions, but in the cases covered by the Bill the companies are not asked to make any contribution but merely to reduce the premiums by 25 per cent. It would balance itself out and it may mean that they would have to contribute later on, such as is the case with the ordinary fire brigades in the metropolitan and country districts. I think the Government pays 19 per cent. and the insurance companies pay about the same proportion. The local authorities also pay something, but I do not know what the exact figures are. However, in the cases covered by the Bill there is to be no payment at all to brigades or to fire-fighters and the measure is intended to have effect only until such time as fire brigades may be permanently established for the purpose in these country districts.

Hon. E. M. Davies: Is there a maximum premium rate charged?

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: No, there is no maximum.

Hon. E. M. Davies: Do you not think the companies would increase the rate by 25 per cent. to cover the reduction?

Hon. G. Fraser: That is exactly what will happen.

Hon. L. Craig: Of course it will.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Members might know that that will happen, but I am not aware that it will. I know a large number of insurance managers and I am sure they would show their appreciation of the supply of the equipment.

The Chief Secretary: Of course they would.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: I am quite sure they would, and I cannot believe that Mr. Craig is altogether right when he suggests that they would increase their premiums by 25 per cent. to cover the reduction.

Hon. L. Craig: It would not pay them otherwise. They will have to make up the amount they lose.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: If there are fire brigades properly equipped in the district, the risk is far less.

The Chief Secretary: There is nothing in the Bill about equipment.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Of course there is.

The Chief Secretary: Well, show it to me.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: The brigades must be properly equipped.

The Chief Secretary: It does not say so.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: The bill states that the equipment must be approved by a forest officer. It states—

If in the opinion of the Minister the bush fire brigade of a local authority at any time not of a reasonable standard of efficiency the Minister may by notice published in the Government Gazette declare that any approved area within the district of such local authority shall, as from a date to be specified in such notice, cease to be an approved area

What refers to the reasonable standard of efficiency.

The Chief Secretary: But I said "equipment."

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: It says that.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: You are reading the disapproval clause and not the approval clause.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Clause 3 states—

Before declaring the district or part thereof to be an approved area the Minister may appoint a forest officer to inspect the bush fire brigade of the local authority and report as to the standard of efficiency of such bush fire brigade.

Of course, that refers to the equipment as well. The forest officer would not inspect the men because the men are not permanent. It is the equipment only that will be inspected together with the facilities available, such as the transport and so on.

Hon. A. Thomson: Thousands of pounds would have been saved years ago if bush fire brigades had been in existence.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: This is the first attempt to afford some protection by providing bush fire brigades. It is a step in the right direction, and I consider that the House should agree to it. Another place has already approved of it in its present form. I understand that some members think there should be spark arresters fitted to tractors, but insurance companies more or less insist upon that at the moment. If a person is using a tractor for harvesting a crop and no spark arrester is fitted, the premium is considerably higher than if such a device is installed.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: For every fire started by tractors, 20 are started by railway engines.

Hon. G. Bennetts: As regards the question of payments to brigades, the insurance companies pay 5/9ths of the cost, the Government 2/9ths and the local authorities 2/9ths.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: Probably that would be about right, and it would be something along the lines I suggested. The Bill is a very simple one, is easily read and very easy to understand. The Minister laughs. I do not know whether he is finding any difficulty in understanding it.

The Chief Secretary: None whatever.

Hon. Sir CHARLES LATHAM: If the Honorary Minister does not understand it, I am sorry; but I think I should have his support because the road board with which he is associated is at the present time start-

ing some sort of local fire brigade with equipment for the very purpose that the Bill has been introduced. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

HON. J. A. DIMMITT (Metropolitan-Suburban) [5.55]: I agree with Sir Charles Latham that the Bill is simple and easily understood, but I hope the House will not be as simple as the Bill. It strikes me as a particularly ill-conceived piece of proposed legislation, because it seeks to do something I consider would be entirely unsound and seeks to do it in a way that insurers certainly do not like. I want to disabuse Sir Charles Latham's mind in regard to the attitude of insurance companies. They do not like the Bill. Sir Charles suggested that they were in agreement with it, but I will tell him that they are entirely opposed to it.

In the first place, the Bill seeks to compel all insurers—that is, all insurance companies that transact crop insurance—to reduce rates in approved areas by 25 per cent. I was interested in the interjection by Mr. Hearn, because I intended to ask the same question. I wanted to know how the sponsor of this legislation arrived at the basis of 25 per cent. Why not 45 per cent. or 20 per cent.? Sir Charles replied that it was the number Mr. Perkins first thought of. That is not the way to calculate fire insurance.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: I did not say that.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: The hon. member said that he supposed it was just a haphazard guess.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: I do not think I said that. I said I thought it was a haphazard guess.

The Chief Secretary: Sir Charles is right. He did not think!

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: And that is the basis for calculating a rate that shall be thrust upon the insurance companies! They are to give a 25 per cent. discount because Mr. Perkins thought that 25 per cent. might be a jolly good figure. Fire insurance premiums are not arrived at by hit or miss methods. They are calculated premiums, and are the result of years and years of experience by many companies.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: They still make a huge profit out of it.

Hon. G. Bennetts: My word, they do.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: And they carry a huge risk, which is based on the hazards. It is not based on guess-work, as this Bill apparently is. Underwriters rate their risk on the merits of the case and the hazards associated with the property to be insured.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: The Bill is designed to reduce their hazards.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: It will reduce their hazards.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Then why not let the companies pay for it?

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: There is a premiums committee that alters the premiums up or down for the insurance companies as the circumstances warrant.

The Chief Secretary: That is so.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: If the experience has been good in a particular district, the insurance premiums are reduced in that district. If they are bad, the insurance premiums are raised. These insurance premiums are not static; they move up and down according to the experience and the risk. Experience is the criterion of that movement up or down, and the risk on some farms is very much greater than it is on others. A farmer who has his crop on a property adjoining which a railway line runs for several miles, is a much more hazardous risk than another whose crop is on a holding miles away from a railway. Insurance premiums are rated according to the hazard.

Hon. A. Thomson: It is to be hoped that you will be able to persuade the Railway Department that that is so.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: The railways have nothing to do with this legislation.

Hon. A. Thomson: No, but you referred to the hazards involved.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: That is so.

Hon. A. Thomson: The railways only start fires.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: Members will recollect that insurance is not compulsory, a phase that is in Mr. Craig's mind. On the other hand, insurance is very competitive. Underwriters do not necessarily agree upon rates of insurance, with the result that

farmers can benefit by placing their insurances with the underwriter that quotes the lowest premium. The Bill will take away from the underwriters the right to assess the risks they will insure.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: No.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: It does, seeing it sets out that in certain areas the rates shall be reduced by 25 per cent.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: That is all right. Why not give it a test?

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: As I have pointed out, insurance is not compulsory. It is not compulsory for an owner to insure his crop. By the same token, it is not compulsory for any insurance company to accept a risk at a rate other than that fixed by the company on its own assessment. Let members look at some of the features of the Bill. Subsection (1) of proposed new Section 35A sets out—

For the purpose of this Act any local authority in the district of which a bush fire brigade is established may apply to the Minister that such district or any part thereof be declared an approved area.

Members will recollect that what was known as fire prevention week was conducted recently. Throughout the State the wireless stations broadcast a great deal of information about fire brigades. On Friday night I listened to one of the broadcasts, and I particularly noted that the commentator said there are 230 bush fire brigades in Western Australia. In those circumstances, it is reasonable to suppose there will be 230 applications for the gazettal of approved districts, which would virtually mean that the insurance of the whole of the crops in those districts would be reduced by 25 per cent. I do not think any insurance company would be prepared to accept a compulsory reduction of 25 per cent. in the insurance on crops. The result might easily be rather disastrous.

Hon. J. M. A. Cunningham: Would those 230 applications cover the whole of the area under crop?

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: I have just quoted the statement made during the broadcast.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: They would cover the forest areas.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: At any rate, it means that if a bush fire brigade were established in the district of a local au-

thority, crop insurance there would be reduced by 25 per cent.

Hon. L. A. Logan: The officer appointed would have to approve.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: I am interested in that interjection. Proposed new Subsection (3) sets out that before declaring the district or any part of it an approved area, the Minister "may" appoint a forest officer to inspect the bush fire brigade.

Hon. G. Fraser: It does not say he shall do so.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: No, it is not obligatory upon the Minister to do so. What is this officer to do? He is to inspect the bush fire brigade of the local authority and report as to the standard of its efficiency. What is the standard of efficiency? The Bill contains nothing that will enable him to determine what is the required standard.

Hon. H. Hearn: And why a forest officer?

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: At any rate, it is to be at the whim of this individual. He is to determine whether the fire-fighting appliances are efficient or otherwise. I took the opportunity recently to discuss fire fighting efficiency with our chief fire brigade officer, Mr. Gerhard. I said to him, "What would you consider an efficient bush fire brigade?" His reply was, "Efficiency depends upon three things—suitability of equipment, personnel and ability to get that suitable equipment and personnel to the scene of the conflagration before the fire gets out of hand." The Bill provides that an officer of the Forests Department, without any knowledge as to the standard set up in an Act of Parliament, has to judge the efficiency or otherwise of a bush fire brigade.

Hon. W. J. Mann: You ought to be very careful in your comments, because those officers are very highly trained.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: I am prepared to give the forest officers full marks for all they are doing.

Hon. W. J. Mann: They are very highly qualified officers.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: They are the best trained men in this State at their work.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: In this instance, we are dealing with voluntary personnel, and there is no guarantee that those volun-

teers will be available when called upon. The success of a volunteer fire brigade is largely due to the enthusiasm of one or two leaders. If those leaders should happen to be out of the district when the services of the bush fire brigade were required, then its efficiency might be considerably lowered.

Hon. W. J. Mann: That only "may" be so.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: Then there is the other point regarding the distance of personnel and equipment from the scene of a fire. It might be completely out of hand, and then the efforts of the bush fire brigade might be negligible.

Several members interjected.

Hon. W. J. Mann: You ought to go out into the bush.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: Members by their interjections seem to suggest that I have never been outside the metropolitan area. I think I have travelled this State as much as any other member.

Hon. W. J. Mann: And probably have seen fewer bush fires.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: Supporters of the Bill may say that provision has been made in this respect towards the end of the Bill, where in proposed new Section 35C it states—

If in the opinion of the Minister the bush fire brigade of a local authority at any time is not of a reasonable standard of efficiency, the Minister may by notice published in the "Government Gazette" declare that any approved area within the district of such local authority shall . . . cease to be an approved area for the purposes of this Act . . .

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: You said the standard of efficiency was not mentioned.

Hon. J. A. DIMMITT: I did not say so; but that is beside the point. Those who favour the Bill may contend that the maintenance of the requisite standard of efficiency is provided for in that proposed new section. If that efficiency is to be maintained, then the Forests Department will have to employ a great number of inspectors continually and continuously to inspect the fire-fighting plants in order to ensure that the standard is maintained.

For my part, I cannot see that the Bill has any merit at all, for the simple reason

that it fixes a premium rate that has no relationship at all to the hazards. Secondly, it contains no indication as to what is to be the required standard of efficiency. Thirdly, I suggest that it is entirely wrong that Parliament should try to fix insurance premiums. I do not know how sound my opinion may be on the point, but I think it cuts right across price control. I shall certainly vote against the second reading of the Bill.

HON. G. FRASER (West) [6.10]: It may be suggested that I am putting up a fight for the insurance companies, which would be a most unusual role for me, when I say that I intend to oppose the Bill.

Hon. W. J. Mann: You are not a director, are you?

Hon. G. Bennetts: He is probably the only member who is not a director!

Hon. G. FRASER: I suggest that in opposing the Bill I am doing a good turn to the farmer. This is one of the most awful Bills I have ever seen introduced into this Chamber. The point that strikes me is that there is nothing contained in the measure to say what the insurance companies shall charge as premiums. There is no provision stipulating the maximum amount that may be charged, and it is obvious that if the Bill is agreed to, the insurance companies will apply rates so that in those parts where the 25 per cent. is to be deducted the rate will be such that the farmers concerned will continue to pay the premiums that rule at present, and the rates charged in other parts may be increased.

If the Bill contained some safeguard in that respect and fixed a maximum amount of premium, which could be reduced by 25 per cent. as proposed in the measure, one might be inclined to support the Bill. I know of nothing that will compel either the tariff or non-tariff companies to accept this type of insurance. I consider those companies would be better able to judge as to the precautions that had been taken and to decide who would be entitled to reduced premiums rather than that Parliament should attempt to do so by legislation. Mr. Dimmitt quoted one provision in the Bill, but he dealt with only part of it. That provision sets out to do something and then does not do it.

Proposed new Section 35A starts out by proposing that certain things shall be done and then in Subsection (3) states that before doing those things, the Minister "may appoint" a forest officer to make certain inquiries and inspections. I regard it as a most remarkable provision. The Minister has to do certain things and then the Bill practically provides that he may not do them. The whole matter is left in the air. It does not say what the equipment should be nor does it lay down the requisite standard of equipment. It refers to a 25 per cent. reduction in premiums but gives the Minister no guidance upon which to base his action, other than to say that he shall rely on the report of the forest officer as to whether he will approve of a district. I admit that difficulty could be overcome in Committee by an amendment altering the word "may" to "shall."

The Minister must have definite information that a district was complying with certain standard requirements. The Minister should have that information before declaring an area to be an approved district under this legislation. While it is generally accepted in parliamentary practice that "may" means "shall," in this instance I do not think the words have the same meaning. It would be left entirely to the Minister as to whether the inspection should be made or otherwise. It is ridiculous to place the onus of declaring a district as an approved area on the Minister without insisting upon all the requisite information being at his disposal as a result of reports from some competent authority.

Hon. G. Bennetts: Do you think a forest officer would be a competent authority in this instance?

Hon. G. FRASER: I do not know of anyone who would be better able to express an opinion as to whether a district was complying with the necessary standard.

Hon. H. Hearn: Should not the insurance companies have some say about it?

Hon. G. FRASER: I do not know that they should be concerned with it.

Hon. W. J. Mann: Now you are going back on the companies.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: The local authorities have imposed a tax for their benefit.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. G. FRASER: I do not propose to repeat my objections to the Bill. I give credit to the sponsors of the measure, believing they have an objective in view that they consider will be in the interests of the farming community, but I cannot see how they will attain their objective by this Bill. If the measure were put into operation, it might result in higher premiums being charged to farmers in many districts. The insurance companies, in arranging crop insurance, consider the experience over past years and the amount they have had to pay in claims. This amount is covered by declaring a premium that is practically uniform throughout the State.

Under a measure such as this, if there were a maximum rate for crop insurance and the companies were required to make a 25 per cent. reduction in specified cases, I can visualise their applying for a higher premium in districts not covered by the measure. Thus there would be differential rates in various parts of the State. We might even find that a farmer on one side of a road would be paying a certain amount and that a farmer on the opposite side of the road would be paying a different rate. This could apply in districts where the whole area was not covered by a fire brigade, so that many complications would arise. I consider that the best method is that which is adopted today. Let the districts have their own fire-fighting equipment and, if their brigades prove efficient, the competition between the insurance companies will keep the rates down.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Competition!

Hon. G. FRASER: Yes.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: What are the underwriters for?

Hon. G. FRASER: If the fire-fighting equipment is as good as we have been led to believe it is, some of the companies will want to break away and charge a rate that they consider more reasonable. We have the tariff and the non-tariff companies operating now. I do not know whether the non-tariff companies charge a lower rate than do the tariff companies, but I can visualise that, after a succession of years free from the bush fire menace, some of the non-tariff companies would be endeavouring to attract business from the tariff companies by offering cheaper rates. The establishment of a fire brigade in a coun-

try area would not prevent the outbreak of fires, though it would prevent the spread of fires.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: That is just as important, is it not?

Hon. G. FRASER: Once a fire gets started, a considerable amount of work is required to stop it. If we could devise effective means of preventing fires in the first place, something would be achieved, but no matter how effective a brigade may be, once a fire gets under way, it is very difficult to stop it. I believe that many outbreaks could be obviated by adopting more effective control over the causes of bush fires, and if that were done, there would be no need to consider a Bill of this sort. If I thought the Bill would achieve the objective of the sponsors, I would support it.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: It will.

Hon. G. FRASER: I cannot convince myself that it will and the hon. member, in moving the second reading, did not convince me. If he can convince me in the course of his reply, I shall not hesitate to reverse my vote, but at this stage I must oppose the second reading.

HON. G. BENNETTS (South) [7.37]: I support the second reading, and give credit to Sir Charles Latham for having introduced the measure because I believe it will be helpful in the farming areas. Mr. Dimmitt made reference to voluntary fire brigades, but I point out to him that, but for such brigades on the Goldfields and in parts of the farming areas, we would be very badly served. Once this fire fighting equipment is installed, it will prove an incentive to people in the district to assist. I believe in having brigades set up by the Government and the personnel paid. Opposition to the Bill has been expressed by representatives of insurance interests, but I propose to support the measure and hope that other members will do likewise.

THE HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE (Hon. G. B. Wood—East) [7.38]: I do not wish to give a silent vote on the measure and am loath to oppose it because I believe that the sponsors are actuated by the best of intentions. They have set out to accomplish something which they thought could be done in this way, but

I am definitely of opinion that what they desire cannot be done under this measure.

We should not be influenced to pass the Bill on the plea that it will do no harm. I believe that it will do harm. I am of opinion that something should be done in the country areas to encourage and perhaps finance the formation of fire brigades, and if we pass legislation of this sort, nothing along those lines will be done and we shall get nowhere. I believe that the solution could be found in amending the Road Districts Act to provide that loans entailing a very small rate might be raised to finance fire brigades.

Bruce Rock has installed three fire engines. They were "disposals" trucks, four-wheeled drive, which were acquired for £150 each and they were fitted with pumping equipment. I think the whole cost was about £200 or £300 each. These three engines constitute a highly efficient fire-fighting organisation in that district. This is a tremendous advance when we recall that a few years ago we relied upon the use of bushes to beat out fires and then later adopted the knapsack sprays. If other boards followed the example of Bruce Rock, I believe that the fire hazard would be reduced considerably.

But the proposals in the Bill will not encourage anybody and certainly will not provide finance for the road boards. In my opinion, Sir Charles Latham put up a very weak case in support of a very weak Bill. One can pick holes in the measure from beginning to end. Apart from the object in view, the Bill has no merit at all because it will be incapable of being implemented. To say that it is a simple Bill will get us nowhere. Perhaps the measure itself is a simple one, but it will not be simple to operate. Like Mr. Dimmitt, I travel much in the country and I can appreciate the difficulties that would be associated with any attempt at implementing the measure. First of all there is the standard of efficiency to which Mr. Dimmitt referred. The standard of efficiency will presumably be that of the engine, but there is nothing in the Bill about the standard of the personnel or of the district. That is a definite weakness. What might be considered high efficiency in one district would definitely not be so in another district.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: You mean as regards the equipment?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Yes. What might be suitable in the Bruce Rock area would be of very little use in the Northam district with its hills and dales and rivers and creeks. What is required is equipment that can be moved from place to place. Perhaps an ordinary truck would be suitable in the Bruce Rock area or a district consisting mostly of sandplain, but in districts like York, Northam or Toodyay, it would be of no use at all except to run along a main road. According to the Bill a forestry officer would be sent out to inspect the fire equipment, but no mention is made about inspecting the district. What would be the position of the Minister for Lands? How could he reach a determination on such a report? We would have many of the 125 local authorities clamouring to be approved in order to get the 25 per cent. reduction.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Do you suggest that the fire brigades and Forests Department officials are no good?

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Not at all. Suppose there were only 50 crop districts clamouring to be approved, what a job the forestry officer would have! How could he cope with the work? Somebody would have to make an inspection every year. To say which district should be approved and which should not be approved would be a most difficult matter. In fact it would be almost impossible. There are other ways of making the requisite provision. We have often said that before in this place. This is not the way to deal with the situation.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Tell us the way.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: I believe the time has come to do something to encourage the creation of these brigades. Unlike the Bruce Rock Road Board, everybody cannot get a truck for £150. My own road board has been trying unsuccessfully to obtain one. This project will cost a lot of money.

Hon. L. A. Logan: It will cost the insurance companies a lot of money the other way.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: Not necessarily. The cost to the individual person in any road

district would be very little indeed. It would require a very small loan rate. I think that is the solution. This measure will not bring money into the coffers of the road boards. Suppose Parliament said to the insurance companies, "You have to reduce your rate by 25 per cent." There is nothing in the Bill to say that the companies cannot increase the rate by 15 per cent. or 18 per cent. or 20 per cent. And so it will go on. Parliament will say "Break it down" and the companies will put it up. I can see no reason why that should not go on if they want to do it. I hope the House will not pass this legislation. I do not want to mislead the sponsors into believing that it will have any effect at all. I am loath to oppose the measure, because the sponsors have good intentions.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: The road boards want it.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: All of them do not.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: Practically all of them.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: No.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: I will send you a list.

The HONORARY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE: It is all very well for them to say that they want it; they do not understand it. I know some that want it. I have been circularised by road boards in my own province, but I believe that I would be misleading them if I supported this legislation. They would say, "We have what we want and we need not go any further."

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. H. S. W. Parker—Metropolitan-Suburban) [7.48]: I have a certain feeling towards the hon. member who introduced the Bill and I entirely agree that this is a matter in which we should use commonsense.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: It is most unusual for you to agree with me.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Most unusual! I also have a feeling that before introducing the Bill he did not prepare his speech. It has sometimes been said by the hon. member that I have not given sufficient details concerning Bills I have introduced. In opposing this measure, let me give a few details that he has apparently overlooked.

When a person goes to an insurance company to take out a policy, he fills in a proposal form. The company may or may not undertake the insurance, as it deems fit, and it will charge a premium which has been worked out on a scientific basis. If the law says there is a risk of the area in which a man wishes to insure his crop becoming an approved area under the 1948 Bush Fires Act Amendment Act, the only way the company can cover itself is by putting on 30 per cent. first and then, when the district becomes an approved area, it will be on the right track and have its correct premium.

I would like the hon. member, when replying, to tell me what the position would be if a man were successful in getting an insurance company to insure him in an approved area and then the Minister decided to cancel his approval of that area. The man would think he was insured and would find, after a fire had occurred, that the area was not approved. The Bill is a snare and a delusion to the farmer. It is a very grave risk to the farmer, because it gives him a false sense of security. He thinks there is an efficient fire brigade because the Minister has declared the place an approved area.

There is nothing in the Bill defining the standard of efficiency required. It is at the whim of the forestry officer. What he thinks is efficient for crops may be entirely different from what he thinks is efficient for a forest. Similarly what he thinks is efficient for a closely settled farming area, may be entirely different from what he thinks efficient for the forest areas. How are we to judge efficiency? Something may be efficient today and most inefficient tomorrow. I have heard the hon. member most efficient on some occasions, but I cannot say that he is very efficient tonight. Conditions vary considerably. A brigade may be most efficient; but, unfortunately, the leader or some of the principal men may become ill, or be shifted, or go away, and then it will not be an efficient brigade. Are we to have a forestry officer continually inspecting in order to ensure that a brigade is efficient?

What is an efficient brigade? I do not know, and I am unaware as to how forestry officers will decide the point. Are these brigades going to purchase the equipment that the forestry officer says is necessary to make

them efficient, or is this Act to become a dead letter? The only way to handle this matter is by means of a proper Act introduced after careful consideration has been given to it. If a railway line divides a property one side of which is in an approved area and the other side is not, is it likely that any company is going to insure one side for 25 per cent. less than the other side because on the one side there is an efficient fire brigade?

There is no saying how far a fire brigade will be away from a district. It may have to travel from 10 to 20 miles. This scheme is quite impracticable. It is not workable. We know that all people in the country do their utmost to put out fires whenever they can. They have as much equipment as they can afford for the purpose. Surely if a district is going to have really good fire-fighting equipment approved by the insurance companies, those companies will be only too delighted to make a rebate in the premium.

Hon. J. A. Dimmitt: If they have had a good experience.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Most decidedly. Reference has been made to competition. There are tariff companies and non-tariff companies, all out for the business they can get. Surely that is all we want. I feel that if this Bill were passed it would give a very false sense of security to the farmers. It would be of no effect because insurance companies would not accept the risk. There is nothing to say they have to do so; and the farmer, as a result of this Bill, would find that he could not get insurance cover. In the interests of the farmers, therefore, I must vote against the measure.

HON. W. J. MANN (South-West) [7.54]: I did not intend to speak on the Bill but I am so amused by some of the things that have been said in this connection, particularly by the Chief Secretary, that I feel I cannot keep quiet.

The Chief Secretary: I did not expect you to be on the same side.

Hon. W. J. MANN: That might even happen some day, when the Chief Secretary brings down something worthwhile. Extraordinary things have been said about these bush fire brigades. The Minister said a brigade might be 10 or 12 miles away.

Every little locality has its own fire brigade. A brigade might be 10 miles away from a fire, but the members would jump into their runabouts and get to the fire very quickly, almost as quickly as the metropolitan fire brigade gets into the far suburbs. The Minister says this proposal is a snare and a delusion for the farmers, because members of a brigade may be ill or go away or leave the district. Does he not know that the members of these brigades are the farmers and their sons? They are not strangers brought into the place, but local people.

The Chief Secretary: Do they never go away?

Hon. W. J. MANN: Does the Chief Secretary ever go away?

The Chief Secretary: Very seldom.

Hon. W. J. MANN: Perhaps the same might be said about them. Members can see what a fallacious argument that is. These men are defending their properties. They are out to safeguard their own assets. They do not do silly things like leaving the brigade in the hands of other people. As a matter of fact, I do not know where they would get them. Everybody in these brigades is either a resident or the son of a resident. There is no unemployed population that could be utilised for such a purpose.

So far as the safety aspect is concerned, the brigade adds to the farmers' sense of security to a very great extent. We would not find them banded together and having practices as they do if it were not worth while. The question has been asked as to what equipment they have. They have a certain amount of equipment which up to date has functioned very well. Somebody asked whether the Bill contained anything about the standard of efficiency. Let any member read the Fire Brigades Act and then show me anything therein which indicates what should be the standard of efficiency of brigades in the city. There is nothing in the Act to that effect and it is just hooey to talk like that.

The Chief Secretary: I quite agree.

The Honorary Minister for Agriculture: There is no 25 per cent. reduction, either.

Hon. W. J. MANN: I will come to that. I am showing the fallacy of some arguments put up by members. One would think that there was no rural aspect to this matter.

Hon. Sir Charles Latham: The Minister has no rural outlook.

Hon. W. J. MANN: Quite a lot has been said on behalf of the poor insurance companies. I have never known one of them to go broke.

The Honorary Minister for Agriculture: Who referred to poor insurance companies?

Hon. W. J. MANN: A member did. I have never known one to go bankrupt.

The Chief Secretary: You have never been a director perhaps.

Hon. W. J. MANN: Perhaps I am one of those few who are not directors. I have heard members get up in this House and speak about the poor insurance companies that would be ruined because of some legislation that has been introduced; but I have never known a company to go out of existence. I am not going to defend the 25 per cent. because I am not in a position to do so. But I do say that from the viewpoint of efficiency of these brigades, there is a wrong impression in this Chamber.

The brigades are doing very good work, and are being captained in many cases by forestry men who are well trained and whose duty it is to see that a fire is extinguished, whether it is on Crown land or private property. I know one or two men who are captains of small bush fire brigades in areas where the fire hazard is not great. But there have been two or three cases during the past summer where dairy farmers, but for the bush fire brigades, would have lost all their stockfeed. Such a loss means a lot to the man who is milking from 50 to 100 cows. The bush fire brigades have often saved the situation for men such as those. While I do not say the Bill is perfect, or that I agree with all its provisions. I feel that, when discussing this question, we should get down to bedrock instead of talking a lot of nonsense.

HON. J. G. HISLOP (Metropolitan) [8.1]: I do not wish to vote against the Bill or have it thought that because I represent the metropolitan area I am opposed to giving support to country measures. The Bill has in it the germ of a very good idea but, because of its parentage, has a congenital weakness. That weakness is one with which I sympathise, having had to do with children suffering from the same type

of congenital weakness. The weakness may be recognised on looking through the Bill and realising that in one portion the Minister is directed to do something but, as Mr. Fraser said, before that clause is finished, he has been allowed liberty of action.

The liberty of action has been given to the Minister owing to the congenital weakness of the Bill. Otherwise, as a private member introduced the measure, it would have been increasing the public expense, and would have failed on those grounds. That is the reason for the difficulties that confront so many members this evening. I had the same trouble some 4 years ago in introducing amendments to the Workers' Compensation Act, but I would tell the sponsors of this Bill that I lived to see the day when a Royal Commission adopted the amendments that I desired to see made at that stage. It is therefore likely that it will not be long, in view of the Honorary Minister's statement, before the real purpose behind this Bill will be fulfilled by action being taken by the Government.

It is obvious to all members that some support should be given to country fire brigades, and if they need more support, more should be given. I, personally, accept the view of the Honorary Minister that there are other forms and places in which it would be wiser to look for the help necessary for this type of fire brigade. My difficulty regarding the matter is, again following the congenital weakness, that I cannot see the Minister appointing, here and there and everywhere, forestry officers to decide the question of efficiency. When the Minister has declared an area, having accepted the statement of the forestry officer as to efficiency, it may be that the time will come when he must decide that that area is no longer in possession of an efficient brigade.

I am in doubt as to how the Minister will do that. There is the possibility that he will be able to declare that area inefficient only after some fire disaster has occurred, whereas what is really needed—it is obvious from reading the Bill and from the remarks of members—is that support should be given to a union of these fire brigades into something of an efficient character for control in much the same way as the metropolitan fire brigades are controlled. Even though

they are voluntary organisations, I venture to suggest that, as we have been told, they are efficient, and voluntary fire-fighting organisations proved efficient under the civil defence organisation. With a more efficient direction and greater efficiency in the laying down and maintaining of their standards, they would give increased service to the community, and it might then be possible to introduce a measure of financial support such as this Bill proposes. I still feel that if they showed they were efficient to that degree and could be looked upon as a State-wide body, it would not be long before the ordinary competition of the insurers brought the rates down to a level possibly lower, in some parts, than is sought in the Bill.

In the circumstances, therefore, I cannot support the measure at the moment as I feel it is inherently weak. It sets out to do something and then, because its sponsor could not commit the Government to expenditure, breaks down in the control of the functions that it undertakes. Had it not been for the fact that the introducer of the measure was not its true sponsor, it might almost have appeared that the time had been reached when he could have held the Bill up and asked for a Select Committee composed of those people vitally interested in the matter to investigate by what means it would be desirable to offer to country districts the measure of financial and other support that the Bill seeks to give them.

Were I in the House where the Bill originated, I would have made that suggestion to its sponsor, but under present conditions I can only put it forward—possibly not even as a suggestion to the introducer of the measure—that he so add to his labour by inquiring to that extent. If he cannot do that, surely the Government must be impressed with the need for something of a more defined character to control efficiently the functions of these brigades or forces and eventually to join them together with the idea of giving them the support sought in the Bill.

On motion by Hon. E. H. Gray, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 8.10 p.m.