Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 26th August, 1941.

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

QUESTION—RAILWAYS, MUNDARING SERVICE.

Mr. SAMPSON asked the Minister for Railways: In view of the added difficulty, now experienced because of severe petrol rationing, in reaching the outer suburban districts, including Mundaring and Mundaring Weir and other railway stopping places, is it possible to arrange for the running of additional trains or diesel coaches, including a week-end train which would permit return to Perth in time for the usual starting time for business?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied: The existing services to the outer suburban area provide reasonable daily and week-end facilities. All have a service permitting week-end return to Perth before usual business time, with the exception of Mundaring Weir, where it is not feasible, without considerable expense, to provide such a service, and where defence restrictions have reduced sight-seeing travel to a very small volume. The position is constantly watched and the hon. member may be assured that any additional services which are justified will be provided.

QUESTION—TROLLEY BUSES.

Mr. CROSS asked the Minister for Railways: 1, Has he seen a statement made by Mr. W. H. Taylor, Manager of the Government Tramways, to the effect that trolley buses were obtainable from America? 2, If so, does he intend to place an immediate order in the U.S.A. for sufficient trolley buses to augment the present Wembley and Claremont trolley bus services, and to replace the present South Perth tram service with an up-to-date trolley bus service?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied: 1, Yes. 2, Inquiry by cablegram has been made regarding supply of trolley bus chassis from America but a reply has not yet been received.

QUESTION—ELECTRICITY SUPPLY.

Mr. NORTH asked the Minister for Railways: 1, Has there been any variation in the agreement between the Government Electricity Supply Department and the Cottesloe Municipal Council since 1924 in respect of the quality and effectiveness of street lighting? 2, If so, in what respects?

The MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS replied: 1, There has been no formal variation in the agreement, but, by arrangement, the power of the previously existing 60-watt lamps throughout the municipality has been increased to 100 watts in side streets and 150 watts on corners of streets and in Stirling-highway. 2, Answered by No. 1.

ASSENT TO BILL.

Message from the Lieut.-Governor received and read notifying assent to the Supply Bill (No. 1), £2,500,000.

BILLS (2)—FIRST READING.

1, Road Districts Act Amendment (No. 1).
Introduced by Mr. Watts.

2, Death Penalty Abolition.
Introduced by Mrs. Cardell-Oliver.

BILL—BAPTIST UNION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA LANDS.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. F. J. S. Wise—Gascoyne) [4.37] in moving the second reading said: This Bill is introduced to give the Baptist Union of Western Australia (Incorporated) power to sell, mortgage or lease any land granted or demised by the Crown or otherwise acquired and held

in trust for the Union, and to permit the Union to transfer the same freed and discharged from any trusts. Legislation of this character applying to other denominations is already on the statute-book. The Bill provides that, subject to a proviso, no transfer or mortgage, and no lease for a term exceeding 21 years, of land granted by the Crown without pecuniary consideration therefor, shall be valid unless countersigned by the Governor. In 1901, the Baptist Union was granted a block of land at South Perth for ecclesiastical purposes. Since then the Union has, for the purposes of its church, purchased other lands and built upon them. These lands have proved in the course of time to be more suited to the Union's purposes, and this Bill will enable the Union to sell the block of land acquired from the Crown and to deal with any similar cases that might arise.

The Crown Law Department advises upon this subject to the effect that legislative authority is necessary to allow the Union to dispose of that land freed from any trust. In 1895 an Act was passed to give similar authority to the Roman Catholic Church. In 1918, similar legislation was passed relating to lands granted to the Church of England. The Presbyterian Church and the Hebrew Congregation also have privilege under legislation of this type to sell and deal with lands granted to them by the Crown. The Bill is simple and sets out specifically the points I have enumerated. Members will find it easy to follow and it has no purpose other than those to which I have given expression.

Mr. Marshall: What is the area of the block of land concerned?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It is a very small piece of land. The whole matter has been carefully considered and the Bill contains nothing to which members can take exception. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Thorn, debate adjourned.

BILL— METROPOLITAN WATER SUPPLY, SEWERAGE AND DRAINAGE ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. H. Millington—Mt. Hawthorn [4.41] in moving the second reading said: This Bill, though small, is necessary in order to bring the Minister's rating powers under the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Act into conformity with the rating powers of municipalities under the Municipal Corporations Act. It is desired (1), to increase the net annual value of any rateable land during the currency of a rating year where it appears to the Minister that, by reason of improvements to existing buildings or new buildings erected upon such land, the amount of the annual value has become greater than the amount of the annual value assessed at the commencement of the rating year; (2), to decrease the net annual value of any rateable land during the currency of a rating year, where it appears to the Minister that, by reason of the destruction, damage or demolition of improvements previously made and standing upon the said land, the amount of the annual value has become less than the amount of the annual value assessed at the commencement of the rating year. The re-assessment, either by increase or decrease, as the case may require, is to be made for the then unexpired portion of the rating year. Section 81 of the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Act reads—

> The net annual value, or capital unimproved value set against all rateable land in the rate books kept by the Minister as aforesaid shall, subject to appeal as hereinafter provided, be the rateable value thereof for the current year.

The Minister, therefore, under present legislation has no power to re-assess the annual valuation during the currency of the year, on account of the annual value having increased or decreased owing to improvements or demolitions having occurred during the currency of the year. Municipal councils have such powers under Section 394 of the Municipal Corporations Act. In municipal districts, for the purpose of rating, the Minister adopts the annual value of the local authority (as will be seen from Section 74, subsection 1, of the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Act) but in cases where the municipality amends a valuation during the currency of a year the Minister is unable to do likewise owing to Section 81 of the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Act already quoted, providing that the rateable value assessed at the commencement of the year be the rateable value for the current year.

Hon. N. Keenan: How often do you propose to give power to re-assess during a year? Every month?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: No. The rateable year commences on the 1st July. It may be that by November a very valuable dwelling may be erected on a vacant block of land, but that property cannot be re-assessed until the succeeding rateable year commencing on the next 1st July.

Hon. N. Keenan: But how often do you suggest that power should be given to re-assess? How many times in a year?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: As many times as may be necessary.

Hon. N. Keenan: If necessary, twelve times?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Can the hon. member imagine circumstances in which a re-assessment would be necessary on 12 occasions in the one year? Assume that a property is assessed at a very high rate in July and that in the following month a valuable building on that property is demolished! Under present conditions the original rate would stand throughout the year. Under the amending Bill there could be a re-assessment covering the remaining 11 months. As I have indicated, that course can be taken under the Municipal Corporations Act. If a building were demolished in the city area the Perth City Council would, under the Municipal Corporations Act, be able to re-assess the value of the land. Under that Act the local authorities have power to increase or decrease an assessment as the circumstances may demand. The purpose of this Bill is to bring the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Act into conformity with the Municipal Corporations Act.

There is another point: It often happens that the necessity arises to extend the reticulation main to serve a building in course of erection on land which is assessed at the minimum rate as vacant land, and under existing legislation the annual valuation of the land cannot be amended until the following 1st July. As the revenue from rates on the vacant land is often insufficient to meet annual charges of interest, sinking fund and maintenance, it is necessary to obtain a guarantee from the owner or builder to meet the deficiency, before the water can be laid on. If the Bill is passed and the department has the right to re-assess, there will be no need for a guarantee which causes a good deal of trouble to the builder, and leads to some delay in the work until authority for the laying on of the water is issued.

The measure is very simple and contains nothing new. It brings the powers of the Water Supply Department into line with those of the local authorities. At present we have no power to decrease an assessment. We can sympathise but we cannot decrease the rateable value of a property. Under this measure we shall have that power. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Shearn, debate adjourned.

BILL—INCREASE OF RENT (WAR RESTRICTIONS) ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [4.50] in moving the second reading said: The Increase of Rent (War Restrictions) Act, 1939, pegged each rent at the figure that existed at the 31st August, 1939. The Act gave to each tenant protection against any increase in rent above the figure at that date. The legislation presupposed that every tenant would stand upon the legal rights conferred upon him. Because of that, no penal provisions were included in the Act. The tenant was given the right by law to enjoy this protection against any increase in his rent, and it was expected of him that he would stand solidly upon that right and refuse to pay any increase in rent that might be demanded of him.

It can be said that the majority of landlords have not sought to impose increased rents upon their tenants. As is usual, however, a number of landlords sought to obtain increased rents from tenants. Theoretically, the landlord and the tenant, under this legislation, are on the same footing. The tenant is given the legal right of protection against any increase in rent, and consequently it is thought (and was thought) that he has all the protection needed. In fact, the tenant is in a position somewhat inferior to the landlord. The landlord is letting the property and the tenant is renting it. Where increases of rent have been demanded of tenants, the tenants have, in some instances,

refused to pay them. Notices to quit the premises have been issued to the tenants and quite a number of tenants have been influenced by those notices, and have left the premises and searched for accommodation in other parts. Other tenants, because of inability to obtain other suitable premises, have paid the increased rents demanded of them.

I propose, briefly, to quote one of several cases that have come under notice. In this instance, some repairs were required in 1940 to the ceiling of the house. The tenant repeatedly asked the landlord to carry out the necessary repairs. The landlord kept on stalling, but finally did carry them out, and promptly raised the rent by 2s. 6d. a week. The tenant carried on under that imposition, mainly because it was not possible for him to obtain another suitable house at the time. From then onwards he kept a close watch, as did his wife, for another suitable house, but it was almost nine months before one could be obtained. As soon as another suitable place was available, the tenant gave his landlord a week's notice and moved into a new home. The landlord then let that property to another tenant and in the process raised the rent another 2s. 6d. a week.

Mr. Marshall: Who are the landlords?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: The standard, or fair rent, for that house was 22s. 6d., but by the time the second tenant occupied it the rent became 27s. 6d. per week. The second tenant made some inquiries about the history of the place and found that the original rent was 22s. 6d. per week. He then inquired into the legal position and found that the legal fair rent for that house was 22s. 6d. per week. He was advised that he ought to offer the landlord 22s. 6d. every week and challenge the landlord to do his worst about it. The tenant did that. Instead of paying 27s. 6d. per week, as he had been paying, he paid from then onwards 22s. 6d. per week. The landlord almost took a fit and gave the tenant a week's notice to vacate the house. The tenant ignored the notice to quit and continued to pay 22s. 6d. rent each week. Finally the landlord sold the property to someone else, and the tenant is still living happily in the house and paying the fair rent of 22s. 6d. per week.

The original landlord benefited by getting 2s. 6d. a week more than he was legally entitled to for the house for quite a period; and benefited also by getting 5s. a week more for it than he was legally entitled to get for another period.

The Government thinks that any tenant overcharged in the manner I have described should have a complete legal right to recover any overcharge so inflicted. It further thinks that power should be available to prosecute a landlord who overcharges in connection with rent, and this Bill now before the House asks Parliament to provide power to cover both of those points.

I have examined similar legislation operating in the other States of Australia, and in each case there are penal provisions in the legislation which enable a tenant, overcharged, to recover the amount of the overcharge; and there are also provisions which enable a prosecution to be launched against any landlord who charges above the fair or standard rent.

It is not anticipated that there will be any opposition to this Bill; and it is hoped also that it will have a speedy passage through both Houses.

Mr. Marshall: What an optimist you are!

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Watts, debate adjourned.

BILL—RESERVES (No. 1).

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. F. J. S. Wise—Gascoyne) [5.0] in moving the second reading said: The Bill refers to an area of land, well known to all members, that has frontages to Hay-street where there is the exhibit of the State Brickworks, to Irwin-street, where the Children's Court is erected, and to St. George's-terrace where Anzac House has been built on half its width. This area was included in the land covered by the Public Buildings Act of 1937, which provided for the renting or leasing of the area, and for the rental and the interest on the rent to be paid into a special fund for the purpose of erecting public buildings. Because of that provision, the necessity arises for the land, which was mentioned in the Act, to be excised from the reserve by means of special legislation—hence the introduction of the Bill. The area is mentioned in the First Schedule to

the Public Buildings Act, 1937, and the land adjoining it on the western side is that upon which Anzac House stands. That area was excised from the original reserve in 1933 and was handed over to the Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia.

The Bill embodies three particular provisions. It provides for the widening of Irwin-street to an additional 10 feet for the whole length of the reserve from Hay-street to St. George's-terrace. For some time the traffic authorities, the Town Planning Commissioner, the Fire Brigades Board and other representative bodies of Perth have commented upon the narrowness of Irwin-street. Members will be aware of the extremely abrupt ending of that thoroughfare where it joins Hay-street and continues through to Murray-street on an entirely different frontage. The opportunity is now taken, seeing that we are dealing with the reserve itself, to make provision for the widening of Irwin-street right through to the uniform width of 10 feet.

Mr. Sampson: Will that make it uniform right through?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, from St. George's-terrace to Hay-street. The Bill also provides for the closure of the 10-ft. right-of-way on the eastern side of Anzac House. In the past, that right-of-way was required for use in connection with the League's premises, but because of the third main provision in the Bill, which is to make a grant to the League of the area between Anzac House and the new alignment of Irwin-street, is no longer required.

Anzac House was constructed on the whole area granted to the R.S.L. in 1933. The structure was built to the maximum number of storeys that the foundations would stand. Architects have advised that there is no possibility of adding further storeys to Anzac House upon the present foundations. The League is severely pressed for accommodation. Prior to the present war, several branches of the League's activities were unable to obtain accommodation in Anzac House. The Legacy Club and other such affiliated bodies of the League could not do so. The position that arises today is materially affected by the prospective return of thousands of men now attached to the various branches of the fighting forces. The Air Force in itself has added thousands of men to those eligible for membership of the League; consequently, there will be in the future a great demand upon the resources of the home of that body.

It is pertinent to observe that this organisation and its property afford no benefit to any particular person. If, and when, the affairs of the League are wound up, the assets must be devoted to a patriotic cause and, should any dispute arise, the Chief Justice will have to decide what shall be done. From the ranks of the thousands of men now abroad will come the future controllers of the organisation, and I consider, without infusing any unnecessary sentiment into the consideration of the question, that the proper thing to do, since Anzac House occupies the area it does, is to endeavour to find additional room for the purposes of the League in close proximity to the present site of Anzac House.

The representatives of the League approached the Government with a request for the area under discussion, and the whole position was carefully considered. The problem of the better utilisation of the area was reviewed. The necessity for its use for public buildings or governmental purposes, because of provision being otherwise made for that object, was really removed, and this excluded from immediate or future need the area of the narrow strip of 92 links in width and 197 links in length along Irwin-street, which is the land under discussion. I have had plans prepared showing exactly what is proposed. The boundaries of the reserve, the future width of Irwin-street and the area proposed to be granted to the Returned Soldiers' League are all clearly shown, so that there can be no misconception.

Members will agree that the proposals embodied in the Bill can readily be accepted. With the prospect of so many men returning from various theatres of war—some have already returned—the pressure on the accommodation at Anzac House will be such that additional provision will have to be sought and paid for apart from Anzac House itself. If the Bill meets with the ready approval of both Houses of Parliament, the League proposes to make a commencement of building operations on the extended area at an early date. Members may desire to know some particulars regarding the value of the land. During the past week or two I had a valuation effected by approved valuers, and I find that the land

is worth approximately £100, or a little more per foot. The area may be said to be worth about £7,000. The proposal is that the area shall be made over to the League as a grant. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Thorn, debate adjourned.

BILL—NATIVE ADMINISTRATION ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR THE NORTH-WEST (Hon. A. A. M. Coverley—Kimberley) [5.10] in moving the second reading said: This Bill proposes to restrict the migration of natives from the Kimberley district to south of the 20th parallel of latitude, which is about 150 miles south of Broome. If the measure is agreed to, it will have effect only in the northern portion of the State. I believe members fully realise that leprosy has been quietly spreading amongst the native population in the far North during the past 20 years, and for that reason the Government, acting on the advice of the Medical Department, has seen fit to introduce this legislation. I personally consider the Bill very necessary in conjunction with other activities of the Government to stamp out, or at least control, this very sad disease.

I do not wish to convey the impression that, because this Bill has been introduced, leprosy is likely to spread through the State, but I believe it is necessary to take all precautionary measures within our power. The original suggestion for this legislation came from the travelling medical officer attached to the Department of Native Affairs. After a rather lengthy tour through the Kimberley district inspecting natives, he made recommendations to the Principal Medical Officer who in turn placed the report before the responsible Minister, and the outcome is the introduction of this Bill. I have lengthy reports from the two medical officers on this question, but I do not intend to weary the House by reading them. Still, members may desire some information as to what the medical officers think of the position, and I shall therefore read a few extracts. Most members know that Dr. Davis, the medical officer referred to, has had a lengthy experience of practically all tropical diseases, of which he made a special study, and that he did exceptionally good work in the interests of the natives in the North. In his report he gave reasons why, in his opinion, precautionary measures should be taken to prevent the spread of leprosy and put forward several alternatives. I quote the following—

> At the outset I may say that I am actuated solely in the interests of the public health of this State. On account of the long incubation period of this disease, it is unlikely that any serious spread of the disease to clean areas will take place during the time that I am associated with this question, but if serious steps are not now taken to de-limit this disease, it will be a real problem in the future. Now is the time for stringent measures if we would avoid the reproach of those that come after us.

Dr. Davis concluded his report thus—

> I cannot see how any of these alternatives, except perhaps the first, will go any distance towards limiting the spread of this disease. If one could appeal to the common sense of these people, as one can do in the case of whites, then their co-operation could be obtained. Unfortunately, such is impossible, and I hold out little hope of anything short of compulsion bringing about the desired end.

The Principal Medical Officer, Dr. Atkinson, forwarded Dr. Davis's report, together with his own comments, to the Commissioner of Native Affairs. This, in essence, is what Dr. Atkinson had to say—

> I quite agree with all that Dr. Davis has said hereunder, realising, as he does, that it is extremely desirable in the interests of future generations to confine to the present endemic areas the disease leprosy, even if we fail entirely to eradicate it from those areas where it now exists.
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> There is no doubt that the most efficient way of doing this is to exclude from the South those likely to have been infected, namely, natives and half-castes, so far as we reasonably can.

This is not what might be termed hasty legislation; it has been considered from all angles by those most competent to judge of the dread results if we allow the free access of contacts to other parts of the State. I know something of this disease by virtue of the fact that I have the honour of representing the Kimberley district where it is so prevalent. In 1924 there were only five known cases of leprosy in the town of Derby, and they were treated at the native hospital about 1½ miles out of the town. The people of the town were so concerned that the local road board re-

signed in a body as a protest against the inactivity of the Government of the day in allowing those five cases to drift on practically without supervision. Later the five natives were moved from the Derby area to an island off Cossack. This, to some extent, appeased the members of the Derby Road Board, who repented, resumed office and continued their good work.

In spite of our having moved those five natives from the district, by 1932 another 43 cases had come to light in that area. The previous trouble recurred and we drifted along until 1934 when the Government appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into native affairs. The Royal Commissioner recommended, amongst other things, that an exhaustive examination be made of all natives in the North and North-West for leprosy and other diseases. Following the presentation of his report, things moved somewhat faster and a travelling medical officer was appointed. The reports from which I have quoted were made after the subsequent examinations had been completed. I have pointed out how the number of known cases of leprosy had increased up to 1932. By 1940 another 284 leper patients had been found and brought in. Members will appreciate the increase in the last few years. After the appointment of the travelling medical officer, the Government built a leprosarium at Derby at a cost of £16,000. Good work has been done there in the interests of leper patients. There have been some cures, some discharges, and a few deaths, and we still have a fair number of patients.

I am of opinion that with a view to furthering the good work already done—and I think the House will agree with me—the best method of controlling and supervising the disease is to pass this legislation, which will assist in confining the trouble to that particular area, and enabling the utmost to be done for preventing spread of the disease. It is a hard task for the travelling medical officer to contact all the natives in the district, especially the section of unattached natives in civilised areas. When the travelling medical officer can go to a station, he has not much trouble in getting the natives lined up for examination; but it is the nomadic natives we find trouble in getting hold of and inducing them to face examination. In fact, when they hear from their friends or mates that the travelling medical officer is in a certain portion of the district, these natives drift off elsewhere. They play a sort of hide-and-seek game. The more civilised natives have got into the habit of going further down the coast merely to dodge examination by the travelling medical officer, for they know full well that as the result of examination they may be confined in a compound. Moreover, before the establishment of the leprosarium at Derby, they stood in dread of being sent to Darwin, to them a foreign country of which they had great fear. It has been found that the more educated natives in particular have begun to drift south so that they may escape undergoing the examination.

The Bill, therefore, is for the purpose of controlling the area in question and of obviating the possibility of the disease being brought further down the coast There are two classes of leprosy, both of which are treated in Kimberley. One is known as the open class, and the other as the closed class. I do not think members desire technical information regarding the two diseases; if they do, the information will be supplied. I wish once more to emphasise that leprosy has a very long incubation period, this being the reason why the medical profession is keen on having the disease confined to the one area

Mr. Marshall: Does the Minister know the percentage of natives afflicted with leprosy?

The MINISTER FOR THE NORTH-WEST: Statistics on that aspect are not available; but the records show that since 1935 there has been a total of 73 deaths in the Derby leprosarium, and that 44 patients have been released as cured. We still have 200 patients receiving treatment. Members will recognise that there is ample evidence justifying me in asking the House to agree even to this drastic measure, which restricts the natives to the particular area where the disease has become endemic. Fully 317 cases of leprosy have passed through the leprosarium to date, and, statistics indicate that there are 10,000 natives in the North. Whether we have the 10,000 is open to question; the estimate is somewhat in the nature of guesswork.

Mr. Marshall: Some of those patients may have been re-treated.

THE MINISTER FOR THE NORTH-WEST: My friend has no need to doubt that those are correct figures.

Hon. C. G. Latham: The Bill contains a lot of matter for very little. One clause should have been sufficient.

The Premier: One clause could not have done the lot.

The MINISTER FOR THE NORTH-WEST: There is more in the Bill than restriction of natives to the endemic area I have mentioned. We have to provide for emergencies, such as legal cases in connection with which natives have to be brought south. Medical and surgical treatment is required in special cases; these must be provided for. Further, the pastoral industry has to be thought of; and attention has been given to that aspect. Actually, the object of the measure is, in a few simple words, to confine leprosy to the area in which it exists, to prevent its spreading to any other portion of Western Australia, and, lastly, to preserve as far as we can the health of future generations.

Mr. Sampson: And to move back north the natives who have moved south.

The MINISTER FOR THE NORTH-WEST: The Bill provides that any native brought south under permit from the Minister must be returned to the North after the official business for which he is needed has been completed and the native is not required longer for either legal purposes or medical treatment. If a native is allowed to come south under permit there is not much danger, because he is under close supervision and under medical attention all the time. He may be a suspect, or a suspected contact, when leaving the area; in which case he will be under close supervision, as I have already stated. Another feature is that in the case of a native coming south under permit we know his whereabouts and habits and contacts. He would be easily found and brought to book if he happened to be a leper; and when he returns north his contacts in the south are easily traced. On the other hand, if a native comes south without supervision, he can drift anywhere in the State of Western Australia, and then there is no means of tracing his contacts.

For the information of the member for Murchison (Mr. Marshall) I will quote one case of which we really know. A boy aged 12 or 13 years left the Kimberley district, and came down overland with cattle. He developed a touch of fever, and the drover left him at Meekatharra. Twenty years afterwards the native was discovered drifting about the Murchison as a positive leper. Members of the medical profession have found it difficult to trace all the contacts he made during the 20 years when he was drifting around the district. That provides one good reason why we should give members of the profession the right referred to in the Bill.

Mr. Marshall: Do you imply that he has been associating with me during those 20 years?

The MINISTER FOR THE NORTH-WEST: No. I do not imply that the hon. member has in any way been in contact with cases of leprosy. What I mean is that the man of whom I speak may have made contact with many other natives in the district. It is necessary that we should be in a position to follow the movements of any of the natives who have left the area in question. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Sampson, debate adjourned.

BILL—ABATTOIRS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. F. J. S. Wise—Gascoyne) [5.32] in moving the second reading said: This Bill provides for two amendments to the Abattoirs Act. The first amendment is designed to legalise existing conditions regarding the slaughter of certain types of stock on premises other than Government abattoirs. It provides also for the collection of fees, for the licensing of such premises, and the inspection of stock slaughtered thereon. The second amendment deals with the grading and branding of carcases at licensed abattoirs. This provides for branding according to grade, and that the branding shall be applied in such a manner as to be discernible by the ordinary purchaser. The parent Act became law in 1909. Power was then given under Section 6 to prohibit the slaughter of certain types of stock at places other than Government abattoirs. From time to time, because of circumstances in local districts, a demand has arisen for permits to slaughter certain types of stock away from abattoirs. This applied more particularly to pigs. As time went on licenses were issued and a fee was prescribed of 6d. per carcase with a minimum of 10s. In several parts of the metropolitan area

permits have been granted for the slaughter of pigs on such premises. The practice has grown considerably, to such an extent, indeed, that it has become necessary to obtain power further to control such operations.

The trade is increasing, by which I mean the purchasing of pigs at the metropolitan abattoirs and slaughtering them at places away from Government abattoirs. The practice has presented a threat to many people who are legitimately in the business as butchers at the abattoirs, people who have to pay certain fees for their right to be there. Other difficulties are also presented in connection with the inspection that is necessary, and the control which obviously is needed when carcases of that type are slaughtered away from proper inspection at the time of slaughter.

Mr. North: Do you intend to deprive those people of such rights?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No. We are still going to permit the slaughtering of such animals, but propose to take authority better to control the situation. The desire is to ensure that the people concerned shall not either menace the practice of killing at the abattoirs, or menace the health of the public by the manner in which carcases are subsequently treated.

As to the other amendment to the Act, I point out that although under the Health Act there is authority and power to make inspections for health purposes of all carcases presented for sale, there is no authority to insist upon the proper grading and branding of such carcases. We have found that prices rule high for certain types of meat, more especially for early lamb which fetches high prices. Under-sized mutton, we have also found, is often presented to the public and bought by people as lamb. There is no doubt that that sort of thing has been going on. When an old sheep has been skinned and dressed it presents a different appearance. In the case of an old ewe she will have been denuded of all her clothing, and then might well appear more appropriately as a young lamb.

Hon. C. G. Latham: The Bill will not put a stop to that sort of thing.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It will. All lamb will be branded as such.

Hon. C. G. Latham: So long as you can ensure that, it may be all right.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That will be done with a brand that will run up one side of the carcase and down the other. There will be no chance of passing off an old ewe as lamb when actually she was four or five years old before she was slaughtered. If the ewe has a slender leg it suits the purposes of those who desire to pass her off as the younger animal. The carcases will be represented as they should be.

Mr. Stubbs: You will have difficulty in policing the Act.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No; that will be done officially at the abattoirs at the time of killing, and no difficulty will occur. If a person purchasing meat asks for lamb he must receive lamb that is branded as such. The matter presents no difficulty at all because of the steps that will be taken to ensure that the carcases are properly branded. The roller type of brand will be used (as in the case of, say, Hutton's hams) and this comes out in three blue stripes along the side of the carcase. That type of brand leaves an indelible mark on the skin. It is not deleterious to health and is a very suitable type of brand to use. It enables the purchaser to see what he is getting.

Mr. Sampson: Does the Bill relate to calves?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It can apply to any meat. According to its quality so will the meat be branded appropriately.

Mr. Sampson: I mean with regard to the first portion of the Bill.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The first portion of the measure deals with the registration and licensing of premises, and the provision of the prescribed fee for the licensing of such premises. The second part deals with the branding of carcases. In fairness to the Master Butchers' Association it must be said that it supports the proposal for the branding of carcases so that the purchaser, and members of the public generally, particularly in the case of lamb or hogget mutton, may know exactly what is being offered for sale. This provision will benefit the consumer as well as the producer. We have endeavoured to overcome the difficulty under the Health Act, but it has been found impossible to use that statute in the way of applying it to this particular purpose. The Bill will amend Section 6 of the Abattoirs Act to fit in with that need. When members have examined the proposals, they will find no objection to

them; of that I am sure. The Bill is a very short one, and easy to understand, and its principles are very apparent.

Mr. McDonald: Has the Minister considered the advisability of making provision for more humane methods of slaughtering?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes. I may perhaps be permitted to address myself to that subject. The matter has been closely investigated by the Department of Agriculture, to my knowledge, for the past four years. Some two years ago I received a deputation from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. All the statements made on that occasion were investigated in the light of the practice in Australia and other countries with regard to humane slaughtering requirements. The Act already provides for a humane method of slaughtering, exception being made in favour of religious organisations and people who slaughter cattle or sheep in a different manner. The submission of the society was to the effect that guns with a penetrating hammer would cause instantaneous death if used in killing bullocks and larger animals; but in practice it was considered that that was not an advantage over present methods. The method of slaughter in this State is not merely humane, but it conforms to the standard practice throughout the world. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. C. G. Latham, debate adjourned.

BILL—PROFITEERING PREVENTION ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR (Hon. A. R. G. Hawke—Northam) [5.43] in moving the second reading said: Under the Profiteering Prevention Act a prosecution must be launched within six months from the date on which an offence is alleged to have been committed. That limitation has made it possible for more than one trader to escape prosecution. Cases have occurred where an offence against the Act has not been discovered until after six months have elapsed from the date on which it was committed. It is easy to understand why acts of profiteering are difficult to detect. They are hard to check and it is not always easy to obtain sufficient evidence to warrant a prosecution. A person or firm profiteering, or inclined to take the risk now and then, usually adopts methods not easy to discover or difficult to investigate thoroughly.

On some occasions information has not been made available to the Prices Commissioner until several weeks after the offence has been committed. In such cases the Commissioner starts very much behind scratch in making his inquiries, and it is easy to see that they could not possibly be brought to a satisfactory stage before the lapse of the statutory period of six months. That has been the experience of the Commissioner on more than one occasion. No member of this Chamber, and I hope no member of another place, would desire any person profiteering in this State to escape the consequences of his action simply because the proof required to launch a prosecution could not be obtained within six months. I think the contrary opinion would be held, that an unlimited period of time should be allowed the Prices Commissioner or the authority charged with the responsibility of investigating profiteering.

Mr. Sampson: There is really no limit.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: Any person who overcharges for an article should be given no protection whatever against a prosecution that might be instituted against him. The Bill aims at substantially extending the period of six months within which it is now required to institute a prosecution; in fact, to allow the Prices Commissioner whatever time he requires to complete his investigations, and then a further period of six months within which to launch a prosecution, if it be considered that that step is warranted. I believe most firms and persons are obeying the law against profiteering. However, a small percentage is still endeavouring to obtain much more than a fair profit upon the goods sold to the public.

Mr. Stubbs: They ought to be prosecuted, anyhow.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: They should be. That small section does not stop at using the most cunning methods imaginable to cover up the profiteering in which it indulges.

Mr. Doney: Are you sure it is only a small section?

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: From my inquiries and observations, I think only a small section of the business community

is involved. But those persons comprise a very cunning section. To the utmost possible extent they cover up every act of profiteering they commit. As at present framed, our legislation gives them protection inasmuch as it makes them absolutely immune from any prosecution unless that prosecution is instituted within a period of six months from the date on which the offence was committed. That is entirely undesirable. I am sure that no member of this House agrees that such immunity should be given to those people.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I cannot understand why action cannot be taken within six months.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I explained——

Hon. C. G. Latham: I know you explained, but to my mind the explanation did not offer any solution. If a person is overcharged, surely it does not take him six months to advise the authorities!

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: No, it does not; but often some weeks elapse before the authorities are made aware of a particular instance of profiteering. Then they have the not very easy task of setting out to investigate the alleged offence for the purpose of ascertaining whether a prosecution is justified. The Price Fixing Commissioner, or any other authority competent to take action, could institute a prosecution quickly without having the necessary evidence available. But that would be an undesirable practice. Such prosecutions would be vexatious to some extent inasmuch as in no instance would they be backed up by the evidence necessary to secure a conviction. The firm concerned would receive a very bad advertisement as a result of being prosecuted for alleged profiteering, and a good deal of injustice might be occasioned if prosecutions were launched within the period of six months irrespective of whether sufficient evidence were available to justify such action. We have avoided that practice for the very reason I have just mentioned. However, there should be no bar to the institution of a prosecution against a business man or a business firm once the Price Fixing Commissioner, or any other proper authority, is convinced that sufficient evidence is available to justify a prosecution. That is all this Bill asks. I think that is asking nothing but a fair thing. I am sure it is not asking too much of Parliament that the Price Fixing Commissioner should be given ample time in which to carry out any investigation necessary for the purpose of enabling him to decide whether a prosecution for profiteering should be launched.

With the exception of one other very small amendment, that is the whole Bill. I hope no member of this House will consider that anyone suspected of profiteering should not be subjected to the utmost possible examination and investigation. It is our duty to give the community every possible protection in this matter. The community is our particular care and this legislation, which we passed two years ago, sets out to protect the community from being overcharged, exploited, and subjected to profiteering. It has to be remembered that our legislation does not prevent business men and firms from receiving a fair profit in connection with their trading activities, because the principle of the legislation is to take the prices that were ruling on the 31st August, 1939, as the basis for decision as to whether any subsequent increases in price are to be permitted. Business firms and business men are allowed the same margin of profit, generally speaking, as they were receiving before the war. It cannot, therefore, be argued that our legislation is unfair on the business community. Perhaps it is even fairer to business people than it should be. Whether the pre-war price level is the one that should be operative in war time is very debatable. I have no doubt that many of the prices ruling just before the war were too high and were allowing too great a margin of profit to those in business at that time.

Mr. Stubbs: There is still too great a margin of profit on many articles sold in this city at present.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: I am sure there is too great a margin between the price at which goods are purchased by business firms and the price at which they are sold to the public, but our legislation does not deal with that problem at all.

Mr. Stubbs: It should.

The MINISTER FOR LABOUR: We took the minimum pre-war level of prices as the basis, and our legislation lays it down that any increase of price on that minimum pre-war level is a matter for consideration and decision by the competent price-fixing authority. So the legislation is

not harsh on the business community. If it is harsh upon anyone it is harsh upon those people in the business world who seek to profiteer against the public during the period of this war, and I do not think any legislation can be too harsh upon business people who seek to profiteer in that way.

Summed up, the Bill aims to allow a prosecution for profiteering to be taken against any business man or firm, not within a period of six months but within any such longer period as may be found necessary to enable the Price Fixing Commissioner, or some other appropriate authority, to obtain the evidence required to justify the launching of a prosecution. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. North, debate adjourned.

BILL—GOVERNMENT STOCK SALEYARDS.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. F. J. S. Wise—Gascoyne) [5.58] in moving the second reading said: When the Abattoirs Act of 1909 was passed it provided, by regulation, for the control of saleyards operated in conjunction with abattoirs. During the last 30 years regulations have been promulgated to give control over such saleyards but in many instances doubts have been entertained regarding the legality of the regulations. In order to secure better control and because of the consideration being given to providing additional facilities at the saleyards, we find it is essential at this stage to clarify the matter legally and to put the two separate entities on a proper basis. This Bill, as its name implies, is only applicable to Government abattoirs and the saleyards attached thereto. It has no provision for the control of, nor does it in any way interfere with, saleyards other than Government-controlled saleyards. There are many saleyards throughout the State which come under various ownerships. Some are privately owned: some are controlled by local authorities. In such cases—one which could be cited is the case of Elder's saleyards at Subiaco—there is no provision in this measure to control them or to make any alterations.

Mr. Seward: Are there many Government saleyards?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: No, only two. This will particularly apply to the existing one at Midland Junction. That saleyard has rendered a wonderful service to the community. Its operations have received the full approval and approbation of all associated with the marketing and handling of livestock. The producers on the one hand and the salesmen on the other speak well of the services given there.

This Bill provides for the control of disinfecting, recording and checking of stock, and other things which cannot be done as well today as we would wish. The appropriate clauses give the authority to make better arrangements. There are many complaints from time to time by the fat-stock salesmen in this State of shortages of deliveries, and of the necessity for checking stock in and out of the yards. It is hard to believe, if one does not know the circumstances obtaining at Midland Junction, that such practices could be possible—that half truckloads of sheep, and many head of stock should disappear from the time of sale to the time of delivery. There is no system, and no authority has been taken to institute a system of checking from the pen, from the fall of the hammer to the point of delivery. That has been the responsibility of the vendor, and we have had many cases where there have been considerable leakages from the time of sale to the time of slaughter, or to the time of despatch. The Government is considering certain improvements and additions to the abattoirs and saleyards better to meet the demands that are made upon them today. In doing that it considers it very necessary that proper power for the control and management of them should be obtained. In the clauses of this Bill varied powers are sought, but not any of them interfere with present practices, and none of them will render any different effect, but to contribute towards general efficiency and control.

A considerable amount of public money is invested there, and according to those qualified to judge and express an opinion, with the exception of certain weaknesses in the sleeper-floored yards, these yards compare more than favourably with similar institutions throughout Australia. We have, as members know who use these yards, or visit them, an area there which, some years ago, was floored with sleepers. It was thought that would be a suitable flooring for the purpose. At the time it was difficult to ar-

range for cement supplies, but the Government hopes that very shortly these yards can be altered better to meet the needs of the day. They are unsafe and not suitable to our circumstances, particularly if greater use is made of them in the wet season.

Mr. Thorn: It would be nice to see them roofed.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes, it would! A considerable portion of them is so treated, particularly the section dealing with pigs. Provision along those lines will be considered in any subsequent addition for the cattle and sheep sections. We have only had a certain amount of money annually to spend upon them, and as the additions have had to be made it was a question of making those additions to suit the immediate needs, or to render improvements which would not add to the accommodation.

The general purpose which these yards serve is a very important link between the land end of production and the consuming public. In any new developments of the abattoirs, or additional yards, it is intended that this Bill, when it becomes law, shall apply. We have had many discussions with local authorities and others who require regulations and some standards of control to suit their purposes, but for the time being no effort has been made in this Bill to arrange for such a contingency. We think that there will be such a development, but it was decided to keep the measure for the control and management of Government saleyards separate from the by-laws and regulations necessary for the control and management of others. Members will readily agree that there is a definite distinction between the work necessary in an endeavour properly to control Governmental institutions on the one hand, and those controlled by local authorities or private persons on the other. I have no other comment to make. The Bill will be found to be straightforward and along the lines I have indicated. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Thorn, debate adjourned.

BILL—TRAFFIC ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS (Hon. H. Millington—Mt. Hawthorn) [6.9] in moving the second reading said: Experience during the past few years has shown the necessity for the amendment of our traffic laws. The proposals embodied in the Bill have been formulated as the result of communications from local authorities and their associations and also from the Traffic Department. Possibly the most important provisions in the measure are those relating to the proposed 25 per cent. reduction in the license fees payable on all petrol-driven vehicles, with retrospective effect regarding all such vehicles licensed for the whole or any portion of the current licensing year, which commenced on the 1st July last. Much publicity has been given to this proposal and possibly it is not necessary for me to enlarge upon the matter.

Members are aware of the drastic petrol rationing imposed by the Federal Government as a national security measure. In response to my request, the Liquid Fuel Control Board has supplied me with information as to the percentage reductions operating with respect to the various classes of petrol-driven vehicles. In doing so the board has explained that it is difficult to provide the exact percentage reduction as there was no uniform pre-war basis on which to make calculations. Before rationing was introduced, it was known that although all motorists had the right to use the roads to the fullest extent, many travelled only, say, 2,000 or 3,000 miles a year while others annually covered milages five or ten times greater. The board advises, however, that the following figures represent a fair approximation of the petrol reduction for the following classes of vehicles:—

Class of vehicle	Reduction.
Private cars	75%
Private motor cycles	90%
Cars and motor cycles used partly for business purposes	40%
Cars and motor cycles used wholly for business purposes	36%
Drive-yourself cars	75%
Primary producers' trucks	15%
Other trucks	40%
Omnibuses	Nil

Concerning primary producers' trucks, I point out that although provision is made for a 50 per cent. reduction, the State Liquid Fuel Control Board has authority to increase the allowance to 15 per cent. of the previous rationing, and circumstances indicate that in a large majority of instances the effective reduction will be 15 per cent. Members will note that the local authority has been allowed

by the Commonwealth authorities discretionary power to the extent of 35 per cent.

Dealing with the issue involved as a whole, representations urging a reduction of the license fees have been made to the Government by the Royal Automobile Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Manufactures, the Chamber of Automotive Industries, the Service Stations' Association, the Institute of Automotive Mechanics, the Pastoralists' Association and the Fremantle Lumpers' Union. Representatives of those bodies waited upon me as a deputation. In order that members may assess the justice of the claims advanced, I give the points placed before me by those bodies in support of their contentions that reductions should be made in license fees:—

As the use of the road had been greatly restricted because of the introduction of petrol rationing by the Federal Government, motorists felt justified in asking for some reduction in their motoring costs.

The Royal Automobile Club had been successful in gaining a 10 per cent. reduction in insurance premiums, and considered that some concession in regard to license fees was only right.

The South Australian Government had announced a 25 per cent. reduction, and motorists in Western Australia felt fully justified in asking for similar consideration.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: I was recounting the reasons given by organisations representative of petrol users why license fees for petrol-driven vehicles should be reduced. Other reasons were—

Many drivers and owners were, apart from using their vehicles less out of a sense of patriotic duty, forced by stringent petrol restrictions to reduce their mileage by more than one-half. As an illustration of the severity of petrol rationing up to the time of the deputation waiting on me in June, the following figures were quoted setting out the restrictions applicable to the average 20 h.p. car that previously had an annual mileage up to 6,000:—

Period	Allowance gallons	Monthly mileage
1st October, 1940, to 31st March, 1941 ..	19	320
31st March, 1941, to 31st May, 1941 ..	14	238
As from 31st May, 1941	9	153

Members are aware that the allowance has now been further and drastically reduced.

Petrol rationing would naturally reduce the total amount of revenue received by the Main Roads Department from petrol taxation, through the Federal Aid Roads Agreement, and it was contended that local authorities should therefore be prepared to accept similar reductions as their share of traffic fees collected in the State. It was also submitted that less revenue would mean less construction of new roads during the war period, and consequently a lower annual expenditure on roads.

While the difficulties which reduction of fees might raise in this direction for local authorities could be foreseen, the organisations failed to appreciate why motorists should be called upon to bear, in effect, a burden which should be borne by the whole of the ratepayers concerned.

Every encouragement should be given to owners to keep their cars licensed so as to avoid loss of revenue caused by widespread delicensing, for such loss was likely to be much heavier than would result from a reasonable reduction in license fees.

Motorists should be encouraged to keep vehicles licensed lest they be needed in an extreme national emergency. Obviously, if vehicles were delicensed and not maintained in running order, the country might be faced, in an hour of crisis, with transport difficulties of its own making.

In reply to the deputation, I explained that the course suggested would affect the revenues of the local authorities and that their views would be sought. I had to consult all the authorities concerned—those who had to make and maintain the roads. I pointed out that whereas in South Australia a reduction of 25 per cent. had been promised by the Premier, he was giving away revenue of his own, while the revenues I had to deal with were not those that came to the Treasury but those of the local authorities. That is why I maintained they had a right to be consulted. At my invitation, therefore, a conference was held in my office to get the views of the petrol users and of those who had to maintain the roads. Despite the clamour for a reduction the local authorities had to be protected, and they looked to me to see that they were fairly treated.

Divergent views were expressed by delegates of many of the road boards and municipalities represented, and it was ultimately decided that those present at the conference should report back to their associations or boards with a view to deciding upon a definite attitude. Subsequent correspondence with the department indicates that to a large extent it was left by district associations to individual road boards and municipalities to convey their opinions to the department. The majority of the letters received by the department advocated reduc-

tions ranging from 10 per cent. to 50 per cent. Some objected to any reduction.

Mr. Doney: What would be the proportion roughly of those who objected to any reduction?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: In the main, the large majority favoured a reduction; I think only four or five local authorities objected. As I said, the majority were prepared to accept reductions ranging from 10 per cent. to 50 per cent.

Mr. Seward: The Great Southern Road Board Association is against it.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: Yes; the proposed reduction is not so popular with the road boards as with the users of the roads.

Mr. Thorn: Did you hear from Wanneroo?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: The local authorities opposed to any reduction pointed out that the cost of maintaining the roads would not be appreciably reduced owing to the reduced use of them by motorists, and explained that expenses in connection with roads embraced fixed salaries, interest on loans, sinking funds on loans, depreciation of plant and road deterioration due to time and weather and, in a relatively minor degree, to the wear of traffic. The local authorities also contended that while a motorist could immediately relieve himself of practically all his expenses by placing his motor vehicle on blocks, such a course was not possible in connection with the roads. This is a point that people must understand if they deal fairly with the question. A motorist may relieve himself of all cost in the shape of license fees, but the roads still have to be maintained, and there are permanent commitments to be met whether we charge traffic fees or not.

Mr. Marshall: That is not the whole truth, because depreciation on the vehicle will take place.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: But the motorist could relieve himself of the whole of the licensing charge. I think too much is made of the mere cost of licensing a vehicle. In normal times, to run a first-class car, including depreciation, would cost at least £100 a year. If the license fee is reduced by £2, that is, by charging £6 instead of £8, the cost of running that motor, instead of being £100 a year, would be £98. To hear some people talk, one would think the reduction meant everything. It is only one charge, but there has been a lot of public clamour about it. Even if a man receives a 25 per cent. reduction in the license fee, it does not represent much on the cost of running a car throughout the year.

Mr. Sampson: Is that a reasonable reduction?

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: In reply to the suggestion that local authorities should increase their general rates to a reasonable extent, at least temporarily, to assist in meeting urgent road requirements, the members of some of the boards contended that their ratepayers could not bear any higher rating under existing economic conditions. I am disposed to agree with that. A review of the annual accounts shows that very few road boards are rating on the maximum, and that in many instances the general rates are extremely low.

When members are considering this subject they should remember that by far the major part of the money expended on the road system in Western Australia comes from the portion of the petrol tax collected by the Federal Government and made available to the State Government for purposes of maintaining and constructing roads, and to a small extent for works other than roads connected with transport. It is just as well for us to realise what the Federal user has to pay in the form of taxation. Figures obtained from the Government Statistician's office show that for the years 1926 to 1937—eleven years presumably—the total amount collected by the Federal Government in Customs duty and Excise revenue on petroleum amounted to the huge total of £54,846,904. That is the amount Federal users paid during that period. Over the same period, the total amount received by Western Australia from that tax amounted to £4,626,332. For the last four years the amounts received by Western Australia were—

1937-38	£779,079
1938-39	801,555
1939-40 (peak year)	837,899
1940-41	651,448

It is obvious that the amount for 1941-42 will be substantially below that of last year.

I now proceed to give information regarding local revenue and traffic fees in re-

lation to all road boards for the year ended the 30th June, 1940—

Area.	Local Revenue, other than Traffic Fees.	Traffic Fees.	
	£	£	
Metropolitan and Eastern Goldfields	59,402	49,475	
Suburban-Midland	70,204	57,101	
Great Southern	31,520	33,956	
Geraldton-Murchison	26,460	26,824	
North-West	8,365	5,560	
South-West	33,671	38,064	
Merredin	29,495	37,178	
Total for State (Road Boards)	£259,117	£248,158	
Revenue other than Traffic Fees	....	....	£259,117
Traffic Fees	....	....	£248,158
Total Revenue			£507,270

Members will see that nearly 50 per cent. of the revenues of all the road boards in the State has come from traffic fees. Thus it will be understood that whereas petrol users are enthusiastic to have traffic fees reduced, those fees represent the very life blood of the local authorities. I assume that we have some responsibility to the local authorities, and must ensure that their case is fully stated and realised.

A comparison of the number of motor vehicles licensed in the metropolitan traffic area for the periods the 1st June to the 31st July in the years 1940 and 1941, together with the amount of fees collected, shows the following—

Period.	Number of Vehicles Licensed.	Fees Collected.
1st June, 1940, to 31st July, 1940	21,935	£90,820
1st June, 1941, to 31st July, 1941	20,893	£80,010

It will be noticed that the decrease in 1941 as compared with 1940, for the two months, is 1,042 for vehicles and £10,810 in fees. It is quite probable that the large decrease in fees is due to the abnormally high number of half-yearly licenses issued during this year. I may add that similar information is being sought in country districts but is not yet available.

The Bill includes a proposal for the disregarding of the weight of gas producer units or of trailers used exclusively for the housing of such units and necessary fuel for use therein, when assessing license fees. The added weight of the gas producer power unit and attachments often places the vehicle in a higher classification for licensing purposes; and this proposal, if approved, will be a decided benefit to owners of vehicles driven by gas producer units.

The following information as to the number of motor vehicles fitted with gas producer units will be of interest to members:—

Outside Metropolitan Traffic Area as at the 31st January, 1941:—

	Vehicles.
Motor cars	204
Motor wagons	595
Taxi cabs	9
Omnibuses	17
Tractors	146
Total	971

In the case of 36 cars and 18 motor waggons, the producer gas unit is carried on trailers. In the metropolitan area, as at the 31st July, 1941, the figures were:—

Motor cars	80
Motor wagons	91
Taxi cabs	9
Omnibuses	14
Tractors	15
Trailer units	33*
Total	242

*In the case of 33 motor vehicles the producer gas unit is carried on a trailer.

The total gas producer units in the State number 1,213. From what I can gather, we are easily ahead of all the other States in this respect. In response to numerous requests submitted on behalf of motorists and by licensing authorities, we have made provision for the reduction of the minimum licensing period from six months to three months. The accommodation charge of 2s. 6d. now made for the half-yearly licenses will be reduced to 1s., and this charge will also operate in regard to the quarterly licenses.

In addition to the benefit conferred on the owners of motor vehicles by being permitted to pay their license fees in instalments, it should be remembered that considerable additional expense is incurred by the licensing authorities, including the road boards, in printing and issuing short-term licenses and windscreen stickers and additional bookkeeping and auditing. The accommodation charge of 1s. per license will assist to meet those expenses. In New South Wales, where 96,000 quarterly licenses are in force, the additional charge is 2½ per cent. of the full year's fee on each quarter's

license, equivalent to an additional 10 per cent. on the total annual license fee.

Another interesting proposal in the Bill, included at the request of the Road Boards Association and others, relates to the control and regulation of illuminated signs in order to avoid confusion and danger in traffic. Many of these provisions have been taken from the Lights (Navigation Protection) Act passed in 1938. In South Australia, the Road Traffic Act provides that if any light or sign shows a light adjacent to any road or footpath, and the local authority is convinced that such light or sign is dangerous to traffic, the authority may give notice to the owner to remove the light or sign. If it is not removed within a specified time the local authority may remove it at the owner's cost. In New South Wales the Local Government Act provides that a council may regulate advertisements and structures used for the display of advertisements. "Advertisement" includes any sign, device, etc. An ordinance has been published for that purpose.

To go further afield, the report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords, England, contained the following:—

> A Departmental Committee on traffic signs recommended that there should be greater supervision over advertising signs which may be mistaken for light signals, and that in addition it should be made illegal, without the approval of the highway authority, to have red or green lights for advertisement purposes in close proximity to the carriageway.

A similar provision contained in this measure can be considered by the House. It was asked for by the local authorities, and in my opinion the time has arrived when signs, particularly Neon signs may be said to have become dangerous. Other provisions in the Bill to which I have not referred have been asked for by local authorities and can be considered in Committee. I promised that the measure would be brought down as early as possible and that the Government's proposals would have a retrospective effect. We have gone the full distance of the requests made by the Royal Automobile Club and car and vehicle owners. It merely remains for the House to hold the scales fairly between those who desire a reduction in fees and those who will have to provide the roads for the users of vehicles.

Mr. Doney: I do not think that will be easy, either.

The MINISTER FOR WORKS: No. We must not be influenced too much by public clamour, because in these matters the public is vocal. The local authorities look to us for protection and are expecting a fair deal. I contend this measure will give them that. The reduction in the period for licenses and the accommodation charge may have the effect of increasing the number of licenses. I think that will be so. In any case, this Bill is the best that we can devise to hold the scales fairly between those whose petrol supplies have been drastically restricted and those who have to provide the roads. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Mr. Doney, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 7.58 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 27th August, 1941.

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

QUESTIONS (2)—FORESTS ACT.

Mallet.

Mr. STUBBS asked the Premier: 1, Is he aware that the cultivation of mallet on the reafforestation reserves at Wagin and Narrogin has proved highly successful? 2, If so, is it proposed to extend the cultivation of this tree in suitable areas, in view of its importance to the tanning industry?