

Legislative Council,

Thursday, 3rd October, 1935.

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

QUESTION—STATE TRANSPORT BOARD, MOTORS.

Licenses and Fees.

Hon. A. THOMSON asked the Chief Secretary: 1, What is the total number of motor cars licensed in Western Australia? 2, What is the approximate amount collected in fees? 3, What is the total number of motor trucks licensed in Western Australia? 4, What is, approximately, the amount of fees collected? 5, What is the number of motor cycles, and the amount of fees collected? 6, What is the total amount collected by the Police Department throughout the State for drivers' licenses?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, *28,590. 2, *£153,573. 3, *14,180. 4, *£84,052. 5, *6,093; £6,639. 6, £15,884.

* These figures are incomplete because some local authorities have not furnished returns.

ASSENT TO BILL.

Message from the Lieut.-Governor received and read notifying assent to the Northern Australia Survey Agreement Bill.

BILL—INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE ACT CONTINUANCE.

Second Reading.

THE CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central) [4.36] in moving the second reading said: The purpose of the Bill is to continue the operations of the Industries Assistance Act for a further period of one year. The necessity for the extra legislative power under that Act still exists. Abnormal seasonal and market conditions make it necessary that the Government should have legislative powers to enable them to

meet emergencies that may arise. There are still numbers of settlers whose debts have not yet been funded, and the Industries Assistance Act contains a provision which allows credit to be granted expeditiously, giving an automatic charge upon the crops, as well as on the land and chattels of the borrower. Its usefulness was well demonstrated during the early part of this season when, owing to the late rains and lack of feed, especially in the area situated north-east of Kununoppin, it was found necessary to grant assistance to farmers in the way of chaff and feed supplies. No fewer than 302 settlers have been granted assistance by the supply of 1,372 tons of chaff, and in some cases it was also necessary to supply fuel to enable fallowing operations to be carried on. At the 30th June, 1935, there were 1,374 accounts in operation. The total liabilities at that date amounted to £1,891,288 14s. 8d., consisting of non-funded debts of principal £672,122 12s. 4d. and interest £184,896 7s. 9d., and funded debts—principal £829,862 11s. 2d., and interest £204,407 3s. 5d. The actual advances for the year amounted to £10,985 19s. 6d. In addition to this, a refund of proceeds amounting to £533 9s. was also granted, making a total advance for the year of £11,519 8s. 6d. The collections for the year amounted to £16,691 16s. 10d. principal and £20,170 17s. 3d. interest, a total of £36,862, 14s. 1d. It is proposed to use the provisions of the Act only in cases where they can be more effectively employed to provide harvest credit than is possible under the provisions contained in the Agricultural Bank statutes. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

HON. V. HAMERSLEY (East) [4.42]: I support the second reading of the Bill. Members must be aware that we are experiencing one of the worst seasons since 1914. There will be demands for assistance from a number of centres unless rain falls almost immediately. Most of the settlers in the area referred to by the Chief Secretary and, I believe, in other areas, too, are seriously affected by the shortage of rain. The wheat crops are suffering and, in addition, the position of many settlers, who were persuaded to go in for stock, is serious. To-day their dams and water supplies generally are practically depleted. There has been no rain to replenish their supplies to enable them to carry on. I assume that

their position will be extremely difficult, and it is only by means of the Industries Assistance Act that the Government will be able to provide them with assistance and thus permit them to carry on. I had an opportunity recently to visit the area that was badly affected by a plague of grasshoppers. I congratulate the Government upon their promptness in going to the rescue of the farmers concerned, although I am afraid the operations will be rather costly. The properties of many successful farmers in the district concerned are surrounded by abandoned holdings that have become the breeding ground for grasshoppers. In consequence, the farmers found that their crops and feed were likely to be eaten out as a result of the inroads of the pest. I am glad that the Government realised the dreadful position in which those settlers were placed and readily made available men, money and equipment to cope with the difficulty. If they had not acted as promptly as they did, there is no doubt that the pest would become a much greater menace than it is at present. If rain does not soon fall, a great many of the crops which are wilting will be absolutely burnt up, and many settlers will be in a very bad way and only too anxious to approach the Government for assistance. I support the measure so that the Government will have the machinery to enable them to deal with such cases.

HON. J. CORNELL (South) [4.46]: I am not an alarmist, but it appears to me that the year 1935, over quite a considerable area of the wheatbelt, can be compared with 1914. The settlers affected are actually in a worse position than were those of 1914, inasmuch as to-day they are loaded with a much greater burden of debt, they are suffering from the effects of five years of ruinous prices, and they are faced with the task of carrying on with worn-out plant and equipment. I support Mr. Hainersley's remarks, and would add to the area he has mentioned the area eastward through Waralackin, Boodarockin and Bullfinch, down to Westonia, Burracoppin, Southern Cross and the miners' settlement, and around to 15 miles south of Moorine Rock. Unless a miracle happens, I think that "finish" can be written against 95 per cent. of the farmers. Recently Mr. Battfield, manager of the Agricultural Bank at Kellerberrin, visited the district 15 miles south of Moo-

rine Rock, and he said that the best crops under his jurisdiction were there, but that they would rapidly go off unless rain soon fell. We can link up with the settlers in those districts the 160 odd settlers who have been left in the Esperance district, as their position is identical. One of the worst features is the shortage of feed for what stock they have, and the water shortage presents a most acute difficulty. Fortunately most of the districts as far as Bullfinch and along the main line have the goldfields' water scheme on which to draw, and those who have stock will have to cart water by truck or team. As I said, I am not an alarmist, but it would be well if the commercial section of the community realised—as I feel sure the Government realise—what lies ahead of this State for the next 12 months. It will be a question not only of tiding those settlers over and endeavouring to start them again, but of keeping them until they can make a fresh start. The greatest calamity that could befall our agricultural industry, next to a drought, would be that the settlers who have suffered from five years of depression and ruinous prices should walk off their holdings. It might not be amiss to recount to members the views which the ex-managing trustee of the Agricultural Bank expressed to me when the depression first hit us. He said that if the depression lasted, the greatest calamity that could happen to land settlement would be, not the low prices and not the high capitalisation of the holdings, but the fact of farmers walking off their locations. He added that immediately a man walked off his holding, the security could be written down 50 per cent., and that his aim would be to endeavour to keep the farmers on their locations and thus preserve the security. It seems regrettable that we have to renew the Act, but history repeats itself. The field of operations when the Act is renewed will be almost as extensive as when the legislation was first passed. I hope the Government will do everything humanly possible to anticipate what is likely to happen and act promptly, instead of waiting until the deluge arrives. Recently I spent a week in the Yilgarn locality and had reports from the Esperance district, and it seemed remarkable that so many of the men in those districts should have stuck to their holdings while so many men from other agricultural areas have entered the mining industry.

Some of them have stuck to their holdings though within 10 miles of a mining district. Yet farmers settled in more fertile parts have left their holdings and sought work in the mining industry. Those who have remained on their holdings, in spite of the allurements of the mining industry, are the ones we should endeavour to retain and to encourage. I support the second reading.

HON. A. THOMSON (South-East) [4.54]: For many years I was one of those who urged that the Industries Assistance Board should be merged with the Agricultural Bank, as I considered it would result in a considerable saving of administrative expense. Though the two organisations are administered by the same officials to a large extent, they have been kept separate and distinct. As we have handed over the administration of the Agricultural Bank to three commissioners, I am pleased that we have a distinct Act which will enable the Government to do something for those settlers who are facing a very acute position. I endorse the remarks of Mr. Hamersley and Mr. Cornell. The needs of settlers in various parts of the wheat-belt have caused my party considerable anxiety, and we have discussed ways and means of assisting the Government in the very difficult task that confronts them. Those settlers will certainly require sympathetic treatment. I agree with Mr. Cornell that we must do everything possible to keep on the land the men who are there and give them encouragement to continue. It is to be deplored that, after having suffered from the depression for five years, they should now be faced with conditions that threaten ruination. In view of the large amount of money invested in the farming industry, it is necessary that settlers should be kept on their holdings. When a holding is abandoned I think the security can reasonably be written down, not by half, but by considerably more. Neglected land does not maintain its improvements. Immediately it is abandoned, the scrub begins to grow and the holding soon reverts to its original state. Supplies of water and of feed are important, and I think it will be necessary to arrange for the removal of stock from some districts. That is where sympathetic treatment will have to be extended to the settlers affected. I am hopeful that the Gov-

ernment will be able to secure sufficient funds to finance the operations of the Industries Assistance Board. In my opinion we shall be lucky if we can tide over next year with an additional expenditure of half a million to keep the settlers on their farms. In view of the excellent service rendered by the farmers in opening up and developing that part of the State and hanging on under adverse conditions, I hope that the principle applying to sustenance in the past will not be adopted in future. Unemployed workers have been granted sustenance and have not been asked for repayment, and in view of the serious position existing in the areas under discussion, we should grant the settlers the sustenance necessary to enable them to maintain themselves and preserve the asset for the State, without asking for repayment. I have frequently felt that the Industries Assistance Board had, to a great extent, outlived its usefulness, and I deeply regret that in the year 1935 we should be confronted with a position that necessitates our having extensive recourse to the Act once more, in order to preserve the assets of the State and keep the settlers on their farms. I hope there will be no wholesale evacuation of those areas, and I feel sure that the Government will deal with the settlers as sympathetically as possible. I support the second reading.

On motion by Hon. H. V. Piesse, debate adjourned.

BILL—BRANDS ACT AMENDMENT.

In Committee.

Resumed from the 24th September; Hon. J. Cornell in the Chair, the Chief Secretary in charge of the Bill.

New Clause:

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: I move—

That a new clause, to stand as Clause 13, be added as follows:—

13. Section forty-nine B of the principal Act is amended by inserting after the word "process" in the fourth line of the section the words "or while the skin is held for export in the store of any selling broker duly registered by regulations made under this Act or in the store of any skin exporter, so registered, awaiting shipment."

This is the new clause I suggested to the Committee last week I would have drafted. Acting on the advice of several members

interested, I have struck out "for sale." This will make it perfectly safe and ensure that only when skins are ready for export, will the exporter come under the new regulation.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I oppose the amendment. This is what the Parliamentary Draftsman has to say about it:—

Amendment should be opposed as it will undermine the whole of the previous amendments provided to check the sale of skins from stolen sheep. In the past it has been found that some wool buyers have not been too scrupulous in their buying of skins. The amendment was not even asked for by the wool buyers themselves when their representative interviewed the Crown Solicitor some days ago.

The effect of the amendment will be to exclude skin buyers from the operation of the Act.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: I cannot agree with the contention of the Chief Secretary. I am advised by skin exporters that unless this is agreed to it will mean practical ruination to the skin trade of the State. There are certain countries that will not purchase skins with ears and other parts. Even if they had to be exported thus it would mean additional cost. By eliminating the words to which objection was taken on a previous occasion, the position has been made safe. It is not intended that the skin of the sheep shall be resold, and the way the clause is now drafted makes it quite clear in that respect.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: I am advised on the best authority that the reason why the skins have to be trimmed up before export is that there is a duty of 6d. a lb. on their going into America. Merchants will not send the ears and the skin of the head for that reason. The Act says that the tanner is permitted to remove those parts before he starts tanning. The idea is that when the skins are in the hands of the exporter, the exporter shall be allowed to trim them up by taking off the spare ends of the ears, and such like, so that he may avoid having to pay duty on what is worthless stuff when it reaches America. If the amendment is turned down, the effect on the skin export trade will be disastrous.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: The Government should go very carefully into this matter in order to avoid doing an injustice to skin exporters. It is desired to put up stiff conditions which will be harmful. No reputable house would stoop to anything that would be detrimental to the interests

of the producer. I am informed that at times 25,000 skins per week go into the large stores. They are consigned from the country in bales and bundles. Skins are at times attacked by weevils and they have to be treated with arsenic. The merchants could not prepare the skins for sale unless they were assured that it would be possible to export them without any hampering conditions. I intend to support the new clause.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Mr. Macfarlane told us that 25,000 skins are sent to the skin merchants weekly.

Hon. J. M. Macfarlane: At times.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: Even supposing there were 50,000, does the hon. member imagine that the skins are not examined? They are examined before payment is made. In some instances it is shown that ears have been removed. All we ask is, that the police shall be notified. Is there anything wrong in that? Are the merchants to be put to any undue trouble or expense? They have to examine the skins to discover if they are in good condition. The bundles are opened and the skins examined one by one, and in the process it will be seen whether an ear has been removed or mutilated. The skin merchants have to comply with the law. If I were a skin merchant, the first thing I would do after the passing of this measure would be to notify my clients of the amended law.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: Why should the merchants have to police it?

The CHIEF SECRETARY: They have to come in with the rest. Almost every law that is passed imposes inconvenience on somebody. We want to suppress sheep stealing. Yet we have 25,000 skins coming in without any examination.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: No, that is not so.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: It will be so if the succeeding amendment is carried, because skin buyers will not be required to notify the police, unless the police call on them. Under the original Act the police could raid the premises of skin merchants without a search warrant. It would be a nice thing if a merchant's premises were unjustifiably raided and the episode got into the Press.

Hon. L. B. Bolton: I am afraid you are speaking to the wrong amendment.

Hon. L. CRAIG: I fear the Chief Secretary missed the important part of this amendment. Under the Bill no export of skins is to be allowed, even after the ex-

porter has purchased them. France is the biggest buyer of our wool skins, yet some years ago the Federal Government placed a heavy duty on the exporting of sheep skins from Australia. In consequence, the French buyers refused to buy our skins, and there was nearly a calamity. If we put restrictions on to the export of skins, as the Bill seeks to do, the buyers will eliminate Western Australia and get all their skins from the Eastern States. The provision in the Bill is much too wide; we must make provisions to suit the buyers of our products. An inspector to-day can go and inspect any skins and, if he finds a mutilated ear, he can institute inquiries; but to make it compulsory for skins to be shipped overseas with the heads on, is going too far.

The Chief Secretary: Where is that?

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: In Section 49B.

Hon. L. CRAIG: I must support the amendment.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: By way of reply to the Chief Secretary, I want to say that every skin that comes in is tallied and a record kept of it, and the producer of the skin is notified as to its condition. I intend later to move a further amendment which I think will be acceptable to all.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: No one is more anxious than I am to amend the Brands Act so as to deal with sheep stealing. But we have to be careful that we do not make the conditions too stringent, else we shall ruin the business altogether. I am informed that this provision was included in the South Australian Act but had to be abandoned within a week.

Hon. L. Craig: It was withdrawn at once.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: It is absurd to have an Act that will ruin the business instead of controlling it. There are thousands of earmarks, and lots of people buying and selling sheep with all sorts of earmarks. In due course the skins reach the sale stores at Fremantle. Frequently down there the question is, not whose earmark it is on a skin, but what constitutes a mutilated ear. The danger would be avoided if we allowed the exporter to do what the tanner is allowed to do, namely to trim up the skins.

Hon. A. Thomson: If that were the amendment, it would clarify the position.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: That is the amendment. I am sure the Chief Secretary will pardon me if I suggest that his remarks applied rather to later amendments which I

propose to move. All that the amendment before the Committee asks is that certain words be added to Section 49B of the Act, and it asks that those words become effective only immediately before the skin is about to be exported.

Hon. V. Hamersley: It does not say that.

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: Of course it does. There is no suggestion that the skins shall be offered for sale again. Finally, they are sold to the exporter, who desires to trim them up. The amendment reads "while the skin is held for export in the store." That is to say, awaiting shipment, not awaiting sale.

Hon. H. Tuckey: Why not fix the time before export?

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: I do not think that could be done. I am only asking for the same consideration for the exporter as is given to the tanner. The exporters say that if the provision in the Bill be passed as printed, it will ruin the exporting of skins.

Hon. E. H. ANGELO: The amendment seems to me to go too far. The selling broker may say that the skins are for export, and have the ears taken off immediately. The ears should be left on until the last moment. That is what the original Act provided when permitting tanners to take off the ears immediately before process. The amendment might read "or by any skin exporter immediately before shipment." I am jealous about skins being dealt with as soon as they come into a broker's store. I want the ears to remain, as evidence of any wrongdoing, up to almost the last moment. The word "immediately" was good enough for use in the original Act; why should it not do here?

Hon. G. W. MILES: I agree that the amendment is too wide, and I would adopt Mr. Angelo's suggestion. Perhaps the simplest means of overcoming the difficulty is to include here the words at the end of Section 59 of the principal Act.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: The carrying of the amendment would render the Bill a nullity. It leaves the road open for 25,000 skins to come into the skin market. From the time they were taken delivery of, those skins would be for export. Protection is already given to the skin buyer in another amendment. If a skin buyer receives skins in circumstances suggesting an offence, why should he not inform an inspector of the Stock Department?

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: The amendment exempts the skin merchant who exports skins. I fail to realise that it is urgently necessary for skin merchants to take off the ears immediately. We know that thieving has gone on for a number of years. The object of the Act is to empower the police to inspect skins on the premises of brokers. If brokers are to be exempted from keeping the ears on the skins for the inspection of the police, we might as well not pass this amending Bill at all, but continue to rely on the existing Act. The thieving is not done by reputable firms. The stolen skins do not pass over the ordinary skin floors. They pass into the hands of exporters, and the ears are immediately removed. Under the amendment, ears would never be left on the skins. Some owners of bush slaughter-houses who send dead meat to market or sell it in outback areas, cut off the ears promptly, so that nothing may be found out. Those are the men we want to get at.

Hon. J. M. MACFARLANE: Mr. Bolton's new clause deals with skins coming down with ears and headpiece complete. I take it the new clause is intended to facilitate export to such countries as the United States, where the ears and the headpiece are not wanted. The handling of skins of doubtful origin will be dealt with in a later amendment.

Hon. G. W. MILES: I desire to move an amendment on the new clause, to strike out all the words after "or" in line 4 of the new clause, and insert in lieu "for export."

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I would be prepared to accept an amendment providing for the removal of the ears from a skin immediately before the skin is subjected to any tanning process, or immediately before export.

Hon. G. W. MILES: I move an amendment—

That all the words after "or" in line 4 of the proposed new clause be struck out, and "immediately before export" inserted in lieu.

Amendment put and passed; the new clause, as amended, agreed to.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported with amendments.

Recommittal.

On motion by the Chief Secretary, Bill recommitted for the further consideration of Clauses 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10.

In Committee.

Hon. J. Cornell in the Chair, the Chief Secretary in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 3, 4, 5 and 7—agreed to.

Clause 10—Amendment of Section 42:

Hon. L. B. BOLTON: I move an amendment—

That paragraph (iii) of Subclause 3 (inserted at a previous Committee) be struck out, and the following inserted in lieu:—“(iii) that on the application of an officer of the police or an inspector he promptly gave all information in his power relating to any such sheep-skins in his possession and the persons from whom and the date and circumstances under which he became possessed thereof.”

At present the Act has to be policed by the agent. If the amendment be carried, it would be done by the police or an inspector. If sheep stealing were reported from some particular locality, the police would apply to the agents and inquire whether they had in their possession any skins from that particular district, and they should then be given the desired information. The present provision makes it obligatory on the agent to go through every skin and report each mutilated earmark to the police.

The CHIEF SECRETARY: I have already discussed this point when dealing with a former amendment moved by Mr. Bolton. Under his amendment the agent would not be under any obligation to give information to the police or an inspector. He could buy mutilated skins and not notify the police.

Amendment put and negatived.

Clause, as previously amended, put and passed.

Bill again reported without further amendment.

House adjourned at 5.55 p.m.