

## **CLOSER SETTLEMENT BILL (SECOND READING) 13 September 1922**

**Edith Cowan continued to strongly endorse the Government's group settlement scheme in the State's South West region.**

*Mrs. COWAN:* (West Perth) [5.46]: I am prepared to support the Bill. Although it does not go far enough, I think it is the beginning of what we need very badly. Last year we thought we were going to accomplish something in this direction, but we did nothing —

*The Premier:* We did.

*Mrs. COWAN:* Because it was not passed in another place. We hope that this Bill will be put into such a form by the amendments which will be submitted in Committee that it will be passed, and that it will mark the beginning of the acquisition of these unused lands. Two years ago we had a report by men who were surveying land and who saw the use to which it was being put and were in a position to form some idea of its quality. If anyone was in a position to judge of the quality of land, surely such men would be. They reported that there was 2½ million acres situated seven miles from existing railways between York and Beverley on the west and going east to Dowerin, Cunderdin and Quairading and that only one million acres of that was developed in an agricultural sense. I am glad to know that the Premier has recognised this, because he proposes to devote three millions of the money which is to come for work in the Wheat Belt. The three millions is to be advanced to the wheat farmers already on the land who have 600 acres or more cleared.

*Hon. M.F. Troy:* They will want it, too.

*Mrs. COWAN:* I have no objection to them having it, provided their land is developed. Last year when I spoke of this land, I was told that it did not exist and I was also told that all the land that was worth while utilising was being utilised.

*The Premier:* Oh, no.

*Mrs. COWAN:* I have very distinct recollection of being told that I knew nothing of what I was talking about. I think I did know something about the matter, and I am prepared to take the report of these men who were in a position to know. Otherwise they have no right to be in their present positions and their reports on matters affecting this country should not be accepted at any time. We believe that the advantages will be very great indeed, that many people will find employment and that the three millions will be expended in the very direction and in the very areas in which we were given to understand there existed no land of any account that was not being utilised. This Bill will help that proposal, because it will induce owners to part with their land at reasonable

prices if they cannot get the labour to develop it for themselves, or they will be obliged to give it up and let others who can work it come in and do so. Therefore, I am glad to support the Bill. I am pleased to accept the measure so far as it goes. If it is not quite as satisfactory as it might be in its early operation, it can easily be amended by Parliament.