

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 10th September, 1941.

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BILLS (2)—THIRD READING.

- 1, Government Stock Saleyards.
- 2, Mental Treatment (War Service Patients).

Transmitted to the Council.

BILL—DISTRESS FOR RENT ABOLITION ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

MR. CROSS (Canning) [4.36]: in moving the second reading said: Five years ago the parent Act was passed. During the years the measure has given general satisfaction. In only one respect has there been any complaint and that is regarding Section 6, which I was compelled to accept from another place or probably lose the Bill. To make the Act satisfactory to everyone concerned, a small amendment is necessary. The Act provides that when rent remains unpaid for seven days, the landlord may give the tenant two days' notice to quit. If the tenant fails to leave, the landlord may immediately take legal proceedings to have him evicted. The Act left the landlord with a remedy to recover his rent equal to that given to anyone else to re-cover a debt. Though the landlord could evict the tenant, he had still the right to recover arrears of rent. With that principle I agree.

I have received a number of complaints that the notice to quit to be given by the landlord to the tenant is insufficient. Members will realise that to give a tenant two days' notice, say on Saturday morning, to leave a house, is entirely unreasonable. There is nothing to say that the two days shall be exclusive of Saturday and Sunday. Members will realise also that such brief notice as two days could easily inflict hardship in the event of there being sickness in the home. It is equally unreasonable, even if a tenant could get another house in the time, to expect him to get out in two days.

There is another reason why the time should be extended. It is very difficult to get a house anywhere in the greater metropolitan area. A few weeks ago I was asked by a worker employed on a relief job in the country to do what I could to get him a house, for which he was prepared to pay up to 25s. a week. I got in touch with five or six agents and failed to get a house at that

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

QUESTION—AGRICULTURE.

Production Costs.

Mr. SAMPSON asked the Minister for Agriculture: 1, Has consideration been given to any method of arriving at costs of production of crops for farmers, including orchardists and gardeners? 2, If not, will growers who desire to know what costs should properly be taken into account be provided with sample forms and advice? 3, If these have been prepared, have growers been so informed?

The **MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE** replied: 1, Efforts continually are being made to determine costs of production of various crops. 2, Experience has shown that standardised forms are usually not applicable to individual growers. Should growers desire such information, advice can be obtained by applying to the Department of Agriculture. 3, See reply to No. 2.

BILLS (2)—FIRST READING.

- 1, Collie Recreation and Park Lands Act Amendment.

Introduced by the Minister for Lands.

- 2, Water Boards Act Amendment (No. 2).

Introduced by the Minister for Works.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE.

On motion by **Mr. Doney**, leave of absence for four weeks granted to **Mr. Patrick (Greenough)** on the ground of ill-health.

figure in three weeks. It took that man three weeks and two days to get a house and he had nearly every agent looking out for a place for him. To get a house at a cheaper rental, particularly in view of the war conditions prevailing, is almost impossible. I believe there are now more people residing in the greater metropolitan area than ever before. The wives of many men who have enlisted and gone overseas have come to live in the metropolitan area. Sometimes two families live in one house for the simple reason that neither family can obtain a house at a rental it can afford to pay. It is exceedingly difficult to rent a house in the greater metropolitan area at a rental of less than 25s. a week; in fact, it is extremely difficult to get a house at that rental.

The Premier: It is extremely difficult to get a house at all.

Mr. CROSS: Yes. A house containing four brick rooms was recently erected in South Perth. It is alongside other houses let two years ago at £1 a week; but the landlord was able to obtain a rental of 30s. a week for this house within an hour of a notice having been put in front of it. That was because the tenant was unable to obtain a house elsewhere. The Act relating to rent restriction did not apply to that house, because it was built after the Act was passed. I have discussed this matter with a number of agents and some landlords, who consider that it would be fair to extend the period of the notice from two days to 14 days. They pointed out that landlords are reasonable in most cases, and that it was but fair to give a tenant sufficient time to find another house. It is ridiculous at the present time to expect a person to secure a house in two days, and that is why I have brought down this Bill which, if passed, will extend the period of notice from two days to 14 days.

By way of illustration, I shall mention a case that occurred within the last fortnight in the metropolitan area. In order to secure a house, a man went to the landlord and bought it. There was a good tenant in the house; he had always paid his rent in advance and he said that he could not get out because he could not secure another house. He tendered the rent for one week, but the agent refused to accept it, so that the tenant might be given the two

days' notice under the parent Act. That was the means adopted to evict the tenant. Such procedure is ridiculous. I do not believe the people of this State stand for anything but fair play and the simple provision in this Bill will ensure that tenants get fair play. I hope members will support the measure. We have done a good job in abolishing the old distress law and providing in its place a remedy which is fair and reasonable. There has been no complaint about the present law since the parent Act was passed. If we now pass this amending Bill, we shall have done something to improve conditions between landlord and tenant in this State. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

MR. WATTS (Katanning) [4.44]: I do not think there is any serious objection to the Bill offered to the House by the member for Canning (Mr. Cross). As a matter of fact, when the Distress for Rent Abolition Bill was before the House, it struck me as remarkable that the hon. member did not object to the insertion of the period of two days in Clause 6; but he has just told us that he was afraid of losing the entire Bill if he did not accept that provision. Possibly that was the reason. It seems to me, however, that he is now seeking to make the period rather too long; he has gone from one extreme to the other. Two days is obviously not long enough. Most of these houses which the Bill will affect are let on a weekly tenancy; and therefore the 14 days he now proposes to insert is rather too long a period. That does not prevent me from supporting the second reading.

The place to improve a provision of that nature is in Committee. I look at the matter in this way: The Legislature of this State has seen fit to accept the abolition of the legal method for recovery of rent which had been in operation, as the hon. member told us—I well remember the speech he made on that occasion—for hundreds of years in one form or another. Having accepted that, which by some people has been regarded as revolutionary, all we have to do is to ensure that the provisions we put in place of it are not unreasonable to either party. I agree with the member for Canning, and have agreed with him since the Act was passed, that the period of two days is too short, as it does not afford a

tenant a reasonable opportunity to secure other premises, even without the extraordinary state of affairs to which the hon. member has made reference. If he desires to carry on his campaign to ensure that distress for rent never raises its head again, and that there is substituted for it some reasonable protection to the landlord by way of removal of his tenant, we ought to support the second reading of the Bill, subject to the reservation that the time he has inserted in the Bill is too long.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Mr. Marshall in the Chair; Mr. Cross in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Amendment of Section 6:

Mr. WATTS: I move an amendment—

That in line 3 the word "fourteen" be struck out and the word "seven" inserted in lieu.

I need not repeat the reasons I gave on the second reading.

Mr. CROSS: The amendment would have the effect of giving the tenant only one week within which to find another house. That period might be sufficient in normal times, but just now there is a shortage of houses.

Mr. Raphael: You cannot get them.

Mr. CROSS: The provision might affect the wives of many men who have gone overseas with the Forces. Their allotment might be held up and the landlord would get the opportunity to evict them.

Hon. C. G. Latham: They cannot be evicted under the existing law.

Mr. CROSS: Even if any other excuse were invented under the Act, seven days is an unreasonable period in which to find a place at present. I challenge members to find a decent house in the metropolitan area within fourteen days. It would be more like 14 weeks. I oppose the amendment.

Mr. RAPHAEL: I oppose the amendment. It is not the scarcity of houses, but the impossibility of getting them. There are none available in Victoria Park at the present time. It is ridiculous to suggest one week.

Mr. Berry: It does not matter much whether it is seven days or one hundred days.

Mr. RAPHAEL: The hon. member does not know much about it. The necessity for the extra seven days would be brought home to him very strongly if he were house-hunting. It gives an opportunity to search in more than one district. The Leader of the Opposition said it was not possible to put a soldier's wife out of a home. He does not know landlords and their actions. The member for Katanning pointed out that the pay to soldiers' wives is sometimes held up. We find landlords trying to put it across them. Many of these women are unsophisticated and do not know the laws of the country.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I cannot imagine that they do not know, with you as a member.

Mr. RAPHAEL: It does not happen if I know of it. Rents in many instances are raised contrary to the law. Many people find it impossible to rent a house and are purchasing homes. Because of that, people who have been in houses for years have to get out.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Under the National Security Regulations landlords cannot put soldiers' wives out.

Mr. RAPHAEL: They have put them out.

Mr. Cross: They use a lot of bluff.

Mr. RAPHAEL: They have been put out because they do not know the law. Those who do are all right, and those who consult their member are protected. I can understand the hon. member's desire to accept the crumbs from the rich man's table through the passing of the original Act, but now the whole loaf is desired. A proper opportunity should be given to find another home.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: No good excuse has been given for the retention of the word "fourteen." If, as the member for Victoria Park stated, there are no vacant houses it would make no difference whether it is left there or not. I do not know why there is such a shortage of houses. The population has not increased, but decreased, in this State.

The Minister for Mines: Wives of country people are coming to the metropolitan area.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: If soldiers' wives from the country settle in the city while their husbands are away, that is a reason for the scarcity of houses. Will 14 days provide any relief?

Mr. Cross: It gives time in which to search for a house.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Then let us make it 28 days.

Mr. Raphael: We will agree to that.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: A month in which to find a house seems quite right. Dealing with the point that a soldier's wife cannot be evicted from a house under the National Security Act, I have asked repeatedly that something be done. There ought to be a committee in every district to look after these people. We have a responsibility to the men oversea. I want to see legislation brought down to give them some standing. Committees of three or five in each district could be formed to look after the interests of the people.

The Premier: We have the Soldiers' Dependants Appeal Committee, which looks after this kind of thing.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: It is our responsibility to look after these people, and for that reason I am one hundred per cent. behind the member introducing this legislation. We have no right to allow relatives of those people who have gone oversea to be exploited unfairly. I am sorry this point has been raised under this Bill. This will apply to very few cases of this nature.

Mr. Raphael: You are wrong there.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I do not think so.

Mr. Cross: It might apply to the fathers and mothers of these men.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I do not think so. With the assistance of the Soldiers' Dependants Appeal Committee there ought to be enough money to pay the rent. It has a substantial amount of money. Any case submitted to the chairman of that committee, Mr. Clydesdale, will be generously dealt with as far as finances will allow. A substantial cheque was given to the organisation the other day by the Premier. It should be made public that there are people in the city willing to be the friends of those people and to assist them. The Government will make available a man to look after their interests. I have no authority to speak on its behalf, but I know it well enough to know that this is so.

Mr. BERRY: I support the proposal for 14 days. I had experience of this in South Perth. The house I leased was sold over my head and I was told to be out in three days. By a stroke of luck I found my present house. That stroke of luck cost me another 12s. odd a week in rent. I think

14 days is a very proper time, in spite of the interjection I offered a while ago.

Mr. Raphael: I have to take back the suggestion that you do not know anything about it.

Mr. BERRY: The time should be 14 days and not the ridiculous period of two days. I am sorry the member for Katanning moved his amendment. The present abnormal demand for houses arises from the fact that many people have arrived here from Singapore, while their number has been added to by those who have left the country areas in this State to reside in the city. The congestion has reached the stage when people who own houses have said to tenants, "You get out. I have another tenant." Even the provision for 14 days' notice specified in the Bill is by no means completely satisfactory.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: While I commend the member for Canning for introducing the Bill, the discussion that has ensued would possibly convey the impression that it is limited in its duration. While the measure will protect soldiers' wives to some extent, the present difficulty largely arises because of the necessity for many families to transfer their domiciles from the country areas and elsewhere to the city to cover the period during which the male members are away on active service.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Even so, if there was not so much ignorance regarding the application of national security regulations, many people would not be in difficulties at present.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: That is so. The fact is that the Bill has general application. I know of one instance where a man with a large family was in arrears with his rent for the house he occupied. He received a communication from a lawyer about his position and he made an offer to pay off so much a week. The lawyer accepted the proposition, but the landlord refused to do so. The man consulted me and I told him to remain where he was because he had made the arrangement with the owner's legal representative. Subsequently the police endeavoured to induce the man to leave the house. He communicated with me again and I told him not to move from the premises. I rang up the sergeant of police and told him that so long as the man paid his rent together with the extra amount the lawyer had agreed to, the tenant could not be inter-

ferred with. Within the last 48 hours the man has been served with a notice to quit because the house has been sold over his head. I have told the man to remain in the house until the sale is investigated to determine whether it is a genuine transaction. If it is genuine, then the owner has the right to take possession of the premises. Even the period of 14 days provided in the Bill is too brief to enable a worker to find another house at a rental he is able to pay and in close enough proximity to his work. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that there is a scarcity of houses suitable for workers. There are many furnished flats available but the rentals are far too expensive for workers. Moreover, young families are not popular in flat life. Flats are all right for wealthy people and those who will not bother themselves with the responsibility of bringing children into the world and rearing them.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member must not wander too far from the subject matter of the clause.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: In the city there is a multitude of flats, but the workers want houses so that they may rear their families.

Mr. Raphael: Flats are a curse of the city.

Hon. W. D. JOHNSON: It would not be possible for a person to get a house at Midland Junction inside three months. The Workers' Homes Board is not able to ease the position because it is limited in its operations. I think 28 days would be more adequate than the period of 14 days mentioned in the clause.

Amendment put and negatived.

Clause put and passed.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment and the report adopted.

BILL—WEIGHTS AND MEASURES ACT AMENDMENT.

Received from the Council and read a first time.

MOTION—VERMIN ACT.

To Inquire by Select Committee.

Debate resumed from the 3rd September on the following motion by Mr. Mann (Beverley):—

That a select committee be appointed to inquire into and report upon the Vermin Act with

particular reference to—(a) Whether the distribution and expenditure of the Vermin Fund can be improved; (b) whether and upon what conditions local vermin boards should have the option of supplying netting to farmers within their districts and recovering the expense incurred by instalments as rates; (c) the fencing provisions of the Act and the retention of the Government rabbit proof fences.

THE MINISTER FOR LANDS (Hon. F. J. S. Wise—Gascoyne) [5.11]: A motion for the appointment of a select committee presupposes difficulties of a major description or that information respecting the matter affected is not readily accessible or available. In his remarks the member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) did not indicate conformity with that contention but seemed to suggest that because he was not sufficiently informed regarding certain phases of the operations under the Vermin Act, or of the administration of the Vermin Trust Account, he required further information. In view of that fact, I shall endeavour to provide him with much information in both respects, and also to correct some misconceptions under which he seems to be labouring.

Vermin boards existed long before the inauguration of the trust fund under the Vermin Act. Originally each board was responsible for the control of vermin within its district and collected funds through rates levied for that particular purpose. From the funds thus procured, bonuses were distributed for the destruction of foxes, dingoes and eagles. Because of the varying incidence of the pest in different parts of the State, even in respect of adjoining vermin board areas, considerable differentiation of rates was found in the payments made by boards. The dingo pest developed along the same lines here as it did in an interstate sense. I well remember the time when dingoes were very prevalent in the country between Alice Springs and Darwin. They were moving fairly rapidly towards the Kimberleys, and in the East Kimberley district particularly were causing considerable losses in calves on station properties. So serious was the pest considered to be in the encroachment that road boards in the Far North arranged to pay £2 per head for each dingo scalp submitted to them. Trafficking in dingo scalps became so rampant that some boards were rendered nearly insolvent. It was freely said at the time that because £2 per scalp was paid on one side of the border and only 5s. per scalp on the other,

no self-respecting dingo would die in the cheaper district.

Mr. Warner: And there has been a deal of importation.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The result, which has been proved, was that thousands of pounds were paid out in that way for dogs which were killed thousands of miles away from the point of delivery of the scalps. And that position obtains in the southern districts of the State. Prior to the 1925 amendment of the Vermin Act the road boards had the responsibility of collecting the money by special rates and distributing it as bonuses; and differentiating rates were an extreme difficulty to them. There was also a difficult position which arose in the areas of sparse population, where vermin were very plentiful and where the people could not impose upon themselves a levy which would meet the situation. But it was from those sparsely populated areas, where the vermin were very bad, that the thickly populated and settled districts got their vermin.

Although dogs and foxes were not prevalent in the inner regions, there was always difficulty in collecting rates from the people who were not seriously affected. So that the ultimate result of the initial difficulty of the road boards culminated in a conference of road board representatives in 1925, when representatives of pastoralists' and farmers' organisations requested the Government to scrutinise the whole position. Thereupon the Vermin Act Trust Fund was instituted, and for that fund since a special rate has been collected and levies have been paid. Since that time the Vermin Act Trust Fund has been administered by an advisory committee. That committee consists of a representative of the pastoralists; a representative of the farmers, and a Government nominee. The committee member today for the pastoralists is Mr. Patterson, of the Wiluna district; for the farmers there is Mr. J. S. Teasdale; and the Government representative is Mr. Arnold, who is chairman of the committee. Those gentlemen have carefully administered the fund. There have been times when in their administration they have not seen eye to eye with the Minister. There have been times when their recommendations have been referred again to them. Speaking in general, however, those members meet regularly and are doing and have done an excellent job in their

part of the endeavour to eradicate the serious animal vermin from the stock districts of the State.

The fact of the creation of the trust fund has given to the road boards a splendid opportunity to have an equal right in the distribution of the moneys collected for the fund. Although the mover (Mr. Mann) stated that dingoes were more prevalent in parts of the State than they had been 20 years ago, I would remind him that the State is not merely the south-western part of the State, nor the Great Southern district. Although the hon. member represents a district within a stone's throw of Perth—I think it is nearly a hundred miles, which is nothing as regards distances in Western Australia—he has not even a passing idea of what is happening in respect of infestation of dingoes and foxes in other parts of the State. The hon. member suggested that the most infested part of the State at the present time for dingoes was the south-west corner of it. That is entirely erroneous. Here are the hon. member's words—

Where the dingo is most prevalent today is the far south-western part of the State.

The south-western portion of the State has at the moment comparative security from the depredations of dingoes compared with many other parts of the State. I shall briefly give figures showing the progress which has been made by the trappers whom the fund employs. The average number of dogs caught annually during the ten years from 1930 to 1939 was 10,697, for the whole State. In the year 1940-41 the number of scalps paid for was 11,177. This higher number was accounted for, and can be accounted for, by the severity of conditions in the pastoral areas and the outer areas, which had induced the dogs to come in nearer the civilised and more thickly settled areas. A very close record is kept of the number of scalps paid for, delivered to each board, and the districts they are delivered to; and it can be shown that while 10,554 were killed in those ten years annually in the whole State, 623 dogs were paid for in the South-West Land Division, which includes the whole of the South-West—623 out of 10,554. So that the hon. member is quite wrong when he suggests that the worst part of the State for infestation of dingoes is the south-west corner.

I shall deal a little later with the attention we are giving to that area by the employment

of professional trappers paid from the vermin fund; but before doing that I will mention districts in the South-West Land Division and give the figures of dogs paid for during the last ten years and during the past year. Grouping four districts into four sections, the Dandarragan, Carnamah, Three Springs, and Irwin 10 years ago paid for 390 dogs; last year they paid for 41. Koorda, Kununoppin, Mt. Marshall and Nungarin paid for 451 dogs 10 years ago, and paid for 41 last year. Lake Grace, Kent, Kondinin and Narembene 10 years ago paid for 268 dogs, and last year paid for 25. Augusta, Denmark, Gnowangerup and Plantagenet paid for 390 dogs 10 years ago, and last year paid for 123. The considerable reductions illustrated in those figures have been brought about by the skill and energy of the trappers we employ. I would make a special point that the trappers are not concerned with individual interests. They are concerned with State interests. They concentrate their efforts on the country where the dingo is known to exist and breed. They put in remarkable efforts in places where white men infrequently go, because we have found that since the continued employment of these men the protection of the inner country has come from the abandonment of the killing in the outer areas.

So it is in the district around the coast, from Augusta eastward and north where the trappers concentrate. They have killed dogs which have been considered impossible to trap, and in general have protected by their activities the inner area from tremendous slaughter in lambs and calves. It is only natural that the coastal areas which are not occupied, where white men infrequently go, should be the home for breeding the timid, cunning dog before he encroaches, because of his hunger and his eventual gameness, into the inner areas. We have five trappers concentrated on that coastal valley. Four of them operate on the southern coast between Augusta and Ravensthorpe, not solely because of the numbers of dogs they are getting but because we find that the dogs that breed there are bad dogs, and to the extent that they encroach on the more occupied territory are very bad killers. So the department has taken care that that area receives special attention.

The hon. member in his speech also mentioned the country partly within and some adjoining his own district—the Canning

country and the country that lies adjacent to the Mundaring water scheme and the reserves surrounding it. I think it will come as a surprise to the hon. member to learn that trappers we have concentrated in that area to protect such districts as those of the member for Swan (Mr. Sampson) and the member for Murray-Wellington (Mr. McLarty), during the past 12 months have killed 100 dogs in those reserves. I am sure it will be news to the hon. member that these specially trained men have been detailed to watch those particular areas because experience has shown us that where the dog breeds is in the quieter parts, but not very far from where his depredations take most effect.

Mr. Thorn: I asked that a trapper be sent there.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: If the hon. member desires that trappers be sent there, I am sure that wish will be recorded too. But there have been apparently good results. In the country between Pinjarra and Kalamunda the trappers have taken 100 dogs during the past 12 months, and I suppose have not merely protected the interests of that whole district but even the interests of members representing those districts. Certainly the trappers have done excellent work there. The majority of the dogs caught are dingoes, but some of the others are very dangerous crosses. Dogs that have got away from the mills in those regions, dogs of the kangaroo type, and dogs which become vicious killers have been numbered amongst those which the trappers have caught during that period.

There is an aspect of the employment of these trappers that very few people regard favourably. The methods of their dealing with the pest are to some people quite unorthodox. But a trapper is not merely a man who sets a trap to waylay and ultimately kill his beast. We encourage the trappers to poison systematically all the country that is within their purview; and we find that the most unsuspected domestic dog, who his owner submits is never off the chain, is often found among the first victims once the wholesale poisoning of dogs is embarked upon. The trappers who are employed are not normally the old time type of bushman, as I heard the Minister for Health interject the other evening. These trappers are men skilled in bush lore, and particularly skilled in the art of trapping

vermin. In point of fact, I believe it could safely be said that many of them think as a dog would think. To those who have been privileged to watch these men in action endeavouring to locate a dog which has killed perhaps £500 worth of sheep, it is marvellous to see the trapper track the dog to where he daily crosses a certain track or paddock.

We have had instances where pastoralists or farmers offered £10 or £20 for securing one dog, and the trappers have, so far as my knowledge goes, never failed to obtain the victim. So that in the methods adopted. I repeat, we have at times come keenly into conflict with private interests. I remember a recent occasion when a very valuable sheep dog, supposed to be never off the chain, became the first victim when a trapper went into the district and did not tell anyone of his activities. This valuable sheep dog, a wonderful dog to work sheep, by his own actions proved himself a very bad killer. I am told by the trappers that the people who let their dogs off the chain at daylight when they rise are rendering themselves a disservice. The dog is most active just after dark and just before daylight. That is when he rambles and when he engages in killing. I mention that fact because we have had some difficulty in respect to the domestic dog menace in the district of the member for Murray-Wellington (Mr. McLarty). The men the department employs must pass severe tests in bush lore. It is not generally known that we employ 12 trappers and try to spread them throughout the State in the most advantageous places. If the hon. member can advise us where we can secure the services of other men of that kind we are prepared to give consideration to further appointments.

Some splendid results have accrued from the work of trappers in the district of the member for Roebourne (Mr. Rodoreda) in country which is almost inaccessible to men on horseback. The trappers must be men of great integrity. They work in places far removed from any supervision—almost from civilisation at times—and upon them must be placed full responsibility for attending to their duties. So far we have been very fortunate in the men we have employed. The life they lead is very hard; but no matter where they render service—whether in the Murchison, in the Roebourne district, at

Ravensthorpe or as far distant as the other side of Leonora—they give excellent service and the reports of their activities received from individuals and road boards commend them in the highest possible manner.

I desire to make reference to the variation in the number of scalps collected according to an increase or decrease of the rate paid. Some years ago the department had interesting experiences in this connection; once during the time of the administration of the department by the present Minister for Works and once during my occupancy of the office. I refer to when the fund was almost depleted. Because of the scale of bonuses paid, particularly for foxes, the drain on the fund was about £30,000 a year for foxes alone. At that time we were paying £2 per head for foxes, but the results were not nearly as good as might have been expected. Very few pups were killed at that time because not so much was paid for them as was paid for dogs and the pups were allowed to grow up. We know that very many of those engaged in trapping were reluctant to kill a female dog or fox, especially if the animal were rearing a litter. Its life was preserved until the litter was reared! That practice was induced by the high bonus paid at the time. Members will know that in recent years there have been very few complaints in that connection. That was why I was surprised when the hon. member moved this motion. The administration of the fund, the careful husbanding of it, and the manner of its collection, have for so long been unchallenged and accepted. The fund has been well managed and has been found to be sound in principle and during the time it has been in existence has rendered great service to the State.

After the Vermin Act was amended to permit of trappers being employed, the disbursement from the fund—that is in 1930-31—was £105. In the intervening years so many trappers have been employed that the disbursements have grown. In 1935-36 they amounted to £984; in 1939-40, to £3,174; and for 1940-41 we anticipate spending in trappers' wages £4,774. The payment of that money has meant the saving of a considerable sum by way of other disbursements from the fund. We have not had to pay for thousands of scalps which would otherwise have had to be paid for. The fact that the trappers have attacked the very heart of

the problem by getting at the dogs and other vermin before they reach the more populated regions, has led to the saving of tremendous disbursements from the fund.

At the time of the institution of the rate, during the period of which I previously spoke, when the Vermin Trust Account was first instituted, the farmer was in an absolute dilemma as to how best to co-operate with his fellow farmers and to have adjoining road boards unite in an effort to control the vermin. Under the Act, owners of over 160 acres of land, no matter in what district, have to pay the vermin rate whether or not vermin occur on the property. The rate is not confined to the farming districts of the State. It is paid by pastoralists in all parts of Western Australia. As the member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) may or may not know, the vermin rate is a farthing in the pound on the unimproved value in farming areas and a halfpenny in the pound in pastoral areas. In the case of the farming districts the unimproved value is the figure used by the taxation authorities, and in the case of the pastoral districts it is one-twentieth of the annual rental. So the hon. member is wrong in assuming that the farming community alone contributes to the vermin fund. I suggest to him that those with a knowledge of the outer farming districts of this State have a full appreciation of the work done outside their districts. What I have said provides an answer to the first point raised in the motion.

To deal now with the second point relating to the supply of wire netting by local vermin boards! The motion asks that the select committee be required to inquire—

Whether and upon what conditions local vermin boards should have the option of supplying netting to farmers within their districts and recovering the expense incurred by instalments as rates.

The Vermin Act already provides what the hon. member seeks. There is provision for approved farmers to be supplied with netting by vermin boards. The difference in procedure, if the hon. member's proposal were agreed to, would be that the road board accepting responsibility for the distribution of the netting would also be responsible for the collection of the payments and the repayment of the principal. A rather important fact is that although the boards have the right to do this for the farmers they appear to be very unwilling to assume the responsi-

bility, for they do not apply to have the privilege granted to them.

That provision is already in the Act. The necessity for having the administration of the fund vested in one authority is very obvious. Members from some districts may have heard complaints as to the administration of the Act, but I would point out that the central distributing authority is the Agricultural Bank and I have heard very little adverse comment concerning its activities in that regard. If a road board desired to have netting made available to it, parliamentary approval would be necessary. Since that approval has never been sought, it would appear that there is general satisfaction regarding the present system. The hon. member referred to a restriction of the supply of netting to clients by private mortgagees. I would like him to give specific instances of mortgagees having been denied the right to fence their properties with a view to keeping out rabbits through mortgagees refusing to expend money on netting. I have not had one such case brought under my notice. We find that generally mortgagees are anxious to preserve their equity in a property to maintain the best productive value and to see that the depredations of vermin do not impair the annual return from it. If the hon. member has some specific cases in mind I would like him to bring them to my notice. It does not seem quite right to have legislation compulsorily guaranteeing the instalments for fencing by the mortgagee when no approach has been made through the proper authority—the Agricultural Bank—in which the administration and disbursement of the fund has been vested.

The third matter into which the hon. member desired the select committee to inquire was the fencing provisions of the Act and the retention of the Government rabbit-proof fence. This has been a very vexed question in some districts for many years.

Mr. Stubbs: It always will be.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes. No matter upon what determination a decision is made as to the retention wholly of these fences, anomalous conditions will arise both in pastoral and agricultural districts and no matter what is said in condemnation of the retention and patrolling of those fences, it can be substantiated that those fences were the first line of attack against the rabbits.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Against the rabbits, dingoes and emus.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Not only on individual farms, but generally the fences held up the invasion of the rabbits. The history of the invasion of rabbits shows that that is so. It was feared that the whole State would be overrun with the pest, but we find today that the greatest number of applications for rabbit netting and assistance for rabbit netting come from between the two fences.

Mr. Stubbs: The gates have been left open thousands of times.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It is a fact that what the member for Wagin (Mr. Stubbs) says applies in every district except as to most of the gates on actual main roads. Where by-roads and infrequently used roads occur, these gates are more often left open.

Hon. W. D. Johnson: On many occasions the gates are even propped open.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: The fact remains that the country which has the greatest infestation of rabbits today lies between the two fences.

Mr. Stubbs: Quite right!

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: These fences still prevent a tremendous movement of rabbits westward. There are many other beneficial uses for the fences apart from the holding-back of rabbits. I said by interjection the other night that these fences prevented 50,000 emus from getting into the agricultural districts five years ago. Following the activity associated with the endeavour to shoot emus with machine guns, some two years before that, the drought forced tens of thousands of emus from the pastoral districts to the rabbit-proof fences. In the district of the member for Mt. Marshall (Mr. Warner) there would have been a wholesale exodus of people if the emus which patrolled that fence had got through.

Mr. Warner: They would have reached the farms.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: More emus were killed in that year than would have represented in numbers the people who attended the Royal Show on one of the best days of the society. That was the number of emus killed in one year and kept out of the agricultural districts by the rabbit-proof fence. Although the fence

has been the first line of attack against the rabbits, through the passing years its usefulness has increased in many other directions. The member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) mentioned that the rabbit-trapper had been responsible for the keeping down of large numbers of rabbits. I differ from that view. The trapper has constituted a great encouragement to rabbits in many districts. He has in fact not been as good as the fox has been. The rabbit-trapper goes only to places where rabbits are reasonably easy of access, and where the pest exists in fairly large numbers, where the males are not plentiful and there is the same old story of the females and struggling young, which are not wanted and are not saleable, with the result that where the trapper was last year there has been a worse infestation this year.

Trappers really tend to scatter the rabbits from one region to another. They chase them into areas where there is greater cover and give the private landholder more difficulty than if the trapper had not been there at all. I am sure that events have proved that the methods adopted and recognised by the department are the best methods, namely the method of wholesale poisoning, one that has been adopted in the district represented by the member for Nelson. If we could inspire the road boards of districts outside the road districts represented by that hon. member, we would be in a happier position today in respect to rabbits. In recent years the Upper Blackwood Road Board has put up a determined effort to defeat the rabbits. Although trappers used to think that the Upper Blackwood district was an excellent source of supply for them, they have been almost chased out of the district by the activities of the road board.

Mr. J. H. Smith: That is so.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That road board has sold to its ratepayers £467 worth of poison, and a further £107 worth was sold to them through private firms. It is an instance unparalleled in the State of activities against rabbits. The same policy has been adopted by the adjoining road boards of Bridgetown and Manjimup. Although, as members know, some two or three years ago, particularly because of the cover that was available in those districts, the rabbits threatened to invade the South-West in a terrific sense, it can be said that owing to the activities of the boards and the

encouragement given to the settlers, the fear is not present that was present a few years ago. In the areas represented by the member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) and some of the adjoining road board areas in the Great Southern, the rabbits are increasing in number. There is rarely a board that sells £100 worth of poison per annum. I think the activities of the road boards might greatly be improved by an endeavour to emulate road boards in the Nelson district, and by stimulating some interest direct in the members of the boards concerned.

Hon. C. G. Latham: That poison would be phosphorus, not poison fumigation.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It would be phosphorus poison. There are, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, orthodox methods advocated and stressed by the Department of Agriculture. Those methods have been satisfactorily adopted not only in Western Australia but with excellent effect in Victoria and New South Wales. As a fact, the methods adopted in this State for tackling the rabbit problem by poisoning have been copied in the other States. I do not know whether it is necessary for me to make much further comment in respect to the fence itself. In the main the fence was erected in 1902. There is no doubt that the prevention of the spread of rabbits westward or in the southern parts of the State was restricted by the erection of that fence. Although rabbits travelled 2,000 miles across the continent in the first 40 years of settlement of this State, something must have stopped them, because in districts that were advantageous to them outside the fence they rarely appeared in some instances. In other instances the rabbits came through in waves, as members know.

Hon. C. G. Latham: That was in the timber belt where there was no feed.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Although we have approximately 12,000 miles of wire netting supplied under the Commonwealth scheme to farmers, 90 per cent of it has been erected between the No. 1 and No. 2 fences. Rabbits still exist west of the fence, but the incidence of the pest is very light on the western side of the second fence. There are other aspects of the maintenance and control of the fence which affect members representing North-West districts, particularly in the case of the No. 1 fence, which goes from Pardoo north of the 20th parallel to the southern coast where the rental

charges are raised against the pastoralists whose properties the fence traverses. There are some anomalies in that respect, and to these my attention has been drawn on more than one occasion by the member for Murchison (Mr. Marshall) and other members representing the North-West. I think we can very easily remove those anomalies. I have gone carefully into the matter recently, and found that an equitable adjustment of the rentals of the fence, where it traverses and forms parts of the dividing fence between the properties, might be made and the responsibility spread with very little loss to the Treasury. I admit that the Treasurer does not look favourably upon anything that means a reduction in monetary collections, but I am sure he will be prepared to give earnest consideration to the proposal I am going to put up to him, a proposal that is a practical one.

The Premier: Oh dear!

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I would not suggest that this is an opportune time at which to placate the Premier on such a matter, but there is justice in the submissions that are to be made in this respect which will make things more equitable for those who use the fence, and where we can spread the burden so that it will mean very little loss to the Treasury. The member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) suggested that the cost of vermin control was being borne entirely by the agriculturists. When we consider that the cost of upkeep of the fence, the administration of the fund and of the Vermin Act generally, and the provision of poison and all such expenditure comes out of general revenue, members must admit that these arguments cannot be followed to a very successful conclusion.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Is poison supplied to road boards free of charge?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Not to road boards.

Mr. Stubbs: The upkeep of the fence is paid for out of general revenue.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: In 1940-41, the annual expense of upkeep from revenue was £13,700, inclusive of the patrolling of the fence, its maintenance and all the general expenditure connected with the upkeep of the No. 1 and No. 2 fences. The payment of bonuses from the vermin fund amounted to £20,164. The cost of keeping up the fence in 1940-41 was £7,745, spread over 2,069 miles of fencing, equal to

£3 14s. 8d. per mile. It was suggested by the member for Pingelly (Mr. Seward) in a recent speech that consideration should be given to allowing farmers to take over the fence, and that the Government should assist in the control or patrolling of it. That would bring into existence a state of affairs that has not been borne out with very great success in respect of other fences constructed by the Government in other days. If we could rely on attention and service being given to it, and upon farmers or pastoralists devoting time and attention to their properties in cases of emergency such as wash-aways and fires, and providing the heavy expenditure which occurs from time to time, much greater consideration could be given to the suggestion than could be given to it in the light of our past experience.

While the fence costs less per mile than does any similar type of fence in the Commonwealth, I think that in the best interests of the State the safest course to adopt is to follow the present procedure. I repeat, as I suggested in my opening remarks, that if a select committee is to be appointed for this or any other purpose, a thoroughly substantial reason must be given other than the reason of eliciting information. I have endeavoured briefly to traverse the ground relating to the administration of the fund and the disbursement from it of the collections paid into it. I submit that an inadequate case has been made out by the hon. member for the appointment of a select committee, which in itself would cost a lot of money. Although the carrying of the motion will provide the hon. member with an opportunity to secure further information than I have given him, all that is required is accessible to him either by means of inquiry here or by investigation departmentally. I feel sure that if he, or any other member of the House, made inquiries at the department, the utmost courtesy would be extended to him and the required information would be supplied. While the hon. member's motive in moving the motion may be quite good, the investigation by a select committee would involve considerable expense, and would achieve no good purpose.

HON. C. G. LATHAM (York) [6.1]: In moving the motion for the appointment of a select committee, the member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) was imbued with the desire better to inform the farmers who suffer most

as the result of the depredations by rabbits. The feeling is prevalent in the rural areas that the cost involved in annually laying compulsorily a certain quantity of poison by trail is far in excess of their losses of stock on properties where the rabbits are few in numbers. The farmers have agitated for the amendment of the Act. Members know that I do not usually refer to my own experiences, but on this occasion I am prepared to defy the Minister to find a single rabbit on my property, despite which every year we are forced to comply with the law and lay so many miles of rabbit poison on the farm. What is the bait laid for? The only animals likely to eat it there are the sheep! The time is fully opportune for amending the Act.

The Minister for Lands: Do you wholly conform to the law?

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: That is what we are required to do.

The Minister for Lands: I was just wondering whether the law is administered.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: The law is certainly obsolete, seeing that by Act of Parliament we have allowed certain people to be relieved from the necessity to pay vermin rates. The Minister knows that is correct. In the first place, vermin boards have been allowed to exempt landowners from the necessity to pay the vermin rate if they have fenced their properties with rabbit-proof fencing, which has been kept in good order, and they have cleared their properties of rabbits. Then, again, by means of an amendment to the principal Act, we have provided in Section 100A that if a certain type of vermin-proof fence is erected to provide against other pests as well as rabbits, relief from the payment of the vermin rate may be granted. Thus we already have provided exceptions to the rule. Despite that fact, farmers are bound to lay a trail of poison on their properties every year. Hence the agitation for an amendment to the Act. If an inspector is satisfied that there is no necessity for the farmer to lay the poison bait, the latter should be afforded relief. As it is, an inspector is able to go on my property at any time between October or November and April, and if he finds that no poison bait has been laid, he can take out a summons against me for a breach of the Act, and the magistrate is compelled to impose a fine.

Mr. Mann: That is the point. That is why an amendment is required.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: The magistrate has no option; he must impose the fine. As the Act is so obsolete, I think the Minister, probably without the necessity for a select committee, might be prepared to investigate that phase.

The Minister for Lands: The work is subject to investigation by inspectors.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I know, but if an inspector carries out the law and goes upon a property where there is not a rabbit to be seen, merely because no poison has been laid in conformity with the Act he is required to take proceedings against the farmer, and the magistrate is bound to inflict a fine.

Mr. J. H. Smith: That is not so.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Definitely it is so. A magistrate who has dealt with such cases in agricultural areas stated that because of the provision in the Act he was bound to impose a fine. The Minister knows that my statement is perfectly correct. I am not talking about the departmental inspectors but the inspectors appointed by local authorities.

The Minister for Lands: Those inspectors experience great difficulty because of the position in various districts.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I was coming to that point. Experience shows that one board may carry out the provisions of the Act meticulously, while the neighbouring local authority displays great laxity. The one is carrying out the law; the other neglects to do so. The result is that in the one area rabbits breed in great numbers, thereby providing the necessary parents for a big influx of rodents during the next season. I know my suggestion is not popular among local authorities, but I have always advocated that the inspections should be carried out from the head office. One inspector acting with reasonable discretion would see to it that farmers were not harassed in their operations, and he would be able to traverse several districts to secure effective compliance with the Act. By that means we could stop the migration of rabbits to the South-West. Only in the last few years have rabbits invaded the South-West and that is the most difficult part of the State in which to deal with the pest. I admit that rabbits do not like wet country, but in the South-West they burrow into the hills and

the most luscious feed is available, and there is no better harbour in the world for them. The result is that a colony of rabbits springs up there before one is really aware of it.

If inquiry was made by a select committee, we might be able to persuade the local authorities, who have previously been very reluctant to hand over any of their powers to the department, that it would be in their interests to have the authority centralised in the department. Actually we know enough about the subject without having a select committee, but the important point is to get something done that will be satisfactory. In recent years, since the foxes invaded our country, the number of rabbits has declined considerably.

The Minister for Lands: The foxes destroy the lambs.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Speaking from personal experience, the fox has been a friend. Though an odd lamb or two might be destroyed by foxes, as a general rule loss is suffered where the mothers have left the lambs, and if foxes had not destroyed them, eaglehawks which are numerous at lambing time would probably have killed them. Foxes, like other animals, might become educated to the stage when they will attack, but I am safe in saying that in my territory we do not lose one-half per cent. of lambs through the depredations of foxes. Foxes can pass a rabbit-proof fence almost as easily as if no fence existed, so rabbit-proof netting will not keep them out. I have seen a fox run up a fence post and drop down on the other side with the facility of a cat. I have often seen foxes do that, particularly at night. The producers who have suffered most from the depredation of foxes are the poultry farmers.

I mentioned that foxes had been a friend because of the way in which they destroy rabbits. A fox attacks rabbits most effectively where there are young ones and digs straight down to the nest. The fox must have an extraordinary sense of smell because it is able to dig straight down. I have never known a fox to miss a nest of young rabbits. I disagree with the Minister on the matter of trapping. Not often do I disagree with him, because he is really a fairly good Country Party man, except that his politics are wrong.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order!

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: The Minister said that trapping was of no use to destroy rabbits. The method we employ to destroy rabbits on our property is first of all to poison them when they are numerous. Then we reach a stage where there are only a few left, and I would defy anyone to poison those few; they are too cunning. The most successful method to adopt is to dig out the burrows that remain or else use traps. The farmer should burn up any logs, which are a great harbour for rabbits. They love hollow logs and hollow trees to live in. Where there are granite outcrops, it is extraordinarily difficult to cope with the pest. Unfortunately most of our farming areas have a fair amount of broken rock, and that is country which provides a good harbour for the rabbit. In those places it is difficult to combat the pest, and there we usually have our water supplies. Rabbits dislike the dry periods; many of them die from lack of water and those that do not die become so impoverished that they can easily be run down and destroyed. The problem is to deal with rabbits in country where there is broken granite. Poison will, to an extent, reduce their numbers, and with the aid of traps they can be eventually eradicated, though I should not like to guarantee that one would secure 100 per cent. eradication by these methods.

As to the method advocated by the department, the law lays down that there is only one way to exterminate rabbits and that is by using poisoned pollard. Fumigation is much more effective. This can be carried out by using a powder that produces cynogas and by using carbon bisulphide, which is a liquid. Carbon bisulphide forms a heavy gas that goes right to the bottom of the burrows; cynogas, being light, keeps nearer the top. If both are used, effective destruction occurs. Often when I have been fumigating in this way, I have seen the rabbits come out of the burrows squealing, and it is then easy to grab them and wring their necks. Fumigation by these means is a very effective method of destruction. The ploughing-in of burrows is effective in some cases. Farmers working with tractors can destroy rabbits in that way, but with horses there is a difficulty because they detest burrows and dislike going over them.

I have been a very keen supporter of the rabbit-proof fence and have been dis-

appointed with fellow farmers for their bad habit of leaving the gates open. We have a right to say to such farmers, "Here is a valuable possession belonging to the people. It was erected for the benefit of the State, and you should not be too indifferent or too tired to get out of your vehicles and shut the gates." The gate through which I pass when I motor to my home is open 98 times out of a hundred. I am always careful to close it after me, but when I return that way, I almost invariably find it open again. I do not know how we can deal with that sort of thing.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I was saying that it was difficult to deal with the question of gates in rabbit-proof fences on main roads. Not long ago the Minister for Works introduced an amending measure providing for run-throughs. Whether it would be possible to use those on the rabbit-proof fence successfully I do not know. The question is one for the departmental officers to advise on. I know that on the railways where a rabbit-proof fence crosses the line some provision is made for the train to run over the rabbit stops or the cattle stops, or whatever they may be. Whether that provision is effective I also do not know.

Next I wish to deal with the laying of poison baits in the form of poisoned pollard. I have said the Act provides that every landowner shall lay a certain quantity of poison. As the result of this, some destruction takes place. In my young days in the Eastern States, the bait was always covered. A furrow was made, the bait was laid, and then there was a little paraphernalia behind covering the earth in. The rabbits sat down and picked the bait up. That might obviate the big loss that takes place because of poison not so much in big stock as in small stock. The matter is one which should be investigated, because the losses from poisoning are fairly heavy. The member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) has just drawn my attention to the fact that poison baits promote toxic paralysis.

Certainly, rabbits are not as plentiful as they were years ago. The Minister has said that the No. 2 fence has prevented rabbits from coming west. I have seen the rabbits thicker at York and Quairading and

adjacent places on this side of the line than anywhere else.

The Premier: For a time!

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Yes, for a time! I have often wondered where they come from. Rabbits are like mice and rats, seeming to come from nowhere in huge numbers. The rabbit-proof fence has served a good purpose, and I would not advocate its being pulled down or even handed over. It has been in existence for over 40 years, and has proved highly beneficial. Its present state demonstrates that the wire-netting supplied in those days was of high quality, besides being very cheap as compared with the price today. Having seen the fence from time to time, I have been surprised to find how good the netting is even now. Fences put up at the present day are not nearly as good as those erected 18 or 20 years ago, and the netting in them is much worse.

As the Minister stated, the rabbit-proof fence has prevented the dingoes from coming in. Dingoes are like foxes, and after a little while become more cute than in the native state. They soon learn to jump the fence. Still, the fence does keep back the bush dingo who is not accustomed to jumping fences. It used to be necessary to yard sheep every night because of the dingoes, and that is not the case now. Moreover, the fence has proved of great value in checking the emu. I certainly would not like to see the fence handed over to farmers, who would disregard it and leave the gates open. Between here and Bruce Rock there is only one gate to go through, and yet it is hardly ever found closed. The position is different on the goldfields road, because a boundary-rider looks after the fence there. That is the reason why that gate is hardly ever found open.

If the Minister does not agree to a select committee, I trust he will give consideration to the suggestions put up by members. The Act is obsolete. Much benefit would be derived from amending it. Doubtless there is sufficient knowledge in the department to bring the Act up to date so that it may function more efficiently than in the past. A very good plan, but one which would be highly unpopular with the Vermin Board, would be to adopt separate control and separate inspectors. This would result in the employment of more efficient methods. I hope the Minister will agree to the appointment of a select committee.

The Premier: I do not think you hope it very much.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: The excuse put up by the Minister as regards cost is weak in the extreme. Outside the printing the expenditure would be very slight. In the past I have known of inflated estimates of the cost of printing documents.

The Minister for Lands: Have you heard about the Stored Wheat select committee?

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I have knowledge of one on which the Minister and I sat. I heard from the Treasury that the cost of that committee was supposed to be £700, but if ever there was a cheap inquiry it was that one. Yet it was supposed to cost £700; an absurd figure! We put up an excellent report, but effect has not been given to it although my colleague is now in the Ministry.

Mr. SPEAKER: We are getting away from the subject.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: We hear nothing about that select committee's report now. I commend the member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) for having moved the motion. In my opinion he has done very good service if only by eliciting a discussion which has educated even some members of this Chamber. The Minister himself has given us information with which perhaps various members were not acquainted; moreover, the hon. gentleman has listened most attentively, and therefore must have derived some benefit from the debate.

MR. SEWARD (Pingelly) [7.38]: I support the motion of the member for Beverley (Mr. Mann), and I hope the House will carry it. Tonight the Minister gave us a most painstaking and in some respects illuminating address; but to me the hon. gentleman's speech seemed more in the nature of a defence of the Central Vermin Fund Committee and its employees. I wish to make it perfectly clear that in supporting the motion I do not advocate the disbandment of the central committee. Neither do I wish to say anything derogatory of the members of the committee. On the contrary, I join with the Minister in paying a high tribute to them. From conversations I have had with the member for Beverley while coming down in the train, I know his intention in moving the motion is to ascertain by a select committee inquiry whether in the light of our experience since the inaugura-

tion of the Vermin Act and since the construction of the rabbit-proof fence, 40 years ago, and having regard to the state of the vermin pest, some alterations could not be made in the Act that would tend towards greater destruction of the vermin.

In order to arrive at that determination, it is necessary to do very much more than simply outline the activities of the trappers—very competent trappers no doubt—employed by the central vermin fund. In my opinion, it is necessary to ascertain what amount is being contributed each year by the landowners of this State for the destruction of vermin, contributed not only to the central vermin fund, which pays for dogs, eagles and foxes, but also to local road boards, and in addition any other charges that may have to be met. I propose to give some of those figures, because otherwise we cannot make a proper examination of the matter. I shall not go back to the commencement, but will start with the figures for 1933-34 and bring them up to 1939-40, which are the latest figures we have. The amounts paid to the central vermin fund by the landowners for the years mentioned are—

1933-34	..	..	£20,220
1934-35	..	..	£21,246
1935-36	..	..	£18,654
1936-37	..	..	£21,201
1937-38	..	..	£21,671
1938-39	..	..	£20,616
1939-40	..	..	£16,489

In 1933-34 the sum brought forward from the previous year was £12,317, which was the unexpended portion of the previous year's collections. But even with those collections, which amount to over £32,000, the Treasury had to find an additional sum of £5,290 to complete the payments for that year, these amounting to £37,827. The next year, 1934-35, collections amounted to £21,246. The sum of £2,646 as against £12,317 was brought forward and no contribution was made by the Treasury. The following year, 1935-36, the sum of £1,220 was brought forward, while £18,654 was collected, and the Treasury had again to come to the rescue of the fund to the extent of £289. The following year, 1936-37, however, no balance was brought forward, the amount collected being £21,201. The following year, 1937-38, a balance of £3,641 was brought forward; the year following, 1938-39, the sum of £10,170 was brought forward, while last year the amount was £14,640.

The lesson I would draw from those figures is that the amounts collected in the last three years have been progressively more than has been required to meet the expenses of the fund and the sums paid out by way of bonus. The amounts paid by way of bonus for those years have varied from £33,000 down to £13,000, proving of course that the destruction of dogs, foxes, and eagles has progressively declined owing, I take it, to the fact that these experts are getting a thorough grip of their duties. That, I think, is proved by the figures quoted by the Minister.

There is another phase of the question, mentioned by the Minister, to which I desire to draw attention. Wages have increased from £902 per year to £3,174 per year. In addition, I notice that last year another item has crept into the accounts which was not present before: that is an amount of £1,027 representing advances made to employees to purchase motor cars. It is the first time I have noticed this item. The expenditure may be necessary to enable the employees to travel over a larger area of country or to save the wages that additional trappers would entail; but the fact remains that the unexpended balance during the last four years has risen from £3,671 to £13,924. That indicates to me that the amounts collected by the fund are now more than necessary for the successful functioning of the fund.

Another factor to which I draw attention is that during those years there has been on occasions necessity to vary the rates paid. During some years they had to be reduced because the fund had not sufficient money to pay them. For instance, in 1933-34, the sum of £1 per head was paid for dogs, 5s. for pups, 5s. for foxes, 1s. for cubs and 2s. 6d. for eagles. That rate was maintained for some time with a slight variation. In 1935-36 the rate for foxes was further reduced to 2s. 6d.; and in 1938-39 a further alteration took place; 20s. was paid for dogs and 5s. each for pups, foxes and eagles, no payment being made for cubs. Those amounts that had to be advanced by the Treasury during 1934, 1935, 1936 and 1937 were subsequently repaid to the Treasury by the central vermin fund from the unexpended balances of previous years. That is the position so far as concerns the fund. I am not in the position to say whether it is functioning successfully, because I am not in touch with the pastoral areas, where the

greater portion of the fund is expended and contributed to.

Another fund is in existence, however, and I wish to draw attention to it. The Minister did not mention it. I refer to the vermin funds administered by road boards. Those are funds to which the landowners also contribute, and in my opinion we must take into consideration the sums contributed to such funds each year. We must ascertain the total of those sums in order to find out whether, in view of the present state of the vermin pest, the money is being wisely expended. Last year, 1940, the total sum of £30,463 was contributed to local vermin boards throughout the State by landowners outside the metropolitan area. That is in addition to the £31,000 contributed to the central vermin board, making a total of over £60,000. We are entitled to find out how that large sum of money is being expended and whether or not it is being disbursed as successfully as it should be.

The Minister made reference to one or two boards that had been active in selling poison to land owners in their districts. That is one of the items that struck me when perusing the list in my possession. It is remarkable to note the disparity between the contributions made to various road boards for vermin destruction. For instance, in the case of two boards on the list that I have, one collects £1,064 per year in vermin fees, while an adjoining board collects £42 per year. I do not know why there should be such a marked difference between these two boards; to me, it seems to indicate that one board may be doing its job while the other is not. I shall not go right through the list.

Strange to say, one of the largest contributors to the road board vermin fund is a board on the west coast, where presumably rabbits are not as thick as they are in other places. But, as I said earlier, there is the total amount of £30,463 that has been contributed during the years I have mentioned. Add that to the amount contributed to the central vermin fund and we get a total of £61,000. Then the Minister indicated that a further £7,700 had been provided for the upkeep of the rabbit-proof fence, bringing the total up to nearly £70,000. The Minister indicated that there were even further contributions from the Treasury. That is a huge sum of money, and if the vermin pest is being coped with adequately, so much to the good. But despite the Minister's assur-

ance that the greatest number of rabbits are to be found between the two rabbit fences, the statement is not borne out by the department in its annual report. I intend to quote from the annual report of the Department of Agriculture, not because I am unaware of the information contained therein, because I see the evidence every day. The annual report of the department for 1934 stated—

Vermin generally has shown an increase, especially dogs. Rabbits are making their presence felt west of No. 2 fence.

The 1936 report indicated that—

A serious position is developing west of No. 2 fence. Foxes also have greatly increased throughout the State.

In 1939 it was reported—

Rabbits still too numerous in the northern part of the Midland districts and have increased to a rather alarming extent in portions of the lower South-West. Three expert trappers employed. Another appointed in the Murchison. In addition four others put on temporarily in the South-West. Dogs troublesome.

In 1940 the department indicated the following position:—

Marked increase in dogs. Foxes also show increase. Operations of dog trappers have been extended, two being appointed to operate in pastoral areas. In more favourable districts the rabbit pest is again becoming evident and unfortunately vermin boards are not doing all in their power to enforce the destructive sections of the Act.

That tends to bear out the necessity for an inquiry such as has been suggested by the member for Beverley (Mr. Mann). I did not require the evidence of the Director who states that the rabbit pest is increasing, because I see almost daily proof of the fact. There is not the slightest doubt that the carrying capacity of the Great Southern districts has declined, since the rabbits made their appearance, by anything from 30 to 50 per cent. Farmers today cannot carry the number of stock they used to carry years ago. There is at present a wheat stabilisation scheme designed to cut out the growing of wheat in areas more favourable for the production of other types of commodities. That applies particularly to the area we have in view west of the No. 2 fence. If there is a desire to take those districts out of wheat growing and put them under pasture, and there is a desire to enter upon the cultivation of clovers and grasses, it becomes necessary first of all to eradicate the rabbit pest, so that people may be able to carry

the full quantity of stock. It is evident that today they cannot carry the number of stock on their farms that it was possible to carry in 1920, and that is due to the depredations of rabbits. There is no doubt that we should have an investigation. It need not be a costly inquiry, as was suggested by the Minister, but an investigation certainly should be made to see if something cannot be done to improve the administration of the large amount of money contributed to the vermin fund every year.

I have asked whether it is possible to have the rabbit-proof fence handed over to adjoining landowners but I am not wedded to that. I do not necessarily want to have the fence abandoned but the fact has to be remembered that it was erected about 40 years ago. People living close to the fence have told me that the wire at the bottom of it is rotting, and either the fence will have to be removed or the wire renewed. If we are faced with the expenditure of money for fresh wire, an investigation should first be made to discover whether the fence should be retained and whether the expense of improving it is warranted. I can speak with a certain amount of authority on the rabbit question. I think it was the Leader of the Opposition who said that the rabbit would not live in the wetter districts. I happened to be in Gippsland, Victoria, which is as wet as is any part of this State, when the rabbits first made their appearance there in 1909. That country is devoted to dairying and the growing of pastures. In 1910 I happened to go to a client of the bank with which I was connected. He had a property of 60 acres on which he used to keep 40 cows, but his holding was denuded by rabbits.

People in Victoria used to say that the rabbits would never live in Gippsland because they had not come there although they were in Victoria 30 years ago. When they did get to Gippsland, there is no doubt what they did! The member for Williams-Narrogin (Mr. Doney) has asked me why the man to whom I just referred did not net his property. As his banker, I advised him to do so but he said, "No. All my neighbours have netted their properties and there is no need for me to net mine." He refused to take my advice and he certainly paid the penalty. Rabbits are going into the South-West today. There is no need for them to burrow. They have

plenty of shelter, plenty of cover, and once they establish themselves in that country where there is water and feed all the year round, it will be a serious matter for that part of the State. It therefore behoves us to see that a policy is adopted which will ensure that everything possible is done to keep down the rabbit plague in that area.

As pointed out by the member for Beverley, the supply of wire netting by vermin boards would have the effect of bringing the control of netting closer to the farmers and to the authority that has the responsibility of granting it. The system was in operation in Victoria when I was there. Netting was supplied by the shire councils to the farmers on 20-year terms, and, as was pointed out by the hon. member, the system obviates the necessity for obtaining the consent of a mortgagee to a priority charge to pay for the netting. It brings the control of the netting closer to the individual concerned and to the local authority. The road boards know their people well. They know if a man is not likely to stay in the district and whether he is worthy of being granted a supply of netting, and are therefore in a better position to control the netting. I have seen letters from road boards which express a wish to have this power. If that is so, I do not think there should be any objection to their receiving it.

For those reasons I desire to support the motion, which simply requests an investigation of the expenditure of the £70,000 a year to counteract the vermin pest. The inquiry is designed to discover whether the money is being expended in the best way. In the light of our 25 years' experience, it may be possible for such a committee to suggest several alterations to the Vermin Act whereby better results can be obtained from the administration of the fund.

MR. WATTS (Katanning) [7.59]: From his point of view, I have no doubt the Minister for Lands made out a good case why the motion should not be passed. At the same time it is evident, as was mentioned by the member for Pingelly (Mr. Seward) that he was engaged not in a defence of his department—because there was no attack upon it or upon those engaged in the work of controlling the vermin fund—but in answering on behalf of that department the statements of the member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) without, I think, really understand-

ing the motives that actuated that hon. member in submitting his motion. There is no doubt the hon. member sought to discover if there were ways and means of improving the administration of the vermin laws, and the methods of destruction of vermin in this State. Because one desires to improve the administration of the vermin laws, that does not connote any desire to criticise or condemn those who have been responsible for their administration prior to this time. It can just as readily, and rightly in this case, be taken as a desire to improve the methods if they be capable of improvement, or to satisfy this Parliament, if they are discovered to be the best possible, that they are the best; and to compliment, in consequence, those responsible. It may be thought this proposal has been evolved entirely by those who sit on these benches.

It may be thought, as was suggested, that there is no desire in quarters other than those close at hand to have an inquiry into any of these matters. I find, however, in the minutes of the annual conference of the Great Southern Road Boards Association a motion was carried, that a committee be appointed to go into the matter of the better distribution of the central vermin fund. I will give the House a little information on the subject of that conference. None of the members, either of this House or another place, who represent that line in this Parliament, was present at that conference with the exception of the member for Albany (Mr. Hill). He did not take any part in bringing this matter before the conference and having the motion carried. In consequence, in the absence of any suggestion from other than the delegates themselves to that conference, and if there be no request for an inquiry from any part of the country, why do we find that the conference in question carried a resolution with direct reference to, and may indeed be part of the genesis of, the first question in this motion now before the House?

I believe we will find, and there are grounds for this belief in the figures given by the member for Pingelly (Mr. Seward), there is opportunity to improve the distribution of the central vermin fund. I do not deny for one moment the good work which has been done in the destruction of vermin—particularly wild dogs—by the trappers who have been paid out of the fund. Nor do I wish to decry the method adopted of

paying bonuses for the destruction of such vermin to those who have destroyed them. Nevertheless, there are those who believe that it would be better in certain districts if the funds made available for the payment of these bonuses were used to employ more trappers. They contend there are some districts where the bonus system has not resulted in very satisfactory work being accomplished, and that the money so paid out, which runs into a fairly substantial sum even in those districts, would be better expended in the employment of some other experienced individual, who would get better results by his skilful methods. I am not in a position to say those people are justified in that belief. I do submit, however, it is the duty of this House to ascertain whether any improvement along those lines is reasonable, or otherwise. The Minister made some reference to the willingness of the department to employ more trappers if they could be obtained. That may be so at present, but it was not so as recently as June of this year—at least in regard to that portion of the State which lies between the Stirling Ranges and Augusta, which is the portion to which the member for Beverley made particular reference.

I will read from a letter written to me from the Agricultural Department in reply to a communication of mine on this subject, asking for consideration to be given to the question of further trappers being appointed in that area, portion of which, I may add, lies in my electorate, portion of which lies in the electorate of the member for Albany, and portion of which lies in the territory of the member for Nelson. The department's letter says—

The department recognises the difficulty of dealing with the dingo pest, and has four trappers continuously working between Augusta and Ravensthorpe, one of whom spends a considerable amount of his time in the Plantagenet district. The Chief Inspector advises that it is not possible to appoint a trapper to work full time in any one district, as only a few such men are available, and in addition, the Vermin Act Trust Fund is limited in scope, and has not sufficient to pay bonuses for wild dogs, foxes, etc., and in addition the wages of more trappers than are at present employed. The appointment of a trapper to one particular district would also result in the immediate demands for a similar privilege from other areas.

The department says the vermin trust fund has not sufficient to pay bonuses for wild dogs, foxes, etc., and, in addition, the wages of more trappers. It goes on to say that the

appointment of a trapper to one district would also result in the immediate demand for a similar privilege from others. Notwithstanding the fact that the fund as at the end of the last financial year apparently had a substantial credit balance, and notwithstanding the fact that the department admits the appointment of a trapper in one place would result in the immediate demand for the appointment of trappers elsewhere, the Minister would have this House believe that there is no desire for any alteration in the present system.

The Minister for Lands: You do not quite get that point. While we will appoint trappers, we will not appoint them for a specific district. That is the difference.

Mr. WATTS: I take the literal reading of the letter and it says—

In addition, the vermin trust fund . . . has not sufficient to pay . . . the wages of more trappers than are at present employed.

It does not say they shall not be employed in any particular district, but that there is not the money to pay them. It was somewhat of a surprise to me when I was told, subsequent to receiving this letter, that the vermin fund was not broke as one would be led to believe.

The Minister for Lands: It would not want to be.

Mr. WATTS: I admit that.

Mr. Doney: Is it £13,000 in credit?

The Minister for Lands: Yes, and could easily be £13,000 in debit in one year if the wrong bonuses were paid.

Mr. WATTS: The Minister, in dealing with paragraph 3 of the motion, told us that vermin boards already have authority to raise money for the purpose of supplying farmers in their districts with rabbit netting. They have the actual right to do so; there is no question about that, but it is a rather cumbersome method, for it necessitates the local authority's taking a mortgage, getting a first charge by that mortgage, and if it has to exercise its rights of recovery, it must exercise the usual rights of a mortgagee. I have no hesitation in saying that local authorities are unwilling to adopt a method involving that procedure. If evidence of this is wanted, it would appear to be quite clear from the Minister's own observations. I think I remember him aright when I say he stated that no local authority had made any move in the direction of providing money along those lines. I am not sur-

prised at that, and I think the House will agree with me that that method for a local authority would be somewhat cumbersome and unsuitable.

Some few weeks ago I brought to the notice of the Minister a request from the Gnowangerup Road Board on this subject. Of course, as is usual, he went into the matter and gave me quite a courteous reply expressing the various difficulties he saw in regard to the request. At that time, and as a matter of fact at the present time, I am not altogether clear as to what the local authority in question had in mind, but it seemed to me its idea was some course that would enable it to borrow money at a reasonable rate of interest and lend it to farmers, one here, one there and one somewhere else, who desired to rabbit-net their properties. In order to do that, special legislation would be required, because the local body would not be rating the whole district to recover the amount in rates. It would be rating only isolated properties. Members of the board thought—and I dare say they were right—that if they could adopt this system, they could help farmers to obtain the necessary money and simply strike a rate on each farm—if given legislation for the purpose—that would cover annually the instalment of principal and the interest payable in respect of the individual loan. The attitude of the board members at their meetings indicated a desire to improve the position in their district, a desire to help in keeping out vermin and its ultimate eradication, over and above the ordinary duties which they perform as a road board.

To me it seemed that that desire should be encouraged. I do not suggest for one moment that every local authority—that is, every vermin board—should be called upon to take this action, but it did seem to me it was reasonable that the local authority should have the right to do it if it so desired. We all know it is not easy for the Agricultural Bank to find money to lend out to the farming community for the purpose of rabbit-netting their properties, and anything that will contribute to having funds made available more rapidly than they are now, on a reasonable basis, and under the close supervision of the local authority, would be desirable. I say "close supervision of the local authority" because in matters financial the supervision of the local authorities is very close. There is no doubt that

the majority of them desire to keep their accounts in good order, and they are subject to the annual or sometimes more frequent checking by Government auditors and inspectors. Therefore their financial affairs would be closely supervised, and in the process they would certainly be taking an interest in those farmers who rabbit-netted their properties as a result of the moneys obtained from the board.

Without being able clearly to put before the House the exact intention of the local authority who indicated that desire, I feel there is sufficient meat in it to warrant further inquiry by us. I know of no other means of making that inquiry than by a select committee. We should then be in a position to inquire not only of this particular local authority but also of all others, and of the associations to which they belong, and of those who have been taking a life-long interest in these matters, whether the proposals are good. If they are good, and if there are more ways than one of carrying them into effect, an inquiry would enable us to determine which was the best way. So it beats me to understand why the Minister should, as it were, almost resent the suggestion that there should be an inquiry into these matters.

The Minister knows that the rabbit trouble is of very great importance to the primary producing interests of the State. Upon the eradication of that type of vermin, amongst others, depends to a very large extent the productivity of a great number of properties. If the productivity of an area can be increased, the prospects of the holder of the area being able to pay his way and keep his head above water financially must be greatly improved. Because legislation has been on the statute-book for 22 years is surely no indication it is so satisfactory that it should remain for an indefinite period without any substantial alteration or addition. So I am unable to understand the attitude of the hon. gentleman who seems to think there is nothing that is capable of improvement in this particular department.

I find that the intention of the Vermin Act is that every holding shall be ring-fenced. The definition of a holding is to be found in one of the earlier sections of the Act, which begins—

Any land or collection of lands of an owner constituting or worked as one property.

So, when the Act refers to the fencing of a holding, it means the fencing of the whole of the property worked as one holding by an owner. Section 87 of the Act provides, amongst other things—

Any owner or occupier of a holding desirous of enclosing his holding with a vermin fence or rabbit-proof fence, and any owners or occupiers who are desirous of enclosing their respective holdings with a vermin fence or rabbit-proof fence as a ring fence and have entered into an agreement under section eighty-three, may apply, in the prescribed manner, to the Minister . . . for wire netting.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no reference in the Act contemplating any sort of rabbit-proof fence which is not a fence right round the holding; that is to say, the land worked as one property by one owner. There are not lacking instances where the fencing with rabbit netting of a portion of a holding would probably prove the salvation of the holding. There are farms, for example, those adjoining Government reserves, abandoned properties, lakes and so forth, where it would be quite advisable to fence off the portion of the holding adjoining those places. This would enable the farmer to control the vermin within that area, and also control much more easily the vermin on the remainder of the holding. As I said, I cannot find in the Act any provision that would enable a farmer to obtain assistance for fencing of that nature. It has occurred to me—and I know it has occurred to the member for Beverley—that to fence the whole of a holding might be very expensive and unnecessary, while a considerably smaller expense in fencing off a substantial portion of the holding, or even only a small portion of it, dependent on the circumstances, would give the owner very satisfactory results in his efforts to destroy the rabbits. It is therefore advisable to inquire into that aspect of the fencing provisions of the Act, even if it is desirable to inquire into no other aspect. Since hearing the Minister I doubt very much the advisability of doing anything except maintain the rabbit-proof fence. That fence at present is only maintained by the Crown. In that regard the hon. gentleman has put up quite a strong case. There remains, however, the question raised by the member for Pingelly as to how long, notwithstanding their careful

maintenance, these rabbit-proof fences are going to stand in their present condition, and when it will be necessary to renew them. That part of the question is well worth inquiring into. After hearing the Minister and the facts he gave us I have come to the conclusion that the motion now under discussion has proved of value from that aspect. I am inclined to think that while the fences may not be serving—and almost certainly they are not serving—a useful purpose with regard to rabbits they possibly are serving a useful purpose in regard to other pests, and therefore ought to be maintained.

But that information, at any rate so far as I am concerned, has never been put forward so clearly as it has been by the Minister this evening. It is a strange thing to me that there should be necessity for moving a motion of this nature in order to get the "dinkum oil" in regard to this matter. I consider there is more to be said in favour of carrying the motion than for rejecting it. The member for Beverley (Mr. Mann) seems to have been somewhat misunderstood. I am pretty sure that he has no intention of indulging in an outburst of criticism, which I do not regard as warranted. What we want, at all events so far as regards myself, is to ensure that only the best methods are put into operation for the expenditure of the central vermin fund and also for the expenditure of the funds of local authorities, both of which are taken from the farmers, many of whom are not in a position to pay a single halfpenny more than can be avoided. Certainly that is clear in regard to the farming industry. The House would be well advised to follow the lead given to us by the member for Pingelly (Mr. Seward) and admit that after 22 years there is just a possibility that we can improve the Act, and that it is our duty, if we can, to find the right way to put into effect the necessary improvements.

MR. J. H. SMITH (Nelson) [8.25]: Perhaps I can speak authoritatively with regard to a district which has received as great an influx of rabbits, foxes and dingoes as any portion of Western Australia. In the lower part of my district many settlers cannot go into the sheep industry because of the dingoes, which pull down the young stock. On the other hand, farmers who take their cattle to the coast are sure that

the trappers have been instrumental in getting rid of many dogs during the past few years. The Minister has referred to what the settlers in my electorate have done in the way of poisoning; but that is not the only way to get rid of rabbits. This year the price of skins has been particularly good, and many farmers' sons and daughters have been out trapping rabbits. The proposed select committee might consider the question of what is the best method of getting rid of rabbits. Nelson has vast areas of Crown lands; and the assertion of the Chief Inspector that rabbits do not breed on Crown lands is a fallacy, because all the old settlers can show multitudes of warrens miles away from any settlement.

The Vermin Board strikes a rate, and the farmer is taxed through that rate. If the select committee did nothing else, it could go into the question of making that taxation more national. Residents of country towns should contribute to the vermin fund, as well as the farmers. If the select committee went into the question thoroughly, the people of country towns would agree to pay a vermin rate. The select committee could even go further afield, because the depredations of dingoes, foxes and rabbits are so severe as to render the matter a national one. Destruction of these vermin should be a national task. The cost should come out of the general revenue of the country. I had to join issue with the Leader of the Opposition when he said that his property carried no rabbits or vermin of any description and yet he was compelled to lay miles of poison trail.

Hon. C. G. Latham: So I am!

Mr. J. H. SMITH: Then the hon. member should see about getting rid of the inspector. It is not mandatory for an inspector to order the laying of poison if there are no rabbits on a holding. In such a case he does not instruct the occupier to poison. Local inspectors work under other inspectors. In my electorate we have poisoned with apple jam and strychnine; yet at one time we thought the rabbits had us beaten. Our country is such a wonderfully rich country. It is different from the land in the wheat area. We carried three and four sheep to the acre; but the rabbits became so bad that our people began to despair, and feared they were going to be down and out. It was only five or six years ago that we tackled the problem, but today we are keeping the

rabbits down, although that is all we are accomplishing. It is costing each landholder in the district, irrespective of the area of his holding, 30s. to 40s. per week for vermin destruction. We lay poison to kill the rabbits; in addition, we trap them. Despite what the Minister's inspectors say, the opinion of practical men is that the only effective way to exterminate rabbits is first to lay poison and then to trap them.

The Leader of the Opposition said that the fox was a great help in keeping down rabbits. That is so, if rabbits are scarce; but when they come in millions, as has been the case in the past, then the fox proves to be a menace. I know of one farm—I was on it myself—where there were less than 100 ewes and lambs and the foxes killed nine lambs in one morning. I therefore cannot agree with the opinion of the Leader of the Opposition in this respect. The rabbit-proof fence has now been standing for almost 40 years. I am not aware that it is serving any useful purpose today, nor has it done so for years past. That is an item into which the proposed select committee could inquire. The fence runs for 2,000 miles north and south and the cost of its upkeep is about £3 per mile. We could well do away with that expense. This also could form another subject for inquiry.

The member for Katanning (Mr. Watts) dealt with the matter of wire netting. The Minister can provide settlers with wire netting; and once a settler's holding is netted he is exempt from vermin tax. But only men of ample means can afford to net their properties. This point also arises, that in thickly timbered districts it is necessary partly to clear the property, and then fertilise it and sow clover in order to obtain pastures. A man may have 100 acres so cleared in a block of 600 or 700 acres; the remainder of the land is not of much use to him and there is not much vermin on it. Immediately the pasture grows, however, the vermin flock to it. The Act should be so amended to provide that netting may be supplied to fence these internal blocks, as distinct from the boundary of the property. That is another matter the proposed select committee could inquire into. I trust the Minister will agree to the appointment of the committee, as it will do much good and could make suggestions to Parliament. Every member is prepared to assist the farmer, and as a result of the committee's inquiries, it

may be possible to amend the Vermin Act in some satisfactory way. I support the motion.

MR. McLARTY (Murray-Wellington) [8.34]: I was much impressed by the speech of the member for Pingelly (Mr. Seward). I hope the Minister will, after having heard it, agree to the appointment of this select committee. The hon. member said that the amounts contributed to vermin funds of local governing bodies and the central vermin fund amounted to £70,000.

Mr. Seward: Annually!

Mr. McLARTY: Yes. That is a tremendous sum to be collected annually. The member for Katanning (Mr. Watts) made a strong point when he said that the Vermin Act was 22 years old. Another point I would impress upon the Minister and the Government is that every member of this House representing an agricultural constituency is favourable to the appointment of the committee. I feel sure that, as the debate progressed, the Minister must have been much impressed and I hope he will change his ideas and agree to the appointment of the committee. Like other hon. members who have spoken to the motion, I am convinced that the committee would do much good.

In the district I represent vermin is increasing to an alarming extent. My district is a wet one; and the member for Pingelly is right when he said that rabbits are increasing there. I have often heard it said that rabbits would not get a hold in my district because the country is much too wet. I formerly believed that statement, as did many farmers in my district, but we are waking up to the fact that now, particularly this winter, the country is not too wet for rabbits, which are on the increase. Foxes also are on the increase. As the member for Nelson (Mr. J. H. Smith) said, they are a great menace. There are those who advocate that foxes should not be destroyed because they are the natural enemy of the rabbit; but in my district foxes destroy a great number of lambs during the lambing season. Foxes are, however, easily poisoned, otherwise they would take tremendous toll of the lambs during the lambing season. The member for Pingelly (Mr. Seward) also quoted figures showing the expenditure on vermin destruction by certain road boards.

He said that one board spent hundreds of pounds a year on vermin destruction.

The Premier: Over £1,000.

Mr. McLARTY: Another board spent only £40 per annum. Surely those figures must impress the Minister. It seems to me they prove that some boards are not doing their job in regard to the expenditure of the vermin tax.

Mr. Seward: There is no doubt about that.

Mr. McLARTY: There is another matter into which the select committee could inquire, and upon which it would be able to tender good advice to Parliament. The member for Nelson (Mr. J. H. Smith) mentioned it—vermin on Crown lands. At every road board conference held in the South-West year after year the question of rabbit destruction on Crown lands has come up for discussion. The Minister must realise that the problem is not being seriously tackled in the forestry areas of the South-West. It is rather hopeless to expect farmers in heavily timbered country to destroy rabbits on their holdings while at the same time they are in thousands in the forestry areas. I hope the Government will agree to the appointment of this select committee. I cannot see that it will cost a great deal. A strong case has been made out this evening for its appointment. I support the motion.

MR. MANN (Beverley—in reply) [8.40]: In closing the debate I desire to thank the Minister for the very fine speech he made. His speech convinced me that the select committee should be appointed because he gave information to the House with which members on this side—and I expect on the other side, also—were unacquainted.

The Minister for Mines: The information was accessible to you.

Mr. MANN: Is there not something wrong with our Parliamentary procedure when it is necessary to move motions of this kind to obtain such information?

The Minister for Lands: You do not have to do so.

Mr. MANN: We did in this case. It was information we could not get for ourselves.

The Minister for Lands: I am sure the department could not have resisted your genial personality if you had asked for the information.

Mr. MANN: The speeches of my colleagues further convinced me of the need for this inquiry.

The Premier: You were not too sure about it at first!

Mr. MANN: I am sure those speeches convinced not only me, but the whole House. It is a long time since the Act was amended and time makes many changes. I am sure the Premier would not like to occupy his present position for 20 years because it would become tiresome.

Hon. C. G. Latham: It would be very costly, too.

Mr. MANN: Yes. The farmers have to face many curses such as the rabbit pest, toxic paralysis and other diseases affecting stock, the ravages of parasites and so on, and it is only right that inquiries should be made into all these matters. The member for Murray-Wellington (Mr. McLarty) has referred to the fact that nothing is done to deal with the rabbit pest on Government reserves. When rabbits first appeared in Western Australia they did not ravage the South-West.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: They should not go on to Class "A" reserves!

Mr. MANN: They do! I have been confirmed in my belief that this inquiry should take place. I hope the Minister does not imagine that I submitted the motion from a frivolous motive.

The Premier: Do you not think that members on your side of the House have exhibited considerable knowledge of the situation, so much so that they do not need the assistance of a select committee?

Mr. MANN: No!

The Premier: What they said was very illuminating.

Mr. MANN: The impression I gained from the speeches of my colleagues was that I was on the right lines in introducing the motion.

The Premier: They know all about the matter. There is no need for an investigation.

Mr. MANN: That is not so. I do not propose to delay the House any further. I trust the Minister will reconsider his decision and agree to a select committee.

Hon. C. G. Latham: He will not.

Mr. MANN: I hope he will. I do not imagine that the cost will be great, but even if it were, surely the primary indus-

tries, the most important we have in the State, are worthy of consideration. What if the inquiry does cost a lot of money?

Mr. Doney: It would be inexpensive.

Mr. MANN: That is so. Not only the farmers will gain a benefit from the inquiry, but the State as a whole will benefit. To have a contented rural population will help the Treasurer to build up a satisfactory budget. I trust the motion will be agreed to.

Question put and negatived.

BILL—DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 3rd September.

MR. WARNER (Mt. Marshall) [8.45]: I listened attentively to the member for Subiaco (Mrs. Cardell-Oliver) when she introduced this Bill and I think I should congratulate her on the trouble she took in preparing her speech, the statistics she submitted and the research she undertook in order to provide us with such extensive information in her endeavour to convince the House of the need to abolish the death penalty. However, she failed to convince me that I should agree to the second reading of the Bill. I fail to see that by agreeing to the measure we shall be guaranteed that peace and security ensured to us by the existing law.

I examined the Bill carefully from two points of view. First of all I looked at it from a propaganda angle, but after having heard what the hon. member said I decided to dismiss that aspect. Then I investigated the nature of the Bill to discover whether or not it was contentious. I believe I have heard it mentioned that during this session nothing of a contentious character should be considered in the House if it could be avoided. I thought that procedure would be followed, but I am afraid this is a most contentious Bill. At any rate, to put it in "digger" language, it comes within a kick of the ribs of being contentious legislation. We shall know more about that by the time the debate has concluded and we have heard the views of various members. We shall then be aware whether or not it is contentious.

The hon. member said that if any inspiration were needed to bring forward the Bill, during war time, that inspiration was to be

found in the fact that we were riding on a wave of emotion at the present time. My view is that at no time should emotions be allowed to influence consideration of such matters. Emotions should not be permitted to induce us to alter laws placed on our statute-book after calm and careful deliberation by our predecessors; men who were sent here by people in all walks of life and of various political opinions. I take it that the representatives of the people at that time were, as now, the best that could be obtained and we should not allow emotion to persuade us to do something to the statutes they passed, for which we are likely to be sorry in our calmer moments later on. The hon. member also stated she was going to prove by statistics that hanging was no deterrent to crime. Statistics of that kind are of no use as evidence to show whether the death penalty is a deterrent to crime or not.

Crime usually comes in waves, or cycles, as we find from our crime records. Not only serious offences, but also misdemeanours and simple offences occur in that manner. These statistics are valueless for argument, more particularly in dealing with this penalty, when they are gathered from other countries where the laws are so different from those on the statute-book of Western Australia. The statistics from adjoining States may be of some value, but not those from foreign countries. After hanging was abolished in Queensland, there is a record in the Victorian police files of six notorious criminals. They were resident in the vicinity of Sydney, New South Wales, and were arrested in Queensland on a capital charge a few years after the abolition of capital punishment in that State. This shows that these murderers, and criminals of that kind, shifted from their own State to a safer place, where they would avoid the death penalty, to carry out the various acts of garrotting and other forms of violence—kicking to death, etc. Crime statistics prove these facts. The same argument can be used from the point of view of the protection of society. It is only a matter of opinion. My opinion is opposed to that of the member for Subiaco. The death penalty does protect society and is a definite deterrent to the criminal class of which, unfortunately, we have some members at the present time.

The hon. member said that 90 per cent. of the people at present in Western Australia favour the abolition of the death penalty. 1

believe that figure would be reversed. Nothing can give us an idea of these percentages without a referendum being taken. I agree with the remarks of the member for Subiaco when she referred to the barbarous treatment and the awful punishments inflicted, and the number of petty offences punishable by death in the dark ages—in the days of Henry VIII., and even a hundred years ago. Since we have discarded the English statutes and compiled our own Criminal Code, these punishments cannot be found in the Western Australian laws. Of those sentenced to be hanged during the reign of that King, sometimes called a fine monarch, Henry VIII., quite a number may have been political prisoners, and undoubtedly were. As that would account for a large number, I reject those records. I also point out that in those times justice was not tempered to the shorn lamb, but was guided by the whim of the sovereign then reigning. The sovereign reigning at the period mentioned by the member for Subiaco was just as filthy as were his politics. I would not put as an argument before this House the convictions in his day.

I had about 16 years' experience in the police force of this State. During that time many files, documents and records came into my possession. I studied many of them, with satisfaction to myself. I was very interested in some of them, and I am enabled to speak with a little knowledge now. Some of the sentences in those documents are engraved indelibly on my memory. They are sentences of savagery, which made me feel I was reading Marcus Clarke's "For the Term of His Natural Life," or accounts of what occurred in the early days of Botany Bay. I cannot quote any names, because I have forgotten them, but I will mention one or two cases which by the horrible treatment meted out impressed me at that time. The punishments can also be compared with what is contained in our present Criminal Code. One case was of a man convicted in England. He was charged with stealing a knife, fork and spoon and, because of a previous conviction, he was sentenced to 14 years' transportation. Other cases dealt with men who stole sundry articles of about the same value and were sentenced to transportation for terms ranging from five, ten to fifteen years. There were cases of assaulting superior officers, where men were sen-

tenced to from five to fourteen years' transportation.

Mr. SPEAKER: I hope the hon. member will connect his remarks with the subject of capital punishment.

Mr. WARNER: Yes, Sir, I will. This has a definite bearing on the deterrent effect of the death penalty. I believe the last cases I mentioned must have been soldiers because they were charged with assaulting a superior officer. No details of the crimes were given. It might have been just a clip on the jaw of the dear old sergeant major, or a vigorous tap with a wee twig of blackthorn from some tormented soldier. I quote these instances, as was done by the member for Subiaco, but they occurred fifty years before that, or possibly in the days of Henry VIII.

Mr. Hughes: Why have you a set on Henry VIII.?

Mr. WARNER: In considering the death penalty as a deterrent, I have in mind also other punishments under the criminal law that have had considerable effect. I remember the action taken by a judge in one of the other States who some years ago commented on the prevalence of cases of assault and battery, garotting and assaults on females. For such offences he had been imposing sentences ranging from ten to fifteen years imprisonment with hard labour. Still those criminal acts continued. The judge issued a statement that in dealing with any future instances that came under his judicial notice, he would meet violence with violence. As a result when dealing with such criminals he, instead of giving the men long terms of imprisonment, sentenced them to detention in gaol for one or two years but ordered in addition 12 strokes of the cat.

Mr. Marshall: How did the cat like it?

Mr. WARNER: The peculiar thing about it was that not one of the men so punished by that judge ever appeared before the Criminal Court again on similar charges. That was all because of a dozen strokes with the cat! The deterrent effect was apparent there, just as it is with respect to the death penalty.

Mr. Hughes: That is a good argument for the reintroduction of the cat.

Mr. WARNER: The member for Subiaco (Mrs. Cardell-Oliver) also stated that murders were seldom premeditated. She suggested that 90 per cent. of petty offences were premeditated—but not murder. Un-

fortunately for her claim, records available in Western Australia show that in nearly every instance during the last 30 or 40 years when the death penalty was ordered, premeditation was definitely one of the determining factors that influenced the Executive Council in deciding that the law should take its course. In every case where the indictment refers to wilful murder, premeditation must be proved, whereas that is not so where the charge is one of murder, homicide, or manslaughter, in which respect the death penalty is not involved.

In order to emphasise the great care exercised by the law and by those charged with its administration so as to ensure that there shall be no miscarriage of justice, I will trace the course of events experienced by a man arrested on a charge of wilful murder for which he ultimately pays the death penalty. I desire to show how justice is meted out to him from the time of his arrest until he goes to the gallows. At the outset sufficient evidence must be available to make the arrest of the man reasonable beyond doubt. Immediately upon his arrest he is warned not to make any statement that would tend to incriminate him. Thus even at that early stage he is afforded that much protection.

Mr. Hughes: And that precautionary measure is often honoured in the breach!

Mr. WARNER: The man is then charged and he is sometimes committed for trial after the hearing of evidence in the Coroner's Court but more often the committal is from the Police Court. He then stands committed to take his trial before a judge and a jury in the Criminal Court. At that stage the interests of the accused person are conserved by the provision of eminent counsel for his defence.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, at eight guineas!

Mr. WARNER: The accused man is always provided with counsel.

Mr. Marshall: That is often where the murder comes in!

Mr. WARNER: That is another matter; it might be described as "insecticide." The accused person then appears before the judge and jury for trial. At the initial stage he is told that he has the right to challenge any man who may be present to act on the jury. If the accused has any reason to believe that a jurymen is interested in the case, might be prejudiced in any way, or is not capable of clear comprehension

of the evidence about to be tendered, or indeed, for any other good reason, he has the right of challenge. During the course of the trial the learned judge takes notes of the evidence and at a later stage advises the jury on points of law, should that be necessary. Finally, the jury decides on the evidence adduced that the man is guilty of wilful murder, following upon which the judge, according to law, passes sentence of death upon the accused. Should the jury make any recommendation for mercy the judge duly notes the fact and conveys the recommendation, together with the notes of evidence taken at the trial, to the Government, without any comments thereon.

Mr. Wilson: How do you know all this?

Mr. WARNER: Each Cabinet Minister has an opportunity to study the notes of the evidence taken at the trial. Cabinet arrives at a decision that is forwarded to the Executive Council which finally decides that the law shall take its course.

Mr. Marshall: Or otherwise.

Mr. WARNER: I am outlining what takes place with respect to a man who is finally executed. My perusal of the decisions of the Executive Council over a very long period gives me no reason to believe that those decisions were not just and proper. To emphasise that point I draw the attention of members to the reply given yesterday by the Minister for Justice to the member for Claremont (Mr. North) regarding the application of the death penalty. From the Minister's reply we find that during the last ten years only one man paid the extreme penalty. We all know what sort of a man that individual was.

Mr. Marshall: How many were convicted on capital charges?

Mr. WARNER: Only one man was hanged in ten years, and now we are asked to agree to an alteration of the law as embodied in the member for Subiaco's Bill. One instance of hanging in ten years! We are asked to discuss this problem at a time when thousands of our boys are risking their lives overseas. We are asked to stop carrying out the work many of us undertake in helping to provide for our lads abroad and to waste the time of the House discussing the abolition of the death penalty!

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member must not say that the time of the House is being wasted.

Mr. WARNER: If the time of the House is not being wasted, at any rate our time is being taken up with this matter. We would be better engaged in some other way.

Mrs. Cardell-Oliver: Why murder poor rabbits? We discussed them for three hours.

Mr. WARNER: The Criminal Code was considered, amended, and finally agreed to by our predecessors in this House, many of the then members ranking high in the life of the community and being men of understanding. The code was passed only after all its aspects had been studied closely, and was not placed on the statute book hurriedly. Now, on a wave of emotion, we are asked to set aside the death penalty provision.

I shall not weary the House by submitting arguments based on accumulated statistics concerning capital crimes committed in the Eastern States and in Western Australia. I shall not adopt that course in protest against those submitted by the member for Subiaco, nor do I intend to comment on the suggestion that crimes are committed in cycles or waves. I suggest that statistics are of little avail in that respect, and I shall not produce them because I refuse to accept those that the member for Subiaco submitted. I will, however, mention a few beastly crimes committed in this State within the memory of the present generation, and I will invite comments from those who may decide to embark upon a defence on behalf of the individuals concerned and in opposition to the punishment inflicted. I defy them to suggest that the decisions of the Executive Council were other than right. I will ask them whether those decisions were wrong, or were they just?

Let me take one case and content myself by making a few observations on that. I will deal with the murder of two policemen—Detective Inspector Walsh and Detective Sergeant Pitman. These two detectives were stationed on the goldfields and were just, upright and honourable men. They were liked by the community, more particularly Inspector Walsh, who was known to his comrades and to the public in general as Gentleman Jack. This name was earned by his good behaviour and general bearing. Those men were on the goldfields in the execution of their duty and they were both slaughtered, butchered, their bodies cut up and dumped in a shaft. The murderers believed that the evidence of their crime would

thus remain hidden and that they would escape the punishment they so richly deserved. But the criminals did not consider the comrades of Walsh and Pitman who worked in the same department. They overlooked the fact that esprit de corps exists amongst the men banded together for the protection of life and property, men working directly under the authority of the State Government. The murderers did not realise that the detective branch would direct all its efforts to bringing them to justice.

We have a just and honourable system of trial that makes very few mistakes, one that demands when a crime has been sheeted home that justice shall be done. For the benefit of members who may not know the details, I will recount them. Walsh and Pitman were brutally murdered; their bodies were dismembered; head, trunk, arms and legs were cut into small pieces. Attempts were made to burn the bodies but were unsuccessful. The remains were put into a large drum and dumped into an abandoned shaft, a shaft that had not been worked for many years.

The Minister for Mines: And it has not been worked since, I think.

Mr. WARNER: When the perpetrators were found guilty, the Executive Council decided that the law should take its course. Was there not premeditation in that case?

Mr. Hughes: There was no premeditation.

Mr. WARNER: It was proved at the trial that there had been premeditation. After the murderers had shot one of the policemen without killing him, they chased him and made sure that he did not survive to tell any tales. The justice of our laws and of the officers who carry them into effect bring to my mind the quotation—

The mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small.

The officers who were responsible for bringing those criminals to justice bring the same thoroughness and justice to bear on all the duties they carry out under the Criminal Code. After the murderers had been convicted, and sentenced to death, there was a rush by some members of the community to get them reprieved. The Executive Council in its wisdom decided that the law must take its course and so justice was done. Who would gainsay this act? What alternative could be provided in a case like that? Bearing in mind the temperament of the

people on the goldfields at the time, what could be substituted for the death penalty in that case?

If my memory serves me correctly, a Labour organisation in the Eastern States at the time sent a message to the Premier of this State—a Labour Premier—demanding a reprieve. He was told to see that the law was not carried out because it was the view of that organisation that the death penalty should be abolished. I remember reading that the Premier wrote back a very strong letter telling the organisation to mind its own business, that he was the Premier of this State and was not looking to that organisation for guidance. I believe the Premier at the time was the member for Boulder (Hon. P. Collier), and the vast majority of our people, many of them of different political beliefs, supported him in his decision. They were pleased that the Premier had stood up to his duty and acted justly by the State. What would have been the reaction if those murderers had not been executed?

How surprising it is that no matter how gruesome a murder may be, when the perpetrator of the crime is sentenced to death, a certain class of people rushes to the aid of the felon with a petition for his reprieve! Everything possible is done for the criminal; those people have no thought for the widow and orphans of the murdered man. There is no move to raise funds for their benefit; that might or might not come later. At the moment there is just a rush to help the murderer. Yet another class attempt to have the Criminal Code amended to eliminate the death penalty, which I believe is the greatest deterrent of all to murder.

Of the murderers sentenced to death in this State, the percentage executed has been very small, and I believe this is due to the close study given to the facts by the Executive Council. If anything, the Executive Council has erred on the side of mercy and in favour of the murderers. Never has the Executive Council acted harshly when reviewing the case of a condemned man. We should be glad that we have provision on our statute-book for the infliction of the extreme penalty that it may be used when necessity demands.

I ask those who might be thinking of supporting this Bill to view the facts from another angle. What would they substitute for the death penalty? If the

capital penalty was abolished, would they impose life imprisonment only for the most heinous crime? Would it be wise to run the risk of people taking the law into their own hands and lynching murderers? Would it not be better to leave the law as it stands and retain what I claim is definitely a deterrent to crime? At times the hostility of the people becomes so great that only their knowledge that justice will be done by the law keeps them in subjection. They must have the assurance that if an accused person is found guilty of a horrible murder, he will be certain under the law to pay the penalty. Let me give an instance of the hostility of people in murder cases and the likelihood of lynching being resorted to if the death penalty was abolished. At about the time this Bill was being introduced, a disturbance took place at a coroner's inquiry in Sydney. Here is an extract from the report that appeared in the "West Australian" on the 2nd September—

Girl's Death.

Man on Murder Charge.

Angry Women Demonstrate.

Sydney, September 1.—Women, some carrying babies, crowded round the court room and took part in several demonstrations when the City Coroner today began the inquest into the death of Jeanette Irene Walsh, whose dead body was found by searchers in Moore Park on August 10. William Fisher (65), printer, who has been charged with the murder of the child, was present in custody.

When Jack Walsh, father of the child, went into the witness box he cried out to Fisher: "You dirty mongrel, I would like to get you on my own, I would." The Police Prosecutor (Sergeant Magney) restrained Walsh and a detective took up a position between Walsh and Fisher.

I will omit the gruesome details of the case and quote the concluding paragraph of the report—

As Fisher, covering his face with his hands, was led from the court during the luncheon adjournment, a group of women demonstrated in hostile fashion. One cried: "They ought to give you to a crowd of women; they would tear you to bits." Another cried: "You ought to hide your face." The inquest was adjourned.

Mr. Watts: Was he proved guilty?

Mr. WARNER: It does not matter whether he was guilty or not guilty. The point I am stressing is the hostility of the people towards the accused. If those people knew that the death penalty was no longer on the statute-book, there would have been a risk of their lynching him. Knowing that

the death penalty was provided for, they could be restrained to let the law take its course instead of their tearing the accused to pieces. When women show a disposition to act with such violence, it is hardly likely that men would be in other than the same frame of mind.

Mr. Cross: And the member for Subiaco would have led them.

Mr. WARNER: The "Daily News" of the 4th September, 1941, under a larger heading prints this—

"I hope he burns," cried the father of a dead girl as he tried to get near 65-year-old printer William Fisher in the Coroner's Court today. The Coroner had just committed Fisher for trial on a charge of having murdered three-year-old Jeanette Irene Walsh, whose body was found in Moore Park on August 10th. Restrained by the police and led from the court the father, Jack Walsh, of Surrey Hills, stopped in the doorway, cried, sobbing bitterly: "I'd like to kick him to death."

Those are the feelings of the people, feelings that would bring about lynchings if the people did not know that there is something to take the place of lynchings.

After Walsh had been hustled from the court a woman tried to break through the police cordon but was prevented. She fell down, and when she regained her feet shook her fist at Fisher. Police then quickly took Fisher into a back room, and later he was taken from the court by the back entrance.

That is all right; but what would our feelings be if the victim were our only daughter, ravished and torn to pieces by such a villain? Would not we be held in check only by the knowledge that the law would see that the murderer was removed from the community by proper punishment? Is it not fitting here to quote the wise man who said nearly 2,000 years ago, "It were far better for him that a millstone be hung round his neck and he be cast into the sea"? That would be a better fate for the murderer. I am not a cruel man, nor revengeful to an excessive degree. I have spent 16 years in the study of crime and its prevention, and for a further period have studied criminal statistics of this State, with satisfaction to myself. The results of my experience I have endeavoured to put before hon. members. I fail to see how I could in any manner satisfy myself for being a participant in the alteration of the law as it now stands, knowing that our safeguards consist in the carrying out of that law.

I believe that the member for Subiaco went to a great deal of trouble and took extreme pains to prepare her case, in the hope of having her Bill for abolition passed. However, there are parts of her case that I must definitely challenge. The hon. member introduced into the arguments one of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not kill." I do not profess to be a Biblical student, but I was taught a great deal at my mother's knee, like most members have been, and I have read the Good Book and re-read parts of it. I have endeavoured to obey not only that one Commandment, but the other Commandments as well, to the best of my ability after I had reached the age of knowledge. I am concerned for the sacred law. Are we to take the Commandments literally as written?

Mr. Cross: Does not the Bible say, "An eye for an eye"?

Mr. WARNER: Are those of us who have been soldiers excluded from Paradise? Will their spirits go to the Mansions above, to which other parts of the Good Book tell us they would go? Are we to believe that soldiers are to be debarred from that happiness because they have not taken literally the Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill"? Is our Sheriff, who is an honourable gentleman, to be debarred from that Heavenly kingdom to which we are taught our souls may go, because he orders a deputy to execute a criminal in whose case the Executive Council has decided that the law must take its course? I do not read the Commandments literally, for I have also read in the Sacred Writings something about Parables. I could speak a long time on that aspect, though I have only a little learning. I do not intend to say more on that side of the question than that I believe if I do as I have said, keep on the right side of the line between good and evil, I shall be quite right. I always did believe, and still do believe, that when the time comes for me to shake off this mortal coil I shall join those departed friends of mine whom I left in Flanders, join them in Mansions not built by human beings.

There would be a great deal of work required to analyse the position as to the figures quoted by the member for Subiaco in support of her Bill. Those things, however, are not at all comparable with Western Australian statistics or with the

conditions of our times. The death penalty has now been modified to such an extent as to be reduced to the barest necessity. To interfere with it further would be dangerous to the well-being of the community. We must also remember that police methods for the detection of crime are now on such a scientific basis that the chance of the death penalty being inflicted on an innocent person is practically nil. Our police force consists of two classes: the preventive and the detective. The former exists to prevent crime if possible, and the detective force is for the detection of the offender and his apprehension after the commission of crime. The detective force, however, is now comprised of specialists aided by scientific methods.

Science is to the fore, and science in the detection of crime has advanced greatly. It has brought us to the point where the innocent do not suffer and the murderer seldom escapes. I am convinced that there are no miscarriages of justice, for no arrest is even made until sufficient evidence has been accumulated to warrant it. There are such scientific aids as photography, fingerprints, and the distinguishing of animal from human blood. A case in Western Australia comes to my mind where the accused was helped by science to escape the death penalty. After evidence has been collected, scientists carry it through the tests of the laboratory. I have no fear of the death penalty being wrongly inflicted and I have no fear if it is allowed to remain on the statute-book. I am unaware of the views of most members of this Chamber; but, to my mind, to preserve the harmony of this House and avoid the heartburning that this contentious Bill will cause, I respectfully suggest that the mover withdraw it. I have taken up a good deal of the time of the House and hope that what I have said is of value. I oppose the second reading.

On motion by Mr. F. C. L. Smith, debate adjourned.

annuation benefits should be granted to the widows of salaried officers and employees of the Perth City Council. It has been introduced in a convenient form, the First Schedule containing the scheme now established, and the Second Schedule setting forth the scheme as it will be amended and showing the alterations in heavy type. The measure has been approved by the Perth City Council and the Government Actuary. The fact that it was introduced by the member for Perth (Mr. Needham) is evidence that it is acceptable to those most concerned, namely, the employees of the council. Naturally the increased benefits will involve payment of increased contributions. Such increased contributions will be as follows:—The contribution by the Electricity and Gas Department will be increased from £860 to £1,090; the contributions of the other departments of the council will be increased from £970 to £1,240. The contributions by employees will be increased as follows:—

Up to the age of 29	from 1s.	to 1s. 3d.
30 to 39	.. ..	from 1s. 6d. to 1s. 9d.
40 to 44	.. ..	from 2s. to 2s. 6d.
45 to 49	.. ..	from 2s. 6d. to 3s.

Personally, I cannot imagine any employee of the council objecting to such increases in view of the extra benefits he will receive. Should he be desirous of not participating in such increased benefits, he will not be called upon to pay the increased contribution. I confidently commend the Bill to the sympathetic consideration of the House.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Bill passed through Committee without debate, reported without amendment and the report adopted.

House adjourned at 9.36 p.m.

BILL—CITY OF PERTH SCHEME FOR SUPERANNUATION (AMENDMENTS AUTHORISATION).

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 3rd September.

MR. HILL (Albany) [9.31]: This Bill is introduced because of the desire that super-