

When, previously, a return has been moved for, members have always had an opportunity of discussing the items asked for. The right to indulge in such discussion has never, to my knowledge, been previously denied. At the same time, Sir, I bow to your ruling.

Mr. SPEAKER: I wish to make it clear to the hon. member that I am not in any way restricting him in dealing with the motion, or with any part of the motion. I only point out that there is no insinuation in the motion itself, and that the hon. member is not in order in referring to some insinuation in the motion when no insinuation is there.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I made those remarks, Mr. Speaker, in reply to your statement that the motion did not deal with wages.

Mr. SPEAKER: I said the motion did not deal with wages at Port Darwin. The hon. member said something to the effect that wages were 22s. a day at Port Darwin.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I was merely pointing out that the same conditions as applied at Port Darwin applied at Wyndham.

Hon. F. E. S. Willmott (Honorary Minister): And then you immediately said they did not.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I said the agreement did not. It is only fair that hon. members should realise the position, and know what it means. As regards the cost of these works, it will be argued that the Government did not exercise discretion in fixing the wages paid to the men at Wyndham. That will be the next point. But here is the position: immediately the Port Darwin works were completed, or almost completed, and only a few men remained at Port Darwin, the Port Darwin wage was raised for the express purpose of increasing the cost at Wyndham. In my opinion, there is not the least doubt of that; and hon. members should be made aware of the position. I entertain no doubt that later, in connection with these works as in connection with other works, the men will be accused of taking advantage of the Government; whereas there will really be no grounds whatever for an accusation of that kind. The agreement is an agreement, and should, as far as possible, be carried out to the letter on both sides. I realise the difficulties of the Government in regard to the Wyndham works. I realise that the Minister cannot supervise the works, but must depend entirely on the officers. He cannot go all the way to Wyndham to see how the work is being carried out. Unless the Government enter into a satisfactory agreement regarding wages at Wyndham, it will be impossible to regulate the wages paid there. I rose chiefly for the purpose of explaining the conditions of the men at Port Darwin.

Mr. SPEAKER: The motion does not deal with any conditions.

Hon. W. C. ANGWIN: I have finished, Sir.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Minister for Works may lay the return on the Table now.

The Minister for Works laid the return on the Table.

House adjourned at 10.10 p.m.

Legislative Council,

Thursday, 28th February, 1918.

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

[For "Questions on Notice" and "Papers Presented" see "Minutes of Proceedings."]

QUESTION — PAPERS, GOVERNMENT BOTANIST AND PLANT PATHOLOGIST.

Hon. H. STEWART (without notice) asked the Colonial Secretary: Will the Minister see that all papers authorised by my motion, referring to the transfer from the Agricultural Department to the Mines Department of the Botanical and Pathological work, which was agreed to in the House on Thursday last, be laid on the Table. I have every reason to believe, from information I have received from Ministers and others, that there are other papers which should also be submitted. In fact, a perusal of the files themselves shows that one minute referred to is not there. Some of the files referring to Mr. Wakefield and Dr. Stoward go back to 1909 and 1911, but others dealing with the position of the botanist and pathologist start as late as the 27th December. November 1st is the date on which the first notice appeared in the Press and I believe there are papers prior to that date which have not been placed on the Table of the House.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY replied: I will endeavour to get what the hon. member wants. So far as I am aware all the papers have been laid on the Table.

BILL—HEALTH ACT AMENDMENT.

Select Committee's Report.

Hon. W. KINGSMILL bought up the report of the select committee appointed to inquire into the Health Bill.

Report received and read.

Hon. W. KINGSMILL (Metropolitan) [4.53]: I move—

"That the report and the evidence be printed."

I am submitting this motion with a certain amount of diffidence, because of the necessity for avoiding all possible expense at this juncture. But I feel sure that hon. members, when they have an opportunity of perusing the evidence which has been given before the select committee, will realise that this evidence deals with matters which affect not only this Chamber, not only this community, but it is of such wide reaching interest and importance that it would be committing a crime against the public health, not only of this but of other communities, if the evidence were not available for future use. Pleading that, therefore, as my excuse, I submit the motion.

Question put and passed.

As to Consideration of Report.

Hon. W. KINGSMILL (Metropolitan)
[4.54]: I move—

“That the report be taken into consideration when the Bill is in Committee.”

In moving this motion, I may be pardoned for making a few remarks on the report of the select committee, because, as hon. members know, I shall not be in a position to offer any remarks when the measure is being considered by the House in Committee. The select committee, as hon. members will see, have been very far from idle since the day they were appointed. Ten meetings have been held and eleven witnesses have been examined, two of them twice. The committee made a marked endeavour to respect the feelings of all sections of the public and to provide a Bill which, when it becomes an Act, will be workable, reasonable and effective. That has been the object of the committee and it is for the House when in Committee to say, by their acceptance or rejection of the proposals put forward by the select committee, whether the select committee have succeeded or failed. Of course hon. members know that there exists in this community, in fact there exists in every community, two schools of thought on this question. One school holds that in the prevention of these most awful diseases to which human beings are subject, that it is wrong to employ any weapon but moral suasion, that the provision of methods of voluntary and free treatment will meet the case entirely. We have given the evidence which has been put forward by these people the fullest thought. The associations holding those views include amongst their numbers people in responsible and prominent positions in this State, whose evidence should be given the fullest possible consideration. I may be pardoned for saying as my personal opinion—the other members of the committee will express their opinions later on—that the people who have given evidence, and those associations and societies who take up this stand, as a rule base their beliefs principally on matters of opinion and not on matters of experience. Throughout the history of legislation dealing with this subject, this is the first opportunity where experience has had a chance of being considered. It is pointed out in the report that the Acts which the opponents of the compulsory clauses quote are invariably what are known as Contagious Diseases Acts. This is the first time in the history, I think, of any portion of the British Empire where there has been an 18 months' experience of a Health Act, affecting all members of the community, and not class alone. The lessons which have been drawn therefrom incline the select committee to think that, whereas the facilities which have been afforded for voluntary and free treatment have been largely availed of by the public, they do not go far enough. The select committee did not believe that the consideration for the delicacy of feeling of men or women who are known to be diseased—and who absolutely refuse to

undergo treatment, who are recalcitrant and obstinate—should be valued more than the public health, and it is upon that basis that we have framed our report. We realise that there is much in the contentions which have been raised by the opponents of the compulsory clauses of the Bill and, in order to meet the claims that the feelings of our women shall not be hurt, that they shall not be humiliated and degraded by unnecessary and futile examinations, it has been proposed to adopt the alternative which hon. members have heard read, namely, that when a woman—men it is considered can look after themselves—is about to have the compulsory section of the Act put into operation against her, the Commissioner of Public Health shall not act on his own initiative. Although I cannot answer for the other members of the committee—I think, however, that they are with me—I am firmly of opinion that we would be absolutely safe in entrusting this power to the Commissioner of Public Health. But, in order to meet the wishes, as I have said, the loudly expressed wishes of the opponents of these compulsory clauses, we have decided to put a safeguard in this Bill which will provide that the interests of the women of our community shall be looked after by two of their own sex. It is a strange thing that the Commissioner of Public Health, as hon. members will see when they have an opportunity of reading the evidence, asked, when this proposition was put before him, that a man should be appointed on the committee because, he said, he was not satisfied that the women on the committee—of course he does not know who is going to be appointed by the Government—might not be kind enough to their own sisters. Therefore, acting on his suggestion, the select committee decided to recommend that another man should be placed on the committee and that is the genesis of the proposition. I think it is a fair, honourable and reasonable proposition, and one which will not be cumbersome, but which will be easily and inexpensively worked. The House when in Committee will have an opportunity of considering it. The cases with which this committee will be called on to act will, I take it, not be very many. They will not exceed more than six or eight in any one year, but I would impress on members that the cases, on which the committee will have to act, are the worst cases the Commissioner will have to deal with. They represent the centres of infection of these diseases that cannot be reached by him. If people will not undergo that treatment, if they will not consult a medical man they must for the good of the community be dealt with compulsorily. The voluntary system of free treatment is good and has done excellent work, but in the opinion of the committee this good system does not go far enough and that the worst cases are left outside of its purview, and it is too obvious that with this state of affairs the committee should place these recommendations now before the House. The report to a great extent is self explanatory. Members will agree with the committee no doubt in the course that we agree to recom-

ment as to the detention of prisoners. To my mind the very title of this procedure condemns it. A person goes into a prison for a certain crime, for a certain period. When that period has elapsed he has purged his crime. It is wrong to keep him one moment after he has purged his crime as a prisoner, but it would be equally wrong to allow him, infected with one of these diseases, to go abroad and spread that disease amongst his fellow beings. The committee advised a means which would be effective, whereby a prisoner, although going into the world would be notified by name to the Commissioner of Health within three days of his release and the man must report himself to the Commissioner or his representative.

Member: Why three days?

Hon. W. KINGSMILL: Because it is looked upon as a reasonable time. I use the words "or one of his representatives" and I wish to relieve the fears of those who think that the Commissioner will be deputing his duties to more or less irresponsible people. It is expressly laid down in the clause which the committee has had prepared in this connection, that this is absolutely the only case in which the officer can depute his duties. The opponents of the compulsory clause fear that the Commissioner may pass his power on to some other persons. I may say, there is nothing further from his thoughts or the intention of the Act or the Bill. But in cases where persons are discharged from prisons or gaols in the more remote parts of the State where it is impossible for prisoners to report to the Commissioner, it is absolutely necessary for a deputy to be appointed, but that deputy will be appointed for the purpose of this clause only.

The Colonial Secretary: He will be a medical man.

Hon. W. KINGSMILL: Probably it would be the same doctor who examined the man while confined in the prison. In all other cases the initiative, and more especially in regard to the compulsory clauses is confined to the Commissioner alone and in the case of women, he has to act on the advice of the committee sought to be appointed under the Bill. I think members will admit that the committee have given a fair amount of thought to a fair number of alternatives. I can assure the House that is the case. It is not without thought and deliberation that the committee have unanimously—I am glad to say—arrived at the conclusion that finds its voice in the report before us. Perhaps that is enough for me to say with regard to this portion of the Bill. I would like to impress on the House and more especially on the representatives of the Government that in the opinion of the committee on the evidence before them, the only hope of arriving at a satisfactory milk supply in the State is by the means suggested; by the establishment in centres of population of distributing depôts for milk where it can be tested, and sterilised if necessary, and supplied to the buyers in the short-

est possible time and with the least possible expense. If members think for a moment they will see that an immense amount of money is wasted by the carts of half a dozen different vendors travelling over the same area to serve people in the same street. It is not proposed by any means that this should be a State business. I think members know well enough that personally if that had been proposed, there would have been a minority report by the Chairman. But it is thought that there should be a division of centres of population into suitable districts, the allotment being by tender or otherwise of the districts to milk vendors, and that there should be means for supplying the milk vendors with milk which we absolutely know is good, and thereby the object will be achieved. One of the most important things the Government have to deal with is the supply of good milk to the people of the State. Let me say just a word or two as to the clauses dealing with patent medicines. It was at my instance, a considerable time ago, that certain regulations dealing with patent medicines were disallowed in this House. I took that stand, not through any love of patent medicines, and not in the interests of the sellers of patent medicines, but having spent a large portion of my life in the remote parts of the State I knew the value of patent medicines in those remote portions, and I know the uses that those patent medicines are put to, sometimes very comical uses, sometimes good uses. But I may say that without the best patent medicines the remote portions of Australia would be intolerable and impossible. I want, as we all want, to get good value for our money. The committee have thought fit to recommend that until uniform legislation is decided on, it is not right to disturb the present state of affairs. Certain patent medicines, which under the clause it is proposed to strike out are condemned, in many of the other States would be highly thought of. What happens? Anyone hankering for that particular vintage, if I may use the expression, instead of dealing with their own tradesmen, send away and gets their particular vintage by post, and there is no power to stop that taking place.

Hon. A. Sanderson: It is alleged there is that power.

Hon. W. KINGSMILL: I do not see that the State has power to stop articles coming through the post.

Hon. A. Sanderson: It is alleged that they have.

Hon. W. KINGSMILL: By whom?

Hon. A. Sanderson: Several members in the House.

Hon. W. KINGSMILL: I think then that members are utterly and entirely wrong. I would welcome the presence of uniform legislation. I do not mean the control of those branches of legislation by the Commonwealth, but we have instances where it has been necessary for the States to pass uniform legislation in the direction I have mentioned. Speaking from memory two cases occur to me. We have the Act dealing with the manufacture and sale of phosphorus matches,

and the Act dealing with footwear. They are not administered by the Commonwealth, but it is found necessary, as we think it is necessary in connection with patent medicines, that the States, acting as States shall deal in unison with these matters. I hope it will not be long before the patent medicine legislation will be universal throughout the Commonwealth. When the doctors agree, and "who shall decide when doctors disagree?" I feel sure that this House and another place will readily fall in with the recommendations, and those recommendations will be made after consultation with the representatives of the public and the chemists and doctors in different parts of Australia. With those few remarks I have pleasure in moving that the report be taken into consideration when the Bill reaches the Committee stage.

Question put and passed.

BILLS (2)—THIRD READING.

1, Public Education Act Amendment.

2, Apprentices.

Transmitted to the Legislative Assembly.

BILL—ELECTORAL ACT AMENDMENT.

Report of Committee adopted.

BILL—VERMIN BOARDS ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

Debate resumed from the 20th February.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM (North) [5.19]: In resuming the debate on this measure, I may point out that its objects are so similar to those of the Rabbit Act Amendment Bill that one might almost discuss the two measures together. Indeed, a large portion of the Rabbit Act Amendment Bill is included in the present Bill; nearly the whole of Part V. of the former measure is incorporated with this Bill. Before offering a few remarks on it, I wish to congratulate the Honorary Minister on the manner in which he prefaced the introduction of the Bill. He gave us a plain history of how the rabbit pest has extended all over the country, how dangerous it has become, and what serious results are accruing in various parts of the State owing to the increase of the rabbits. The hon. gentleman also pointed out clearly the great difficulties which the Rabbit Department have experienced in contending with the pest in the past. He has, in fact, proved, at all events to my mind, that unless greater facilities are given to the department they cannot deal with the pest satisfactorily. Having said so much in congratulation upon the Honorary Minister's introductory remarks, I am sorry I cannot extend my praises to those portions of his speech in which he referred to the amendments proposed in the principal Act. His remarks were so cursory and superficial that, unless one is well acquainted with the subject and knows the Act, it is very difficult to get the hang of what is intended. I hope he will not take amiss a suggestion from an old member like myself. I desire to suggest to him

that in future, when introducing a Bill of this description, he should try to make the amendments as clear as possible, especially as regards their effect on the principal Act. This much, however, the Honorary Minister made quite clear—that the rabbits are a pest, and a pest which is spreading, and that if the pest is to be stopped some strong measures must be taken. If we reflect on the past, we shall find that the history of the rabbit has been a very long one in the Commonwealth. I can bear testimony to this from personal knowledge. In the year 1874 I was journeying from Geelong through the western district of Victoria. Those who know that portion of the Commonwealth are aware that it contains a very fertile stretch of land known as the stony rises; and these were then infested with rabbits. In fact, it was at the time notorious that rabbits were extremely plentiful there, having been introduced, I believe, by an enterprising station holder for the sake of sport. Even then people were beginning to find that the rabbits interfered with the pastoralists. From that time to this the history of the spread of the rabbit has been continuous. I have heard terrible stories told of property holders in the Eastern States being absolutely ruined and driven off their properties by the rabbits. I was a member of the Western Australian Government in 1897, when Mr. Richardson, who was then Minister for Lands, expressed great anxiety to put up a fence from Esperance across the continent. Indeed, if I remember rightly, he had £20,000 placed on the Estimates for that purpose. At that time, however, none of us believed that the rabbit could cross the intervening desert between that portion of the State and South Australia. Lord Forrest was extremely luke-warm about the matter; and I am afraid most of us, with the exception of Mr. Richardson, followed him. Perhaps the excuse for Lord Forrest is that at the time all the available money of the colony was being spent in the formation of the Fremantle harbour, in the construction of the Coolgardie water scheme, and in railway development on all the goldfields, as well as on schools and telegraphs and improvements throughout the country. Therefore, one readily put on one side what appeared to be the expenditure of an unnecessarily large sum of money for a purpose which was not urgent. Unfortunately, it was found afterwards that the rabbits had extended and, too late—we must admit it now—the first fence was erected. A great many rabbits had then already got inside the fence. I was convinced, years afterwards, that the pest was coming into this State, and was going to prove a severe one. So strongly did I become convinced of this that I had a property of mine near Yalgoo, together with that of a neighbour, aggregating something like 200,000 acres, fenced nine years ago with rabbit-proof fencing. I immediately set to work to clear up my property, and put on a rabbitier. Four hundred rabbits were caught, and from that day to this I have had very little trouble with them. The fence, moreover, was a great help in preventing wild dogs from injuring one's sheep. So that, although the expenditure was very heavy, amounting to about £60 per mile, it proved effective in dealing with the rabbits, as well as with the wild dogs. I give that

instance merely because it conveys the conviction that the oncoming incursion of rabbits can be checked by those who look a little ahead. It is certain that the pest must overrun the country, to its severe detriment in time. Everyone who has given the matter any consideration must know that the Commonwealth has suffered tremendously from the rabbits. In the circumstances, the first thing we want to establish amongst ourselves is the conviction that the rabbit is a pest. Having all agreed on that, we arrive at the second stage—how are we to deal with the pest? Unfortunately, there is great diversity of opinion on this point. Some people are in favour of trapping, some in favour of fumigating and burrowing, others of poisoning, and others, again, of making the rabbit a mercantile proposition and trapping and selling. All these methods have their upholders. Unfortunately, however, I have met some people who say, "Do nothing at all; leave the matter to natural results; let each man individually do what he thinks fit." In that connection I will give a little instance, and it is just as well to give a personal instance, because that is brought home to us. Take a property like one adjoining a farm I have at Geraldton. The owner of the adjoining farm does all he can to kill his rabbits. I, on my farm of 3,000 acres, do nothing. What earthly use would it be for that man to undertake the work of eradicating his rabbits? For that reason I say that whatever is done must be done universally. It is no use one section of landholders doing it; everybody must co-operate thoroughly, recognising that the rabbit is a pest and that the utmost efforts must be used to bring about its eradication. Those, I submit, are the principles upon which we must proceed. Unluckily, from this rabbit aspect, the present season has brought nearly everywhere a splendid rainfall, and it is impossible to deal with the rabbits in any ordinary manner of catching them. We cannot poison the water, because there is so much water that to poison it all would be impracticable. Therefore it seems to me that the only alternative is to lay poison with poison carts. It has been suggested that then a question arises in connection with farms. Suppose poisoned meal is distributed about; has anyone had experience qualifying him to say whether the meal will be eaten by valuable sheep, say stud sheep? They may be disposed to take it. I incline to the opinion that possibly on small farms it would be better to go in for shooting and trapping the rabbits and catching them with dogs. But these are matters which, I think, may largely be left to the Rabbit Department. Many people, however, are of the opinion that the trapping of rabbits and the sale of them should be permitted; and they are prepared to state, from experience, that this system gets rid of a large number, besides providing a certain quantity of meat. There may be some truth in it. I honestly admit that I have had no practical experience of dealing with rabbits. I have never poisoned one, or eaten one; and I never intend to eat one. I cannot say which of the various methods is the best. I may, however, read to the House an extract from the "Australasian" of

the 20th January last, on the subject of turning the rabbit into a mercantile business—

It is recognised that the only sure method of ridding any area of the pest is to wire-net the boundaries, dig out the burrows thoroughly, any escaping rabbits being dealt with by the dogs. Unless each burrow is dug out to the very end, rabbits will escape, and the trouble begins afresh. Now wire netting, if procurable at all, is at prohibitive prices, fences are scarce, and labour for digging out is still scarcer. One can only aim at keeping the pest in check, instead of exterminating it; and the most effective means of doing so is by poisoning. The usual plan is to give two or three feeds in the shape of pieces of apples or carrots, followed by the same bait poisoned. The baits are laid in shallow furrows, scratched round the boundary fences; and after several free feeds a big score of victims can be reckoned upon. Simultaneous poisoning always administers a severe check to the bunnies. A New South Wales pastoralist recently got thousands of rabbits by netting all waterholes and using poisoned water. Trapping has always failed to keep down rabbits, and has long been abandoned as a means of checking them. The trappers don't want to exterminate them; and when the rabbits are thinned down the trappers make off to fresh trapping grounds. Trapping simply scatters the rabbits, and causes them to open up fresh breeding grounds, where they multiply more quickly. Any action which promotes the interests of trappers is against the interests of pastoralists; and the latter body will not welcome the proposal of the Minister for Lands to prohibit poisoning within 20 miles of a factory. His declared intention to deal with the pest on Crown lands is a much more sensible idea, though a big undertaking.

We see it is stated that when they are turned into a commercial proposition they are likely to increase, that a man after trapping a certain area will leave 30 or 40 does and some bucks, and in a few months they will have greatly increased. The question arises which are we to have, sheep or rabbits? If rabbits are best, let us kill off the sheep. There will then be no expense for fencing, no shearing troubles, no bother of any kind, except catching the rabbits. When I look round the House I feel that there can be only one answer to that question, namely, that it must be sheep. I do not think anybody could contend that rabbits can satisfactorily take the place of sheep. Then we come to the question, should the two be co-ordinated, should they live together? From experience I can say it is impossible. Therefore, we must find the best means of putting down the rabbits. I know that many people are inclined to deal with this subject very lightly; but believe me, unless the pest is coped with, it is going to be a very serious thing for Western Australia and will to a very large extent do away with that industry which produces wool and mutton and furnishes employment for a large number of men all over the country. The only way, therefore, of dealing with this matter is for all to co-operate, particularly with the Gov-

ernment. The Government must recognise, as I see they have partly recognised in the Bill, that they are responsible for making the interpretation of "holding" include any reserve, so that any public body holding a reserve will be required to keep that reserve clean. But we must go further and get the Government to take action on unoccupied Crown lands and abandoned farms. It is of no use clearing the reserves and the private properties if we leave the Crown lands untouched. The position of the Chief Rabbit Inspector is that he is empowered by law to take action against the holders of farms and stations, to force them to clear their lands, while at the same time not a penny is provided for him to do anything in the direction of clearing Crown lands. Thus, while we fine the men who are trying to develop the country, the Government are allowing all the work of those men to go for nothing by neglecting to keep the Crown lands clean. Unless we all work together, we cannot be successful. That is why I think the matter should be left in the hands of the Government, that the Government should have full power to deal with it. When the Government insist upon private people keeping down the rabbits, they must have somebody to show the ordinary farmer how best to do it. We were told by Mr. Baxter that most insulting, threatening letters have been sent to the chief inspector because he has ordered people to clear the rabbits off their land. I understand that the inspector has been threatened with shooting, and even worse. Unfortunately, everybody has been regarding the department as an enemy instead of a friend. Unless we co-operate with the department all our endeavours will be useless. I suggest that some official be sent into agricultural centres such as, say, the Greenough Flats, to show the men there how to poison and in other ways exterminate the rabbits. Look at what the farmer has to attend to now: He begins in January with the police returns. I am certain that when the ordinary farmer gets through that puzzle he has done very well. Then his next notice is to get his land cleared of all noxious weeds. Then comes the order, "Lice in sheep. Dip your sheep before to-morrow, 28th February; that is the last day." Then there is the making out of the land and income tax returns—although, unfortunately, I do not think the payment of the income tax troubles the farmer very much. And on top of all that, the farmers have had two or three bad seasons. How can we now expect a man who is bearing all this trouble and worry to shoulder a great deal of extra trouble in endeavouring to exterminate rabbits when he knows not the best means of going about it? It would be far better to provide officials and send them out to show the farmers how to do the necessary work. Once we get the farmers to realise the seriousness of the pest, and show them that the Government are working with them, we will be able to do some good. I might instance the old days of the scab pest in this State. In my days it was a perfect nuisance among the sheep. Sheep were shepherded in those days, and the shepherds were fre-

quently losing them in the dense thickets. To eradicate the scab it became necessary to muster the whole of the sheep. Nobody would have believed it possible to get all the sheep out of the dense thickets and get the scab out as well; because scab was capable of being spread, not only from sheep to sheep, but per medium of the camps. However, it was vigorously taken in hand by the department, and people were shown how to dip, and in consequence we have succeeded in ridding the State of scab. I do not suppose we shall ever rid the State of rabbits, but the pest only requires to be taken in hand with the same vigour, with co-operation, with enforcement where people refuse to co-operate. and I am quite sure we shall be able to keep it down. The proposed amendments are, in some instances, a little drastic. However, it is like the Health Bill; for those willing to help themselves, there is no hardship, it is those who will not help themselves, and who thus do harm to everybody else who will feel the pinch. It is unfortunate that the department should have to initiate strong measures at the present time when we have had so fine a season. I had a letter from Yalgoo this morning stating that five inches of rain has fallen during February. How, then, can we poison rabbits in such a season? All that we can hope to do is to keep them in check until we get the next drought. When that comes, we shall be able to deal with the rabbits. I would very much like to see inserted in the Bill a provision compelling the Government to look after the unoccupied Crown lands. Near Yalgoo there is a splendid common reservoir of 20,000 acres. Adjoining that is my fence. Inside my fence you cannot get a rabbit in a day's walk, but outside the fence any boy can get eight or nine in an evening. On turning to the amendments we find that in Clause 2 the definition of "holding" has been amended to include a public reserve. In Clause 3 we have the question of converting roads boards into vermin boards. This is a very important matter. We are all conversant with the method of electing roads boards. As a rule the pastoralists, although most interested in the question of vermin, are furthest away from the township and so find it difficult to attend meetings. In consequence of this, they refuse to take a seat on the roads boards, and so these boards are composed chiefly of men about the town, men whose chief interest is to get as much money as possible spent in the town. I am not sure that such men would make the best members of a vermin board. The question is whether it would not be better to nominate vermin boards instead of electing them; or if they are to be elected, it should be stipulated that the majority of members must be settlers, because the suppression of vermin is undoubtedly a matter for the settlers. I notice that the first members of the board are to be appointed by the Government. On looking at the amendment of the original Act, I find that it confirms a certain number of roads boards, and that amongst these are the Gascoyne, Upper Gascoyne.

Roebourn, Black Range, Shark Bay, Yalgoo and Williams boards. These are all confirmed by that Act. I take it that under Clause 4 it is the intention of the Government to cancel these boards and to appoint fresh ones. We find that any member of a board may be appointed as an inspector of the board. It should, therefore, be unnecessary for any extra appointments of outside inspectors to be made. The board can appoint any one of its members as an inspector to see that the work is being carried out. I do not understand Clause 10. It has connection with some holdings which are outside the board's range, and deals with the question of how they are to be taxed. Clause 11 is an important amendment of the Act because it reduces the time for taking action from 30 days after notice to seven days. I think that is quite right, because 30 days is too long a time. Clause 12 amends Section 46 of the Act by adding the words "except rabbits," which means that bonuses can be offered for any kind of pest except rabbits. It also means, apparently, that no reward can be offered for the killing or selling of rabbits. Section 46 of the Act of 1900 states—

A board may grant bonuses for the destruction of vermin within its district at such rates and subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by regulation.

This amendment says that the board may grant bonuses for the destruction of any vermin except rabbits. That, I take it, is to carry out the views of the Government that they do not wish rabbits to become a commercial undertaking.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Have we no record as to what has been declared vermin? The parent Act only mentions rabbits and wild dogs.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: Clause 13 of the Bill introduces into the Vermin Act the whole of Part 5 of the Rabbit Act, and that is a provision for compulsorily destroying rabbits. Clause 14 is most important, for this authorises the board to strike a rate in a district not exceeding 2s. for every 100 acres, which means exactly double what is paid to the Government for rent, and amounts to £1 per 1,000 acres. Subclause 2 of the section says—

Such rate shall not exceed for a pastoral holding 2s. for every 100 acres of the holding, and for any other holding the maximum amount of the rate which might be levied on the unimproved capital value of the holding by the roads board of the road district in which it is situated.

This amount of 2s. per 100 acres was under consideration in the House some time ago, and was amended in an Act assented to on the 20th November. It was reduced to 1s. per 100 acres, and the time of payment of any amount owing by a vermin board was extended to 10 years. It will be a question for the House to decide whether it is thought that the 2s. proposed is too much to start with. It is, of course, the maximum amount and the boards are not obliged to make a rate of 2s., although they have power to do so. I am of opinion, after giving the matter very careful

consideration, that the question can best be dealt with by the Government and the Rabbit Department, especially if they have the co-operation of the people, and if everyone recognises that this is a pest. The department has had plenty of experience now, and should know the best way of dealing with the matter. We have the experience of the entire Commonwealth to go by and especially that of South Australia, and Broken Hill in particular where the pest became very rife. I have no doubt the department knows how this matter has been dealt with in other parts of the Commonwealth, and ought to be able to make use of that experience for our good. In these circumstances I can only repeat that the first thing we have to consider and decide is that rabbits are a pest, and the next thing we have to consider is the best way of dealing with the pest. Thirdly, we want everyone to co-operate in helping the Government to the best of his ability to rid the country of this scourge, so that it will not attain such dimensions as to do real harm to the country. I have much pleasure in supporting the second reading of the Bill.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES (North) [5.53]: I desire to support the second reading of the Bill, and at the same time to congratulate the Honorary Minister for having placed this amending measure before the House at this early stage. In my opinion the Government should have power to deal with the pest. So far as I can understand the pest is defined in the original Act as comprising dogs and rabbits. These are two of the greatest pests that the pastoralists have to cope with. Indeed, they are almost worse than a bad season, for in a bad season they do get something, but with a full flow of rabbits there is little or nothing left after it has passed. Although the Government should have power to deal with this pest, particularly the rabbits, I think they are asking too much power in this Bill. The measure proposes that we shall revert to the old system of allowing the board to rate pastoralists up to 2s. per 100 acres, which is £1 a thousand acres, when the Crown rate is only 10s. per thousand acres. It is true it is optional on the part of the board as to whether it enforces the maximum rate or not. We had one experience in the Gascoyne, where the board did tax the pastoralists, and many of them were small men, to the maximum of 2s. per 100 acres or £1 per 1,000 acres. This was double the amount of the Crown rent they were paying, and these unfortunate people got into the position in which they were unable to pay these rates at all. The Government then tried to enforce payment, but found that, through a fault in the Act, they were unable to recover these rates. The then Labour Government came down with an amending Bill asking for power to collect these rents. This House, in its wisdom, decided to fix the maximum rate, although giving the Government power to collect these back rates, of 1s. per 100 acres, or 10s. per 1,000 acres, instead of £1. That amendment was agreed to by both Houses of Parliament, and the Government of the day saw the justice of it. It would appear that the present Government, having power to collect

these arrears of rates—and I understand that they have collected a great portion of them—now seek to reimpose the maximum of 2s. per 100 acres. If we could be satisfied that the pastoralists would administer this themselves, or that others immediately concerned would do so, there would be no harm in giving this maximum rate of 2s. My experience of the Gascoyne board was that when vacancies occurred on the board they were filled by the townspeople, who took practically no interest in the back country. The trouble was that the mails only went once in two or three months to the outlying parts, and the result was that the pastoralists did not know of the vacancies which had occurred and, because of that, these were filled by the townspeople. Those who then formed the board, having the right to tax the pastoralists to the extent of £1 per 1,000 acres, did tax them to the full amount. There was a secretary to this board who was paid £6 a week, but, so far as I can learn, and I have followed the thing closely, his full duties amounted to sending out 36 rate notices per annum. There were 36 people concerned in the matter inside the fence, and he sent out these notices, although he had no power to collect the rates so levied, and for this he was paid the handsome sum of £6 per week. This was the result of placing the control of the funds of the board in the hands of those who were not immediately concerned. Some provision should be made in this Bill whereby these people, living hundreds of miles from a post office, and knowing nothing of the vacancies that occur, should be given an opportunity of getting on the board. In the past vacancies on these boards have been filled in the absence of the pastoralists, and on the arrival of the mails they have found that so and so, one of the townspeople, generally the principal storekeeper, had been appointed to the board. I wish to avoid that kind of thing in the future. The House in its wisdom, and rightly so, provided that the maximum that any board could impose should be 10s. per thousand acres and not £1 as suggested here. This does appear to me to be a breach of faith on the part of the Government. Having collected these arrears of rates, or being empowered to do so, and having fixed in 1915 a maximum of 10s. per 1,000 acres the Government should not now come along and try to reimpose the 20s. per thousand rate as a vermin tax as against the 10s. rate. The Crown rental is only 10s. and the Government should not now seek for power to impose a rate of double that amount for the suppression of vermin.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: It is a wrong system of assessment.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: We have heard a great deal about the large areas held by the pastoralists, but anyone who gives the matter attention must know that a big area of the country held by pastoralists is of no practical use to them. It is only good for rabbits. The difficulty in Western Australia is that both in the agricultural and the pastoral areas there is no continuity of good land. One can travel through the agricultural areas by rail, and for

five or ten minutes nothing but first class land will be seen, but a few minutes later the character of the country is completely changed, and land even barely fit for rabbits to breed on is passed through. While the agriculturist has to take up 2,000 acres of land in order to make sure of getting a patch that is good, the pastoralist must also take up an area larger than that which he needs so as to make sure of getting all the good land for his requirements. When the Bill is in Committee I intend to inquire from the Honorary Minister the meaning of Subclause 2 of Clause 4, which states—

"Section 16 of the principal Act is hereby amended by the deletion of all the word after 'shall,' and the substitution of the word 'retire' when the member in whose place he has been appointed would have retired under Section 10."

I hope the Minister will enlighten the House as to the meaning of that paragraph.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: I fail to understand it.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: I submitted it to a legal gentleman, and he gave it up as hopeless. I quote the paragraph at this stage so that the Minister may look into it and explain its meaning when we reach the Committee stage. Clause 5 is also indefinite. It says—

Section 22 of the principal Act is hereby amended by the insertion of the words "an inspector" in Subsection 1, and a new subsection as follows:—"Any member of the board may be appointed an inspector of the board."

It is not pointed out where the words "an inspector" are to be added, and it is very important that they should be added in the proper place. I am advised that it will be necessary for that clause to be given careful attention otherwise it will be found to conflict with the principal Act. The clause repealing Section 4 of the principal Act and providing power to levy rates not to exceed for a pastoral holding 2s. for every 100 acres of the holding should also receive close consideration. I would draw attention to the last clause in the Bill, which reads—

The averment in any claim, complaint, or other document in any proceeding instituted for the purposes of this Act by the Board or the Chairman or clerk or other officer of the Board that any person is or was at the time the owner of any holding shall be deemed to be proved in the absence of proof to the contrary.

That is a pretty strong clause which gives all the power to the Government or a board. In the out places men may not have an opportunity of proving to the contrary. I simply draw attention to the fact that the power seems to be too great in the hope that when the Bill is in Committee the clause may be modified. I do not desire to hamper the Government in any way, knowing as we all know that the rabbit menace must be dealt with at once, but in giving the Government the power to deal with it we must at the same time see that the power is not excessive.

On motion by Hon. W. Kingsmill debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 6.8 p.m.