Legislative Council

Tuesday, the 29th August, 1961

CONTENTS

The PRESIDENT (The Hon. L. C. Diver) took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Acknowledgment of Presentation to Lieutenant-Governor and Administrator

THE PRESIDENT (The Hon. L. C. Diver): I desire to announce that, accompanied by several members, I waited on His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor and Administrator and presented the Address-in-Reply to His Excellency's Speech, agreed to by the House. His Excellency has been pleased to make the following reply:—

> Mr. President and honourable members of the Legislative Council: I thank you for your expressions of loyalty to Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen, and for your Address-in-Reply to the Speech with which I opened Parliament.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

EMPLOYMENT IN THE NORTH-WEST

Recruitment

1. The Hon. F. J. S. WISE (for The Hon. H. C. Strickland) asked the Minister for Local Government:

   (1) To which categories of employment in the north-west has the Government decided to grant special schoolchildren's allowances as an encouragement for recruitment?

   (2) Which categories of employment in the north-west does the Government regard as being not in need of similar encouragement?

   (3) Which departments rely on recruitment for service in the area?

   (4) Which departments have the right to transfer staff to the area?

   The Hon. L. A. LOGAN replied:

   (1) Officers under the Public Service Act, Police Act, and certain employees under the Hospital Act have been granted these conditions as an encouragement to seek postings. The position in regard to school teachers is under consideration.

   (2) Those categories not covered by the answer to No. (1).

   (3) State Departments do not in the main rely on direct recruitment for positions in the north. These are filled by postings and temporary transfers. For other than salaried categories, local labour is utilised where available.

   (4) All State departments have the right to transfer salaried staff.

RAILWAY FROM JARRAHDALE TO NAVAL BASE

Site and Resumptions

2. The Hon. F. R. H. LAVERY asked the Minister for Mines:

   As a number of settlers and residents are concerned by the movement of surveyors on or near their properties:—

   (1) Has the railway site from Jarrahdale to Naval Base for the transport of alumina base materials been finally decided upon?

   (2) Will it be necessary to resume any private property for this line?

   Seaside Terminal

   (3) Has the terminal at seaside yet been determined?

   (4) If so, is it too early for the House to be informed?

   Commencement of Work, and Number of Employees

   (5) When is it proposed to commence the laying of the tracks?

   (6) (i) What is the number of workers to be employed; and

   (ii) how many of these will be unskilled workers?

The Hon. A. F. GRIFFITH replied:

(1) No.

(2) This cannot be determined until the survey is carried out. It is expected, however, that the resumption will be relatively light.

(3) The terminal will be the area granted under the lease for the alumina plant.

(4) Answered by No. (3).

(5) This is dependent on ratification of the agreement by Parliament, the requirement of the company, and the completion of the survey.

(6) (i) } This has not yet been deter-
(ii) } mined.

CIVIL DEFENCE ORGANISATION

Government's Plan and Districts to be Included

3. The Hon. N. E. BAXTER asked the Minister for Mines:

(1) Has the Government prepared a plan for the promotion of a comprehensive civil defence organisation for Western Australia?

(2) If the answer to No. (1) is "Yes," what districts in the State are included in the plan?

Cost and Federal Financial Assistance

(3) What does the Government estimate it would cost—
(a) to establish a sound civil defence organisation; and
(b) to maintain the establishment per annum?

(4) What approaches have been made to the Federal Government for financial assistance in the matter?

The Hon. A. F. GRIFFITH replied:

(1) Yes.

(2) A civil defence role will be allocated to most districts of Western Australia. Emphasis, initially, will be on areas of greater population.

(3) Based on discussions with the former Commonwealth Director of Civil Defence, the amount required for establishment and maintenance in Western Australia of the organisation then contemplated was estimated at £55,000 per annum.

(4) Representations to the Commonwealth Government have extended over a number of years, culminating in a special conference of State Premiers with the Commonwealth Minister in June, 1960, which was inconclusive. With the recent appointment of a new Commonwealth director, the State anticipates a fresh approach from the Commonwealth Government. If this does not eventuate, the matter will again be raised by the State.

PASTORAL LEASES

Inquiry into Renewal

THE HON. F. J. S. WISE (North) [4.38 p.m.]: I move—

That in the opinion of this House, in the national interest, leases issued under the provisions of sections 90 to 115, inclusive, of the Land Act, 1933-1956, be not renewed until—

(1) a committee of enquiry has been set up and, after full investigation, made a report and recommendations in connection with—
(a) the use, treatment and effective occupation of the areas comprised in the pastoral leases of the State;
(b) the condition of the country, its general prospect for permanent pastoral use and how it has been affected by droughts, erosion, stocking, and vermin during the currency of the existing leases;
(c) the desirability of making provision in the Land Act for a new system of determining the size of pastoral leases, maximum and minimum, whether held by individuals or companies;
(d) whether any new provisions or amended provisions should be made in the Land Act in regard to methods of appraisement of rentals, and the powers of the Pastoral Appraisement Board;

(2) Parliament has been presented with the report and recommendations, and the Land Act has been amended after full consideration of the recommendations of the committee and the likely needs of the State in the better use of our pastoral lands.

There are vast areas in this State which are leased for pastoral use under sections 90 to 115, inclusive, of the Land Act. These leases combine to form the stations or pastoral properties of the State; and the total number of leases is very large. The total number of stations is in the vicinity of 540.

Production from pastoral leases has been a source of great wealth to this State; and, as I proceed, I hope that I may be able to show the urgency of the need for this motion. It is far-reaching in its effect, and it is of great national importance, particularly at this point in our history.

In *The West Australian* of the 29th May, 1961, there appeared this comment on the proposed visit of the Minister for Lands to Queensland—

> A Lands Department spokesman said yesterday that the visit was in connection with proposed plans for new leases for W.A's pastoral holdings.

In the *Sunday Times* of the 28th May, last, the Minister, before he left for Queensland, was reported to have said—

> Although the present leases did not expire until 1982, his department was anxious to make an early decision.

Earlier in the same report, the Minister said—

> New leases are being eagerly awaited by big sheep and cattle concerns.

From the foregoing statements, taken from *The West Australian*, the obvious facts which are so vital to this whole subject and which concern the nation are that there are proposed plans for new leases; the old leases still have 21 years to run; the department is anxious to have an early decision; and the big sheep and cattle interests await the new leases.

I point out that the issuance of new leases will affect the holding and use of our pastoral areas well into the 21st century—more than 50 years from now. To extend the leases under the present conditions to the existing holders could be wholly right in many or in most cases, but it also could be very wrong in many others.

I have no objection at all to leases being granted on the basis of a term of 50 years, although on a thorough examination it may be that the recommendations will be for a shorter period; and I have no objection, either, to their being reviewed in the next year or two, but I have a very great objection to their being renewed without a full inquiry into what has happened during the currency of the present leases, and before.

In my view the time is very opportune for Parliament to be interested, because Parliament will be asked to amend the law to provide for the new leases under section 98 of the Land Act after the department, the Minister, and the Government have reached their decision, whether that decision be early or late; and Parliament will need to be assured that in any new proposals the nation's best interests are observed in the objective of better land use in perpetuity.

It is a very opportune time, therefore, to assess the effects of the past 100 years of grazing; the effects of drought and overstocking; the effects of erosion and the possible prevention of it; the need for more research; the responsibilities of the Crown and of the lessees; and the requisite amendments to the laws as they exist. All of these things need attention before the current leases expire.

Development and investment plans must be made by leaseholders; and the Crown, for its part, must make plans for the maximum and safe use of our land during the currency of the new leases whether they be for the full term of 50 years from now, or for 50 years from the time of expiry of the current leases.

In my view there is much loose thinking nowadays, and many irresponsible statements made on the subject of developing the north of Australia by intensive pastoral expansion. Let us realise this: there are very few areas of new pastoral land, even in remote regions, available for selection. Without a review of the existing holdings —their unused areas and their boundaries —there is no prospect of increasing the number of stations even by 1 per cent. in most districts, and there is little prospect of there being any new or any more pastoralists if the leases are renewed as they are now; and we are deluding ourselves and deceiving other people if we pretend otherwise.

There are many reasons why the whole situation needs a review now in the national interest. It is certainly not sufficient to say that big sheep and cattle interests await new leases. To renew leases 20 years before they expire, under the conditions now obtaining and without full inquiry, could be very wrong. Some of our leases are held by the third generation of the same families; and there are instances of considerable wealth accruing to individual families through the very great privilege of using Crown lands for grazing purposes.

Some families acknowledge the privilege and have intelligently used the country. They have pride in their improvements, in their flocks, and in their husbandry, whilst others have regarded the leases as a right and as theirs alone to exploit; and they have shown an utter disregard for the future of the country or of the national asset.

Some have held fast to unused areas and have abused portions of their holdings. But I would point out that it is not all of the large holdings that are badly held any more than it is all of the small holdings that are well-managed, better-husbanded, and used to the best advantage.

Let us look at the matter for a moment or two historically. The first grazing leases were issued in the 1860's. Since that time, production from them has been of great importance to this State, and considerable wealth has been obtained by both the individual and the nation as a whole. A vast area has been peopled—certainly sparsely, but peopled, perhaps, as closely as is possible compatible with pastoral pursuits. We find at this time when a review is necessary—at this time when the Minister himself says there are proposals for the renewal of leases—that many things have occurred during the currency of the present leases which require close scrutiny.

There are matters which require a great deal of investigation and consideration. There have been extremely wide variations

in the price of wool; there have been prolonged droughts in parts of the pastoral areas, and successive drought years in other parts; there have been cyclones causing damage in specific areas; there have been abandonments in some districts and a great deal of intensive use of pastoral properties in others; there has been, and still is, serious soil erosion; there have been great changes in the natural vegetation of those areas; and, most of all, there has been—requiring the most earnest consideration—extremely heavy national loss in the shrinkage of numbers and the production of our flocks and herds in the pastoral regions held under lease.

So, since the current leases have been granted, many things have occurred which were not anticipated when the laws under which they were granted were framed in the early 1930's. Also, when those leases were granted, the conditions that are applying now, together with the many attendant things that have occurred, could not have been anticipated.

The Hon. H. K. Watson: Could not future conclusions falsify the conditions obtaining 25 or 30 years ago?

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I think we have an ocular demonstration of what its behaviour pattern is likely to be in the future; and, on its condition and use, and following on the advice of many skilled people, we would be in a better position to judge what conditions to apply to the term of the lease should it be over a longer period of years. I think the variation in production figures is, of itself, sufficient to warrant considerable inquiry. On present wool prices, production has decreased by many million pounds a year. The annual value of wool produced in the pastoral areas, as distinct from the farming areas, is down at least £3,000,000 a year. Let us look at the figures.

I am now quoting the wool production from the pastoral areas—areas held under pastoral lease, according to the provisions of part VI of the Land Act—as distinct from wool produced in the farming districts. Taking the whole region of the pastoral area and dealing with the production of wool from it, in 1933-34, some 96,021 bales of wool were produced. The peak year was 1934-35 when 102,716 bales were produced. In 1938-39, four years later, production had dropped to 48,608 bales.

I know particularly well the circumstances and conditions applying to the north-west part of this State. As you know, Mr. President, I was privileged for some years to be the Minister in charge of the Land Act, and I was privileged to be the person in authority at the time when the debt structure of the pastoralist was causing serious concern to individuals, to banking interests, and to the State. I can say without qualification that I was able, through persistence and by certain action, to remedy a very difficult situation without statutory authority. So that following an intensive study of the difficulties through the drought years, I did know the circumstances obtaining at that time, before, and since. But to use the north-west figures in particular, I would quote those for the peak year of 1935—25 years ago.

Through the port of Carnarvon, 29,250 bales of wool were shipped. Through the port of Onslow 12,742 bales were shipped; from Cossack, 5,070 bales; Porth Hedland, 11,110 bales; Derby, 3,361 bales; and 67 bales from Broome. That made a total of 61,600 bales of wool shipped through the ports of the north in that year. Further, during that year, 95,450 surplus sheep were shipped from the port of Carnarvon and 12,700 from the port of Onslow. In those days surplus sheep, as a business, represented a vast trade. In Carnarvon's best year 115,222 sheep were shipped over the jetty, and in the same year 25,000 bales of wool were shipped through that port.

The Hon. C. R. Abbey: All to the metropolitan area?

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: Not all to the metropolitan area; a large proportion of them went to Singapore. Other ports shipped tens of thousands of sheep a year. Today that trade is almost nil, not only from the point of view of the market which is being satisfied from the southern districts, but also because of the non-availability of sheep.

To come nearer to the present time, in 1954, the last year before road haulage had an impact on the ports, 26,975 bales of wool, as a total, were shipped from all the ports I have already mentioned. Last year, 16,982 bales of wool were shipped over all jetties. In its best year for the carriage of wool, the State Shipping Service carried 38,000 bales. Last year, there were approximately only 15,000 bales; and shipments by the Blue Funnel boats for overseas destinations were, of course, down by thousands of bales.

The statistical figures for the Gascoyne electoral district show that the decline in sheep numbers has persisted over the last six years. Taking the local government districts of Gascoyne-Minilya, Upper Gascoyne, Murchison and Shark Bay—which in effect constitute the Gascoyne electorate—in 1955 the sheep population was 1,125,520, but by the 30th June, 1960, the figure had been reduced to 855,058. The wool clip for that district decreased from 10,226,860 lb. in 1955 to 8,418,095 lb. in 1960. There has been a shrinkage in pastoral wool production from 61,600 bales in the peak year to less than 20,000 bales in the last year. These are alarming figures.

The Hon. C. R. Abbey: Would there be any increase in the cattle figures for that time?

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I shall come to the cattle figures later. Alarming as those figures are in the national interest, they are unfortunately being hidden partly by the newer and more glamorous happenings in certain parts of the north. The pioneer industry, that is the pastoral industry, being maintained at its maximum income prospect is very vital to this State and to Australia. Not only are the national assets and the wool income from pastoral areas, which has been reduced by more than 50 per cent. since the peak year, being affected; but so also are the incomes of the pastoralists, the road hauliers, the shearers, the employees—whether they be permanent or seasonal workers—of the wharves and harbours, and the employees of the State ships; and the stability of the towns concerned is greatly affected.

It is necessary to give this House an idea of the drought losses for the years from 1934 onwards, because a little later I propose to deal with the effects of droughts and other circumstances. If we take the effect of the drought years in all pastoral districts of the State from 1934 onwards—I include the goldfields, Murchison, Meekatharra, the Gascoyne, Ashburton-DeGrey, and the West Kimberleys—we will find that the total sheep population was 5,516,767 in 1934; the sheep losses were 4,182,000 from 1935 to 1939; and the deficiency caused by loss of natural increase, in addition to the actual losses, was 3,137,000. These figures are found on page 76 of the report of the Royal Commission into the pastoral industry in 1940.

In respect of those colossal losses during that period, not all of the shrinkage since the early 1940's—for the best part of the last 20 years—can be attributed to the effects of the drought, to the dry periods since, or to cyclones. Heavy and tremendous losses were doubtless caused by drought and the after-effects of drought. Some were due to heavy overstocking in the past. In some cases the numbers have been kept down deliberately for taxation purposes, but not in very many cases.

The deterioration of our pastoral land due to heavy stocking has been known for a long time. This goes back to the days when the only watering points, particularly in the cattle country, were those which nature provided. Strange as it may seem, that fact is still not readily admitted by many of the guilty ones.

A very interesting review was made by a committee appointed by the present Government into the causes of sheep losses and into the decreased numbers in the Pilbara district. It is on record that on one station in the Pilbara district which carried 49,000 sheep in 1934, the number was reduced to 13,000 in 1959. The figure for the district dropped from 630,000 to 300,000 sheep. The heading in *The West Australian* of the 19th May, 1959, relating to this loss, was "Bad Grazing Blamed for Pilbara Loss"; and the newspaper had this to say—

> "Faulty grazing and fire management has been one of the main reasons for the decline of the pastoral industry in the Pilbara," the Pilbara Pastoral Committee has reported.

The members of the committee to which I have referred were people well qualified to speak on these matters; they were experts in this sphere. They included Mr. Robert Lukis, Manager of Mundabullangana; Mr. Johnson of the Pastoral Appraisement Board of the Lands and Surveys Department, Western Australia; and Mr. Suijdendorp, an officer of the Department of Agriculture who has been most active in the work of regeneration of our denuded pastoral regions. These gentlemen, in a very carefuly prepared report, came to the conclusion that bad grazing was to a large extent to be blamed for the condition of the Pilbara district. They also claimed that overstocking in the Pilbara region 25 years ago was a very great contributing factor to the present disappearance of many edible shrubs and grasses which were so important in the economy of the district a quarter of a century ago.

In direct reply to Mr. Watson, on the point as to whether decisions made now might also be very faulty when they are projected into the future, I might point out that we can gauge what has happened in the past 100 years from records which have been very well kept, and from the history of individual stations, such as one which has been in the same family since 1884. We have the benefit of the knowledge of men who have continued in the pastoral industry on many stations for a long period.

When the leases were issued 30 years ago, many factors were matters of conjecture, but these have been proven in the light of experience since that time. Variations in seasonal circumstances; wool prices; debt structure of the producers; and all the factors which should be taken into account when determining rentals—the use of the land, improved conditions, and stocking conditions—can be measured in the light of very recent history. Today we are in a very much better position to assess the ability of much of our land being used in perpetuity; that is, for it to remain in permanent occupation by pastoralists—not in occupation for one generation or for one term of a lease so that the cream is skimmed off the country—and for it to become a national asset, intended to be used in perpetuity.

The great work which has been done by such men as Robert Lukis, a member of the committee I referred to, coupled with the work of the Lands Department and agricultural officers who were associated with that committee, have turned

some of the scalded plains of Mundabullangana into waving paddocks of buffel grass —paddocks which were bare and scalded twenty years ago, but which to-day are carrying large flocks of sheep.

The Hon. C. H. Simpson: What is the area of that station?

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: This is a very big station of 1,000,000 acres, lying between Whim Creek and Port Hedland.

The Hon. C. R. Abbey: What would buffel grass country carry?

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: The history of such country is well known to many members. The grass was introduced by the camel teams in Port Hedland in, perhaps, 1917 or 1918. It was located mostly by a man named Moore, and it was propagated intensely in the Port Hedland district. It was taken by Mr. Thompson to Pardoo Station, and very quickly it was found in areas stretching from Wallal to Carnarvon. Alec McRae fostered it very keenly in spinifex country. Apart from the ability of this grass to carry sheep, it was the means of reclaiming land which it had been thought could never be brought back into production. This land is now carrying vast numbers of sheep—land which formerly consisted of scalded plains.

I reached another point when I said the time had surely come when a lot of thought should be given to making productive a lot of our unused land, and to dealing with land that has been abused. It is time to control the use; perhaps that is long overdue. It is time to turn nonproductive land into production. Therefore ,it is time that the Land Act was brought up-to-date.

I do not intend to dwell on specific amendments to the Act. I have referred to sections 90 to 115, inclusive, which embody all the pastoral lease conditions. I would point out that many of these sections are out of date and outmoded. I refer particularly to the provisions which prescribe minimum areas for river frontages. There are those with river frontages, and they were something very choice when they carried the best of our grasses and herbage, particularly in the Kimberleys. But today it is a very different set of circumstances, because the areas which carried the herds and flocks in past years are, in a vast number of cases, denuded of everything except non-nutritious weeds and plants, and are the subject of considerable erosion.

Section 113 of the Act prescribes the maximum area to be held in any one interest or set of interests; namely, a million acres. It is very interesting to study the devious ways by which the intention of Parliaments and Governments have been got around by people in connection with million-acre holdings; because those of us who know of pastoral conditions, and know of leases individually, know of chains of stations—stations continuous and contiguous—held in the one interest through Western Australia and, indeed, into the Northern Territory.

Therefore, when suggesting anything that might be an amendment to the Act, I suggest that the whole of part VI of the Land Act should be looked at before these pastoral leases are renewed. Perhaps one of the many ways to make new stations is to make a survey of unused areas and be prepared to lease them to people willing to develop and use them. I know of one 1,000,000-acre property which shore 104,000 sheep in its best year, and 90,000 on many occasions. It is now shearing under 40,000. On that property, windmills which were blown down years ago are still on the ground.

I personally know of a property in the middle north which once shore 600 bales of wool. Today that figure is under 50 bales. There was another property, which now carries no sheep, and not very many cattle, but which shore over 500 bales of wool. There is one very valuable and large property in the far north which shore well over 100,000 sheep, producing 1,000 bales of the finest quality wool almost of one line. Today, it is under 50,000 head. Much of that property is on river frontage country, a lot of which has been ruined.

One member asked a question regarding cattle. Taking in the whole of the Kimberleys, east and west, down as far south as Anna Plains, the cattle population would be approximately half a million with an annual turn-off of about 50,000 to 55,000 head—that is taking in properties at Wyndham, Derby, Broome, and a few properties overlanding south.

An eminent authority, and one of Australia's best versed men in the cattle industry, said recently that the Kimberleys, if properly handled, should be carrying 800,000 cattle with a turn-off of 120,000 a year. I make this point very strongly: production is still the most important matter being considered in the Kimberleys. It is not much use planning any large-scale Government spending unless the basis for the future—which is production—is also well planned.

The Hon. H. K. Watson: That is wrapped up with production costs.

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: Exactly. Ports, roads, harbour works, development costs of properties, are all tied into the one plan, really, in a national outlook; and any plan for increased production must, in my view, basically include the cattle industry which for a long time will continue to be the basis for satisfactory and safe production.

The Hon. A. F. Griffith: So that the approach to spending an inexhaustible amount of money is not necessarily the answer.

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: Not unless a proper stock-taking is made. I do not wish to digress, Mr. President, but I have spent many years of my life, and have given many years—perhaps the best years—of my life in endeavouring to solve some of the problems of empty Australia. I could go into a discourse on that subject, but I do not wish to be diverted from this one.

The vital matter in this motion is that we should take stock of a situation before we perpetrate or continue a set of circumstances which should not, under any conditions, be allowed to continue into the next 50 to 60 years. That is my concern. In saying that a stock-taking of the situation is very important, I point out that it must be realised that when a thorough inquiry is made, there is a distinct possibility that some of the land held under pastoral lease may be recommended for purposes other than pastoral.

The Hon. A. L. Loton: That has happened in Queensland.

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: It will happen in the North Kimberleys. It must happen when better port facilities, better road facilities, and better access are made possible. In reply to the Minister's helpful interjection, it must be acknowledged that enormous Government spending must precede all sorts of private spending. But in this case—in the case of the Kimberleys—enormous private spending has preceded Government spending. But now that the stage has been reached when access to the remaining undeveloped areas of our pastoral lands must soon be provided, it all becomes part of a complete plan. It should not be a question of deciding on its own merits whether a road should go through one point or another, or to a different point altogether. That should all be encompassed following a complete scrutiny of all the circumstances obtaining; and the beginning of it, in my view, is to get back to the basis of safe production for that region which has proved itself to be suitable for the pastoral industry.

The enormous wastage in the pastoral industry is the next point on which I wish to touch. There is an enormous national loss annually in stock dying at the water points, and in the thousands of cleanskins that are never marketed. On some stations there are still some hundreds of cleanskins. During the last two years, two thousand scrub bulls were shot on one property within a hundred miles of a port.

The Hon. G. Bennetts: Don Barker used to tell us about that.

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: I know of a station—just over the border, it is true, and not involved under our Land Act—which supplies Wyndham with cattle. That station shot 5,000 scrub bulls during the process of partly cleaning up the property. I repeat: 5,000 bulls which had reached a state of maturity and which, because of their wildness and uncontrolled condition, had never been branded or handled, were shot because of the destruction they were causing.

So is it any wonder that in many cases not only are branding percentages low, and the turn-off percentage very low when compared with brandings, but a very serious national loss is occasioned?

Perhaps one of the best reviews of our time in connection with the pastoral industry was the one known as the Payne-Fletcher report, which reviewed the pastoral industry of north Australia some years ago. The Payne-Fletcher report has come to be known as something important in pastoral property offices—at least as important in its place in the offices as is *Miller's Guide* about Melbourne Cup time. The report means a lot to people of the outback. It pays more than a passing tribute to the outback. Payne and Fletcher had much to say on the subject of cleanskins. The report refers to the number of cleanskins, which runs into thousands; to the absence of bullock paddocks, and the necessity of herds requiring cleaning up; to the vast extent of holdings; to the good work that can be done on a holding of reasonable size; and it mentions Rosewood Station, consisting of 1,073 square miles and carrying 16,000 head of cattle. This property has more improvements per square mile than any other holding in the north-west, and it employs more white men than any other holding.

Rosewood, of course, became a famous station. It was once part-owned by a late member of this Legislative Council. It was managed by a remarkable stockman in the person of Jack Kilfoyle. His turn-off figures were remarkable; and, according to Payne and Fletcher—who are skilled men—those figures could have been multiplied many times had other properties been properly managed.

Part of our Kimberley country is considered to be quite as good as the Barkly Tablelands and Western Queensland. The Antrim Plateau is a case in point. Part of the Antrim Plateau is held in one property of a million acres. But there are few more than 10,000 branded cattle on this property; and I am assured by an eminent authority on this subject that half of it does not carry a hoof. It should carry, if properly developed, thirty thousand head of stock.

It is in this ownership that, in very many ways, the million-acre provision has been overcome. Some of the areas held by this interest have formed into a dreadful dust bowl. The erosion is a threat to the Ord River proposal.

The officer-in-charge of the regeneration of the Ord properties—Mr. Kevin Fitzgerald—said, on the 17th January last, at

the Summer School of the University—and this was published—that 1,200 square miles of eroded country existed in the Ord River watershed. I repeat: 1,200 square miles! A hundred square miles are being treated and 200 square miles a year are to be treated. But he said that millions of tons of soil are washed down the Ord each year from three stations. All these are in the one ownership. Surveyor Metcalfe said a few years ago that there were 1,000 square miles badly affected by erosion, and further said—

The PRESIDENT (The Hon. L. C. Diver): Order! One hour having elapsed after the time fixed for the meeting of the House, leave of the House will be necessary to enable the present debate to continue.

[*Resolved: That motions be continued.*]

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: Thank you, Sir, and you, Mr. Minister. I am sorry I am so voluble. In the report which was submitted by surveyor Metcalfe the following words appeared:—

> From measured observations of the silt level carried by the Ord River it is obvious that it must be controlled or the construction of a reservoir on the Ord River would not be practicable.

If for no other reason than the one contained in the words of that sentence, the motion should be carried by this House. Let us have a look at all these things which I have specified particularly in the motion. So far as I am concerned, this committee would not take very long to perform its work. The voluminous report of Payne and Fletcher meant ten months of work. I know of a committee consisting of three members which produced ten reports on Australia's rural problems in two years; but the work of the committee I have in mind would not take long to do. I would give the committee the powers of a Royal Commission to give it an opportunity to report to this House on what I consider an important national matter.

This inquiry really means the pooling of the knowledge and experience of a lot of people. Properly handled it would take care of a lot of the long-range needs for increased development and production which are so tied to all the other elements of Government planning. So far as I am concerned, this matter is national and not political. I make that point.

I appreciate very much the courtesy of members in giving me such a patient hearing over a long period; but I re-emphasise this fact in conclusion: some leaseholders have engaged in good husbandry; they have undertaken research and regeneration; they have studied their land and made provision for water, water conservation, and pasture improvement. However, others have expected Governments to come to their aid after the dire effects of their own bad treatment of a Crown asset; and their own selfishness and rapacity have shown them such dreadful results and experiences.

If members desire to have made available to them material which I have assembled on the subject, I will be only too pleased to assist them. I have studied all the reports since 1924 of, for example, the Harbour and Light Department, the Lands Department, and the tabled reports of the Pastoral Appraisement Board. From a reading of these reports one can come to only one conclusion: that it would be wrong if, after 30 or 50 years' leaseholding, we were prepared to cancel existing leases and renew them for another 50 years under the same conditions. I have no objection whatever to long-term leases, but I think we, as a people imbued with a national instinct and interest, should ensure that whether it be two years from now, or a longer period, before the leases are to be renewed, they will be renewed under conditions which are safe so far as the perpetual use of our pastoral lands is concerned.

Debate adjourned, on motion by The Hon. A. F. Griffith (Minister for Mines).

Personal Explanation.

The Hon. F. J. S. WISE: By way of personal explanation, Mr. President, I would like to say that when I moved my motion I fully intended in a few words to indicate, but omitted to do so, that my intention was that the committee of inquiry should not be a committee of members of Parliament but of experts outside Parliament.

DIVIDING FENCES BILL

Second Reading

THE HON. L. A. LOGAN (Midland—Minister for Local Government) [5.37 p.m.]: I move—

> That the Bill be now read a second time.

This Bill is a very desirable one and should be supported by city people and country people alike. At the present time there is an unsatisfactory method of fencing control in this State. In town and suburban allotments the old Ordinance No. 4 of 1834 still applies and is unsatisfactory, whilst the Cattle Trespass, Fencing, and Impounding Act, most of which was repealed by the passing of the Local Government Act, 1960, contains some fencing provisions, some of which likewise are unsatisfactory.

Under the Local Government Act, councils are given authority to make by-laws to specify what is a sufficient fence for the whole of the district, or in any specified portion of the district, thus allowing for a different type of fence to be specified for townsite lands as compared with country lands.

The present Bill repeals both the old Ordinance and the Cattle Trespass, Fencing, and Impounding Act, and enacts new provisions to take their place. The Bill is based on a New South Wales Act for its general form but incorporates the desirable portions of our own legislation, particularly in regard to fences built before the measure comes into force, and also in regard to repair of fences.

The Bill works on the presumption that it is reasonable that owners of adjoining lands should share in equal proportion the cost of providing and repairing a sufficient dividing fence. It recognises, however, that there may be cases where a dividing fence is not actually necessary. The question of what is a sufficient fence is left for determination by the by-laws of the local authority, or by the court; but the Bill also allows the parties concerned to agree on a type of fence not inferior to that specified in the by-laws of the local authority.

Where a person wishes to fence the boundary between his land and that of his neighbour, he is empowered to serve a notice on the neighbour setting out his desire that a fence shall be erected, stating the position of the fence, and the kind of fence proposed. If the adjoining owner accepts the proposal, then the fence may be built and the cost recovered, but if he does not agree on the necessity for the fence, or the type of fence suggested, he must notify the owner involved, and the latter may then bring the matter before a magistrate in a court of petty sessions for a decision.

The magistrate may make such order as he thinks fit; and he is expressly required, when deciding on the type of fence, to take into consideration the type of fence usual in the locality or the kind of fence prescribed in any by-law of the municipality of the district. If such an order is issued, the person desiring the fence may then proceed and recover a share of the fencing costs.

Consideration was given in preparing the Bill to whether it would be preferable if instead of these disputes being taken to a court they were submitted to the council or the local authority for the district for determination; but on mature thought I consider that this would not be a wise move. The application to the court is a very simple one; and, if the parties concerned do not employ solicitors, they can be assured that the total cost of making an application and securing an order from the court regarding a fence in dispute will not be more than ten shillings. If they employ solicitors naturally they must expect to pay additional costs.

I feel that to submit these disputes to a council might place the members of that body in an embarrassing and invidious position where the disputants happen to be the neighbours and also the supporters of a member of the council; and, therefore, I do not think it fair to place council members in this awkward position. If the council has, by a by-law, stated what it considers to be a sufficient fence, I think that is all that can be reasonably expected of a council; and the decision of disputes would be better determined by a judicial authority.

Provision has been made to deal with cases where the adjoining owner cannot be located. The court may proceed *ex parte* in such a case, and if the owner is subsequently located the person erecting the fence may then claim for a share; but the owner concerned is entitled to bring the matter before the court for a review and the court could, if it wished, vary the position of the fence or make some other order according to the merits of the case. This proposal for a review when the owner is subsequently located presents some problems. It was taken from the New South Wales Act, but I am not entirely happy over the matter. If members intimate to me that they prefer that the court order having been given no later review should be permitted, I will be quite happy to move for the striking out of the two subclauses dealing with this subject.

I feel sure that in the first place when an application was made to the court and the owner could not be located, the magistrate would not deal with the matter without giving thought to the whole question; that he would, to some extent, regard himself as being required to watch the interests of the missing owner; and that he would not make his order without giving thought to the full effect of it. It is not as if the owner can be located but simply ignores the court. The magistrate deals only with those cases where the owner cannot be located. Hence there is no suggestion of his ignoring the court; and I feel sure that a court order would be based on mature consideration. For this reason, therefore, I feel that it might be better to delete the right of a subsequent review, but would like to hear the views of members before making a final decision as to whether the provision should be deleted.

Provision has been made to settle disputes regarding the actual boundary, and also to determine the exact position of the fence where, because of topographical features, it is impracticable to construct it on the actual boundary line: for example, where a cliff face happens to cut across the boundary.

Adequate provision has been made for fences erected before the new Act comes into operation, or fences which might subsequently be erected without taking advantage of the provisions of the Act. In such a case the owner who constructed the fence is empowered to claim one-half of the cost or value of the fence at a later date from an owner who has completed substantial buildings on the adjoining land.

or who has permitted the occupation of buildings on the land by another person. The person called upon to meet part of the cost or value of the fence may dispute the claim, and it is then brought before a magistrate who examines the facts and makes such order as he considers proper. It will be noted that in this provision it is not necessarily the cost of the fence which is involved, but maybe the value. This allows for changing values and also for depreciation of the fence because of the lapse of time.

In regard to repair of fences, similar provisions have been made. In certain emergency cases, where the fence has been destroyed by flood, fire, or similar incidents, either owner may immediately repair the fence and recover the cost; and likewise if it is destroyed by a falling tree, the fence may immediately be repaired and the whole cost recovered from the person owning the land from which the tree fell. In normal cases, where repairs become necessary because of gradual deterioration, one neighbour may serve the other with a notice setting out methods by which the fence may be repaired, and allowing the option for joint efforts by either party or work by a contractor. If the adjoining owner disputes the necessity he must so advise; and again the matter is brought before a magistrate in a court of petty sessions for determination.

It is, of course, to be hoped that recourse to the court will be infrequent and that the good sense of the neighbours will ensure that fences are constructed and repaired without the need for any litigation; but this Bill provides the methods to be followed where one or other of the neighbours does not show a commonsense approach.

Provision has also been made so that where a person with land on one side of a road has not fenced his boundary but makes use of the boundary fence of the land on the other side of the road, he is entitled to pay to the owner of the fence one-half of the cost of maintaining that fence. This supports the provision in section 335 of the Local Government Act under which such an owner is required to pay interest on one-half the value of the fence and also one-half of the cost of repairs.

Provision has been made also for the adjustment of the cost of fencing between a landlord and tenant in the absence of any agreement between them as to fencing or repair costs; and I think this will be found to be a satisfactory provision, being based on the length of time that the lease has to run.

Another provision deals with a case where an option of purchase is given on land and, subsequently, before the option is exercised, a fencing order is issued or a fence erected at the cost of the owner who is prepared to sell. In such a case a share of the cost of the fence is to be added to the purchase price mentioned in the option, as the new owner will acquire an improved asset because of the construction of the fence. The Bill provides for the right of entry to construct or repair a fence; and it makes express provision for the service of notices. The Governor is given power to make regulations which may be found necessary under the Act.

The final provision to which I wish to draw attention is one which stipulates that the Act does not bind the Crown. I am fully aware that many people would like to see the Crown bound in respect of boundary fences abutting on Crown land and reserves, but this liability could not be accepted and so, to make the position quite clear, the Bill has set it out. I commend the Bill to the earnest consideration of members of this House.

Debate adjourned, on motion by The Hon. F. J. S. Wise.

MOTOR VEHICLE (THIRD PARTY INSURANCE) ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

THE HON. L. A. LOGAN (Midland—Minister for Local Government) [5.49 p.m.]: I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

This is a very simple Bill and should not cause any controversy at all. In order that the position may be understood, I should like to trace the history of compulsory third party insurance in this State.

The first provision for compulsory third party insurance was made in the original Act, No. 32 of 1943, which required that the owners of all motor vehicles must insure those vehicles against third party risks. The insurance was carried out by contract between each vehicle owner and the insurance company of his choice. In order to ensure that the charges made were reasonable, and also that the cover given was adequate, provision was made in the original Act, in section 31, for the appointment of a premiums committee which the Governor was authorised to appoint from time to time.

Section 32 of that Act imposed on the premiums committee the duty of reporting when any of the premiums charged for insurance were unfair or unreasonable; and if such a report were to be made, the Governor had power to proclaim the suspension of the Act. The committee had a purely negative function in that it could report only what were unfair and unreasonable premiums, but could make no recommendation or suggestion as to what was, in fact, a fair premium.

In 1948 the conditions were changed in that the Motor Vehicle Insurance Trust was constituted to operate on behalf of all the insurance companies. By subsection (5) of section 38, which was inserted by the amending Act, No. 31 of 1948, the trust was given power to determine the terms, warranties, and conditions to be contained in and the premiums to be charged for policies of insurance under the Act. This was, however, still made subject to the right of the premimus committee to report that the premiums charged were unfair, or unreasonable, and still allowed the Governor power to suspend the Act.

Because of this negative aspect of the committee's powers, the Act was amended by Act No. 40 of 1951 to make the power to determine the terms, warranties and conditions, and the premiums subject to the approval of the Minister. From that time forward, the Minister has been responsible for ensuring that any proposed increase in premiums was justified by the financial position of the trust and the results of its operations. This duty is a somewhat difficult one, and I consider that the Minister should have expert assistance in determining whether the charges are fair and reasonable; and that is why I introduce this Bill.

The Bill is short, and all the amendments are included in one clause. The first amendment is to clarify the duty of the committee as to reporting by making it quite clear that the report must be made to the Minister. The second amendment is to permit the committee to exercise a positive function and to make to the Minister such recommendations as the committee thinks fit.

The next amendment deals with the constitution of the premiums committee. Under the Act as it exists, the premiums committee comprises six members and includes the Auditor-General as chairman: the General Manager of the State Government Insurance Office; two persons appointed to represent owners of motor vehicles, one residing in the metropolitan area and one outside of that area; with another two persons appointed to represent the trust.

The amendment I submit provides for a committee of six members including a practising member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants who is to be the chairman, the General Manager of the State Government Insurance Office, a person to represent the participating insurers that are not members of the Fire and Accident Underwriters' Association of Western Australia, and one person to represent the insurers that are members of that association. In addition, there is to be a person representing the Royal Automobile Club and one person to be nominated by the Minister. At this point I would like to say that, so far as I am concerned, the person to be nominated by the Minister will be a representative of the Treasury.

I have taken from the Auditor-General the responsibility of acting on the committee because he already has so many functions to exercise that I think it only fair to relieve him of this one. I therefore propose that a practising chartered accountant shall be appointed in his stead, confining Government representation to the General Manager of the State Government Insurance Office.

I do not think it fair to the trust or to the members concerned that representatives of the trust should be on the premiums committee, hence the representatives of the insurers are to be appointed on a nomination from the two groups, and are not to be trust members.

The representative of the motorists is to be nominated by the Royal Automobile Club, as I feel that this is the most satisfactory method. The last person to be appointed by the Minister will be a person who, from time to time, is considered suitable to achieve a proper balance on the committee as a whole.

The next amendment is to provide that the remuneration of the committee members—and I do not think that these men should be asked to give their time free of charge in every case—is to be paid from the insurance fund; that is, it will be met by the premiums charged for insurance policies. The next amendment is to repeal subsection (3) of section 31 because, in view of the nomination method of making appointments, it is no longer appropriate.

The Bill could be given further attention in Committee and any doubtful point could then be cleared up. Tonight I laid on the Table of the House the balance sheet of the trust, which shows that last year there was a profit because of the increase in premium rates. However, it still shows an over-all deficit of some £50,000.

The Hon. G. Bennetts: How does the country compare with the metropolitan area?

The Hon. L. A. LOGAN: The figures for the country are about the same as those for the metropolitan area. Because of the blitz that has recently been conducted against traffic offenders, and because of the news in this evening's Press, I am hopeful that no further increase in premiums will be required; because this is the correct method of dealing with premiums, rather than increasing them continuously to meet the cost of accidents.

If the police blitz on traffic offenders is successful, then the motorist—who after all has to pay the premium for motor vehicle insurance—should be thankful he is being assisted in this matter by the reduction of accidents. We are fortunate, however, in that our premium rate is the lowest in Australia; and, of course, we want to keep it that way. In some of the Eastern States the premium figures are double those of Western Australia.

The Hon. F. R. H. Lavery: They make double the payment over there.

The Hon. L. A. LOGAN: I do not think so. It is only a very small percentage of the total. To comment on the Bill I have just introduced, I would like to say that representation was made to me last year by the trust for an increase in premiums because of the losses suffered by the trust. Having referred to the Act, I found there was a premiums committee which should have been able to deal with this matter. But I discovered that the committee could only report to me if the premiums were not fair and reasonable. I set up a committee under the Act and asked its members to report to me; and that is what they did. They reported that the premiums were not fair and reasonable. To my mind the Act contained a purely negative provision. The report gave me no indication whether the premiums should go up or down, because the committee was not empowered to do more than it had done.

Accordingly I set up my own committee of inquiry and asked it to advise me whether the increased rates were fair and reasonable; and we eventually gave the trust only 25 per cent. of the amount it sought. I am happy to say that although the chairman of the trust in his report said that it was not enough, it did help to stop the losses shown the year before, and a slight profit was shown. I mention that to show how unsatisfactory was the position in which the premiums committee found itself. Nor was my position as Minister at all satisfactory, because I was not able to get from the committee the information I required.

The Hon. J. G. Hislop: What is the number of outstanding unpaid claims?

The Hon. L. A. LOGAN: I am not sure, but the amount set aside to cover estimated outstanding claims is £1,700,000. Last year the lowest number of accidents was recorded; that is, in a period of four years. However, the report is on the Table of the House and will give the number of claims made. I commend the Bill to the House.

Debate adjourned, on motion by The Hon. E. M. Heenan.

MINES REGULATION ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

THE HON. A. F. GRIFFITH (Suburban —Minister for Mines [6.0 p.m.]: I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Prior to 1938, there was no provision in the Mines Regulation Act for the proper qualification of any person occupying the position of supervisor in a goldmine. Provisions of this nature did apply in our coalmines and in the metal mines of other States. The underground supervisor's certificate was introduced in 1935 to bring under control a difficult situation which came about through the big influx of new men to mining areas in the early '30's. The certificate is based on a minimum of five years' practical experience, and examination conducted by the board of examiners.

The mine manager's certificate of competency was introduced in 1939. It was based on a special course at the Kalgoorlie School of Mines, at a standard somewhat below the diploma which was introduced mainly to shorten the course in order that a reasonable number of qualified men might be available to the industry. Many of those qualifying for this certificate proceed to the diploma. The board of examiners considers that the standard of a mine manager's certificate should be raised, and proproses to issue a first-class certificate of competency, and a second-class certificate, as is done in Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia.

It is intended that the first-class certificates shall be based on the diploma of the School of Mines, and the second-class certificate on the existing mine manager's course. The introduction of these certificates is proposed by regulation, as has been the case with former certificates.

There are two main provisions in the Bill in relation to these matters. The first proposes in clause 3 that district inspectors appointed shall, in the future, hold the first-class certificate. The second provides, under subclause (1) of clause 4 for the introduction of the first-class certificate to replace the existing mine manager's certificate for those in charge of more than 25 men underground. Subclause (2) of this clause makes provision for a second-class certificate to replace the underground supervisor's certificate in respect of the supervision of a mine employing less than 25 men underground.

I desire to let members know that the status of persons at present employed is protected by the discretionary powers of the board of examiners and of the inspector of mines in addition to the statutory provisions. Clause 5 of the Bill refers to Sunday labour, and proposes to empower the Minister to authorise Sunday labour in Yampi Sound.

It is at present almost impossible for the company to hold a sufficient supply of broken ore to meet shipping requirements over the weekend at Cockatoo and Koolan Islands. This is because of the increasing size of ships now operating in the ore carrying business, as related to the limited bin space which is available. such limitation coming about because of the very rugged nature of the ground. Consequently, it is considered that permission for Sunday work should be granted in

those cases where additional work is necessary to secure the discharge of a ship on Sunday.

A revision of clause 6 is considered necessary to meet the advances made in plant, as a consequence of which, modern compact 20 horse power hoists now available, but not covered by existing provisions of the Act, may be used by mining companies. The addition of the word "vertical" is intended to clarify the meaning of the existing subsection. The intention of subclause (3) is to give the Minister power to extend the provisions of the section. It so happens that, in some cases, the proposals for mine development go beyond the statutory limits, while the equipment is quite capable of performing the work. It is desirable that the Minister should, in such cases, have authority to extend the general provisions within safe limits. I commend the Bill to members.

Debate adjourned, on motion by The Hon. E. M. Heenan, until Tuesday, the 12th September.

COAL MINERS' WELFARE ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

THE HON. A. F. GRIFFITH (Suburban —Minister for Mines) [6.4 p.m.]: I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

This is a short Bill, the purpose of which is to rectify an irregularity that exists in the constitution of the Coal Miners' Welfare Board of Western Australia. The board is a body corporate established under part III of the Coal Miners' Welfare Act, 1947-1957. When the principal Act was passed in 1947, the Collie Coal Miners' Union was known as the Australian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation Union of Workers, W.A. Branch, Collie.

The constitution of the welfare board provided that one of its members should be a member of that body. During the course of the years, the coalminers have disaffiliated from the federation, and their local union is now known as the Coal Miners' Industrial Union of Workers of W.A., Collie. It is in this connection that the present irregularity exists; and, from the legal point of view, it is considered not only desirable, but necessary, to amend the Act to meet this situation.

Clause 3 of the Bill provides for this to be done by a simple amendment to section 9 of the Act, subsection (2), paragraph (b), by deleting the reference to the Australian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation Union of Workers, W.A. Branch, Collie, and inserting in lieu the new name of the union, namely, the Coal Miners' Industrial Union of Workers of W.A., Collie. As previously indicated this is purely a machinery measure to meet an irregularity which, I understand, has existed for some time. This irregularity has now been discovered and it is desired to rectify the position.

Debate adjourned, on motion by The Hon. R. Thompson.

GOLD BUYERS ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

THE HON. A. F. GRIFFITH (Suburban —Minister for Mines) [6.7 p.m.]: I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

This brief piece of legislation is brought before the Chamber as a measure of major importance to the gold stealing detection staff of the Police Force. When introducing the parent Act some 40 years ago, the late Hal Colebatch, a former Minister for Education, and latterly Sir Hal, pointed out that the Gold Buyers Act was being brought before Parliament as a new measure, because it was considered the existing provisions in the Mining Act were ineffective in the prevention of gold stealing.

The Leader of the House said that the object of the Bill was to tighten up existing provisions in order to prevent the abuses in the goldmining industry then prevalent. The present law was introduced as an adaptation of the Victorian Act of 1915. Its main object was the prohibition of the purchase of gold, except by a licensed buyer; the assaying or smelting of gold, except by a licensed assayer; and the purchase of gold matter, except by the holder of a license to deal in gold matter. "Gold matter" is defined generally as meaning copper plates, slags, battery refuse, concentrates, precipitates, sands, slimes, etc., and also rich specimens of gold ore.

A main provision of the parent Act appears in section 36. This section places an obligation on a person in possession of gold to give a proper account for being in such possession. The Gold Buyers Act of 1921 has been amended only once since its passing, and that was in 1948.

The main amendment in 1948, as it concerns us in our debate upon this current Bill, was in respect of section 36. When the parent Act was passed, this section referred to the possession of gold alone. Through the passage of time, it became necessary to widen the scope of the section to cover "gold matter," and these words were inserted into the first paragraph of the section by the 1948 amendment. Through an oversight, the words "or gold matter" were not inserted into the second paragraph of this section in 1948.

The purpose of this Bill is to insert such words into this paragraph, and they are to appear directly after the existing word "gold" in the first line of the paragraph. The need for this has been known for some

time, but not until recently has the Act been challenged. The paragraph as it now stands can be interpreted so that a charge in respect of possession of gold matter could not succeed. This, for the obvious reason that the word "gold" alone is used.

The omission has apparently not come under the notice of defence counsel, or at least it has not been raised in court until quite recently, when, during a court case at Kalgoorlie, the point was made. The case related to the possession of gold matter. The defendant was convicted in this case, but only because the gold matter in his possession contained a portion of free gold. The provisions of section 36 of the Act have always been of importance, and are essential in the enforcement of the law. They are invoked in most cases of gold possession, and are of vital consequence to the police in the recovery of illicit gold matter.

The amendment, as I indicated earlier, is of vital consequence to the gold stealing detection staff, and is recommended by the Commissioner of Police. Failing its passage through Parliament, the commissioner could rely—now that the matter has been brought to light—on the prospects of a conviction on an alternative charge being preferred under the Police Act. Such procedure would not constitute an effective deterrent to gold thieves, because of the minor penalties existing under the relevant section of the Police Act.

Members will recall the widely publicised case of recently suspected gold stealing. This case amply showed the difficulties which the police are up against in pinning a case on gold thieves. Gold being of such value as a mineral, it is well known that the criminal will go to any lengths to conceal a theft to camouflage his actions; and, as we know, to set red herrings to mislead the hand of the law.

We are all agreed it is our responsibility as legislators to give the police every possible assistance we can. The amendment in weight of words could otherwise be treated lightly, but in view of all the existing circumstances and the experience of the past, a matter of its importance cannot be overlooked; and I feel sure it will commend itself to all members.

Debate adjourned, on motion by The Hon. E. M. Heenan, until Tuesday, the 12th September.

House adjourned at 6.14 p.m.

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, the 29th August, 1961

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The SPEAKER (Mr. Hearman) took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.