

Legislative Council,

Wednesday, 3rd April, 1918.

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

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

BILL—GENERAL LOAN AND INSCRIBED STOCK ACT AMENDMENT.

Read a third time and passed.

BILL—VERMIN BOARDS ACT AMENDMENT.

In Committee.

Hon. W. Kingsmill in the Chair; Hon. C. F. Baxter (Honorary Minister) in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—agreed to.

Clause 2—Amendment of Section 2:

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I move an amendment—

"That in Clause 2, paragraph (a), after 'or a public reserve' there be inserted 'or by the Government as owner of unoccupied Crown lands or abandoned leases.'"

The object of the amendment is to make the Government responsible for carrying out the same conditions on Crown lands as they are seeking to impose upon private owners of land. The Honorary Minister, in speaking on this point, said that in view of the immense size of the areas belonging to the Government which were unoccupied, and of which no use was made, it was, of course, impossible to carry out rabbit extermination on them at any expense within reason. I believe the Honorary Minister was correct in making that statement. But what is the result? There is no Australasian State which has yet cleared its lands of the rabbit pest, or even kept the rabbits down. The rabbit pest is now as bad in some of the other States as ever it has been. Indeed, the pest, in spite of all that has been done, is increasing in certain States. One of the causes of the failure to cope with the pest, we may take it, is the fact to which the Honorary Minister alluded. I was recently speaking to a prominent man in Western Australia, and, moreover, one who knows something about rabbits, and he said to me, "I understand that all the other States have the pest under control, and that in them there is no trouble with the rabbits at all." I was astounded at that remark because, having followed up the developments of the rabbit pest, I have found the fact to be quite the opposite. I shall give the Committee some information showing how rife the pest is in the Eastern States, and how necessary it is, if we are to deal with the rabbit, that we should take every possible precaution. One of these precautions must be to see that Crown lands, whether occupied or unoccupied, shall be so dealt with that they may not render useless the work done by the owners or occupiers of private lands. The

Honorary Minister, I consider, almost gave his case away when he said that no other State had applied to Crown lands such provisions as those contained in this Bill. The consequence, obviously, is that no other State has been able to keep the rabbits under anything like control. I shall now give the Committee a little information bearing on the pest. A man asked whether rabbits are more prolific in Australia than in England. Undoubtedly they are. The principal reason is the more genial climate here. In England a rabbit is often compelled by severe weather conditions, which of course affect its food supplies and consequently its virility, to reduce its litters to four a year. The most that the English climate allows the rabbit to have is eight litters a year. In Australia, on the other hand, there is no such limit. Here a rabbit may have 10, or even 11, litters in a year. Certain parts of Australia, such as the western district of Victoria, and the western Riverina of New South Wales, are ideal breeding homes for the rabbit. In England, too, the number in a litter is often down to four, while in Australia it ranges from five to nine. All the work of the farmers in the eradication of the pest will be rendered useless if the Government do not accept their share of the responsibility. I have here an extract from the "Argus" which states that the rabbits in the mallee are very bad, but that the efforts of the Government to combat them are far greater than ever before. This is the report of an interview with the Minister for Lands in Victoria. The Minister went on to say that unoccupied Crown lands and vacant blocks along the railway to Mildura had been described by an inspector as "rotten with rabbits." The inspector had declared that it was useless to prosecute farmers for having rabbits on their lands. The Minister explained that four new inspectors had been appointed and that poison carts had been supplied to the settlers, who had been induced to lend the fullest assistance to the destruction of rabbits. Farmers enlisted in this service were receiving 11s. per day from the department. The Minister concluded with the remark that the efforts of the Government would be rendered useless if they were not fully seconded by the farmers. I take a different viewpoint. I say that the efforts of the farmers in this State will be rendered useless if the Government do not take active steps to assist them. I have here another cutting from a Victorian newspaper which shows that while rabbit poisoning is being actively carried on in some of the mallee districts, the mallee farther out is being overrun by the pest. The suggestion is here made that free use of pastoral leases for several years should be granted to anyone who could keep the rabbit pest within bounds. It is stated that the methods adopted by the vermin destruction branch are ineffective, as poisoning, which commences in autumn, is slackened off at the end of March, as the close of the financial year is then approaching. This report states that the rabbits are now swarming in their millions and are so thick that dogs will not look at them; that they played such havoc with the wheat crops last season that the farmers are afraid of being driven off their blocks.

In my opinion, the same trouble will be experienced here, and all the efforts of the farmers will be rendered ineffective if the unoccupied Crown lands and abandoned farms are allowed to remain as breeding places. The Government should be made responsible for looking after their own part of the country.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: The hon. member's statement that rabbits have not been kept down in the Eastern States is quite correct. However, most of the trouble there is due to the fact that they have stopped poisoning in the interests of trapping and the trade in rabbits. The hon. member asks the Government to assume a liability which they could not carry out. Under the amendment the Government would have to accept the entire responsibility for the eradication of the pest. The hon. member says that rabbits breed on Crown lands. That, of course, is because the improved land provides no shelter for them. However, there is no getting away from the fact that the rabbits feed on the improved properties, and that if it were not for the improved properties the rabbits would not breed so rapidly. In view of the tremendous area of unoccupied Crown lands in this State it would be literally impossible for the Government to keep it all clean. The amendment would place upon the Government the entire responsibility for the eradication of the rabbit pest and would entail the expenditure of an incredible sum. We are doing what we can. We have a number of poison carts out now, and we are carrying out a great deal of fumigation. No other State has attempted so much as has Western Australia in the eradication of the rabbits. I hope the Committee will not agree to the amendment.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: The Minister's statement that the rabbits feed exclusively on improved land is altogether erroneous. They are to be found in millions in the Murchison country, which is virtually all bush land. Right along the rabbit-proof fence is to be found Crown land held under pastoral lease and virtually unimproved in point of cultivation. Then there is all the unoccupied poison country on the Murchison. Who is going to deal with that area? Thousands of miles of unimproved land on the Murchison is carrying immense hordes of rabbits. I admit the enormous cost entailed, but is it of any use undertaking the task unless we do it thoroughly? If we are to follow the lines adopted in Victoria we shall be in the same unfortunate position at the end of some years, notwithstanding all our expenditure. There are many places in regard to which, apart altogether from the amendment, the Government should accept the responsibility. Take for instance Moora or the Greenough Flats: there one finds unoccupied lands in the midst of large areas of settlement. The Government should readily accept the responsibility for the unoccupied land in such places. In the past the very proper complaint of the Chief Inspector of Rabbits has been that, although empowered to compel private landholders to kill the rabbits on their own areas, he is not provided with a single penny for the eradication of the pest on unoccupied Crown lands.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: We are doing it.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: There is no evidence of that, beyond the fact that you have purchased a few poison carts. Something must be done in respect of the unoccupied lands.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I cannot agree with the amendment. I would agree with it if I thought it possible for the Government to keep down rabbits on Crown lands. Experience has taught me that it would cost more to keep down rabbits on the Crown lands of Western Australia than the whole value of our wheat crop. Therefore we cannot afford to do it.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: You would let the rabbits have the wheat crop.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: We cannot afford to grow wheat, and put the whole of the cash returns into the eradication of rabbits. As in the other States, men will have to grow wheat in districts where they can keep down the rabbits. On the second reading I declared that leniency would have to be shown in the administration of the Bill. It will be impossible for a vermin board to enforce the provisions of the measure. If we could kill out the rabbits once and for ever, I would support the amendment; but we cannot do that. It represents an annual expenditure. If the rabbits were poisoned off in February until there was only one to the mile, by the following November they would be again in their thousands. I agree that the rabbits breed on Crown lands. Of that no man has had more bitter experience than have I. I have known them come off Crown lands and swarm across my clean property in tens of thousands. Many of the settlers outback will be compelled to leave their holdings. I can see nothing else for it. I do not see how the Government can afford to eradicate the pest from Crown lands. Later on, when wire-netting is available, the Government might fence along the railway lines or divide the unoccupied Crown lands into large paddocks, and wire-net those paddocks. Then they might be able to eradicate the pest inside those large areas, but at the present time the best the Government can do is to provide the poison free to the settlers and perhaps poison carts, and not enforce the provisions of the Bill too rigidly. It must be enforced with discretion, and leniency will have to be shown. I think the Government should give those who occupy land in rabbit infested areas their land rent free until such time as wire-netting is procurable.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: I support the amendment. In connection with poison weeds, inspectors go round threatening all sorts of pains and penalties if the weeds are not eradicated, and the same thing will occur in connection with the rabbit pest. At the same time the Government make no attempt to eradicate the pest from the reserves and Crown lands. It is not fair to say that the settlers should eradicate the pest, and the Government make no attempt to get rid of the rabbits from the areas which they own. In days gone by the Government recognised their liability by subsidising the boards. Now the Minister says the Government are recog-

nising their liability by distributing poison free and supplying poison carts. But there is nothing in the Bill which says that after the measure is passed the Government shall continue to provide poison free. If there was such a provision then I might be satisfied. If we pass the Bill as it stands the local boards will not only have to eradicate the rabbits from their own areas, but from the Crown lands and reserves as well, which are the breeding grounds for rabbits. Will the Minister give an assurance that the Government will meet the boards by providing free poison? Then the Government will be recognising their liability to a certain extent.

Hon. C. SOMMERS: This is a knotty problem which no Government in Australia has yet been able to solve. I would support the Government if the funds of the State would allow the work to be carried out on Crown lands. The Government might subsidise the vermin boards in the areas where the rabbits are over-running them, and the Government could assist in giving the boards poison, not free, but at a nominal cost. I should like to support the amendment, but I cannot see how the Government can bear the cost.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: Mr. Baxter put forward a strong reason why we should vote against the amendment. In none of the Eastern States are the Governments required to keep the land free from the vermin, and in no State would the task be so great as in Western Australia. The extent of the Crown lands in Western Australia is vastly greater than in any other State. Take Victoria, a small, closely and well-populated State, comparatively rich. Even Victoria did not consider it necessary to require the Government to keep the Crown lands free from vermin, and it would cost fifty times as much to keep the Crown lands free in Western Australia, as it would in Victoria. It is asking the country generally too much to say that the Government should keep the Crown lands and unoccupied areas free from the vermin.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I support the amendment. Some hon. members have made contrasts between this State and certain of the Eastern States, but these contrasts cannot be relied upon, because the conditions in this State are not similar to those in the Eastern States. So far as the Eastern States are concerned, it is possible to make a profitable business out of the rabbits, which it is impossible to do here. We have large scattered areas where the rabbits are spreading throughout the length and breadth, doing immense damage, with the result that we shall find many farms becoming deserted. If that is so, as the Minister has pointed out, undoubtedly something must be done in the way of the Government assisting in the eradication. If the Bill is intended to eradicate the pest the Government must come forward to assist the settlers, or worse consequences will follow. Under Clause 13 it is provided that it shall be the duty of the board to enforce the provisions of the Bill, and of the Rabbit Act of 1902. I recognise fully the tremendous cost to the Government to maintain a staff

of inspectors. These rabbits are feeding on the unoccupied Crown lands and partly improved lands that have become vacant. We hardly know where we shall be in a few years. If this enforcement is to be made against the owners of lands who have properties adjacent to Crown lands the responsibility will be too heavy, and it will be an unfair burden to ask the owners to bear. The Government have found it necessary to withdraw from councils and roads boards the subsidies which they paid in past years. If the Government own land on which the pest is breeding, and will not subsidise the vermin boards—for they are certainly not subsidising the municipalities—then it is an unfair burden to cast on the community because this pest is threatening the whole of the State. The expense undoubtedly will be heavy so far as the Government are concerned by reason of their assisting in the eradication of the pest. It is at the same time their bounden duty to assist those pastoralists and farmers who have to meet the obligations imposed upon them by the Bill. It seems to me that quite too heavy a burden is placed upon the farmers, having regard to the fact that the breeding grounds are provided by the Government. It is true that the Government have put up fences, but they only did their duty by erecting those fences. No doubt the Honorary Minister will take the point that the Government have already provided what was more than a subsidy by erecting those fences, but I should like to anticipate any such argument by repeating that it was only their duty to do so.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: In addition to the fact that the Government have erected the fences they have also gone to the expense of fencing all water supplies, and at present are giving a substantial subsidy by way of supplying free poison and also supplying poison carts. The main point at issue is that the amendment will give boards the power to levy a rate upon the Government. I hope the Committee will not agree to the amendment.

Hon. G. J. G. W. MILES: I cannot entirely agree with the amendment, as I realise that it would be a great power to give to a vermin board. The Government, however, should give an undertaking that they will be prepared to assist in keeping the vermin down on abandoned farms and leases. I am glad to see that the Government are doing something to keep vermin down on public reserves. If we can get some sort of undertaking in the direction I have suggested, I think that should meet the case.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: We have it on record that there are 650 or 700 abandoned farms. I take it that these farms are situated amongst those which are occupied. If there is no one to keep down the rabbits on the unoccupied farms, what is the use of those who are still in possession of their holdings going to the expense of destroying the vermin on their own properties? The Government should certainly take the responsibility of destroying the pest on the abandoned farms. I recognise the enormous expense the Government would be put to, but if we are to have this matter done efficaciously it must be at-

tended to thoroughly. The position is just as bad in the other States. I have a newspaper extract here which shows that the rabbits are now swarming on private holdings from Crown lands and are so thick in places that the dogs will not look at them.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: What State is that in?

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: In the mal-lee of Victoria. I am quoting from the "Australasian" of the 9th March, 1918. I am pointing out to the Committee the possibility of our having exactly the same complaints to make by and by. The Chief Inspector of Rabbits has declared that he is empowered to take action against holders of private lands, but the Government have not given him any money with which to do anything on the unoccupied lands. However, I have no desire to press the amendment to a division, but I hope the Government will recognise the importance of the question. I feel sure the Honorary Minister will try to do his best under the circumstances. With the permission of the Committee I will withdraw the amendment.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Hon. H. STEWART: I move an amendment—

"That the following new paragraph to stand as (b) be inserted:—(b) Strike out the definition of 'Manager' and in lieu thereof insert the following: 'Occupier' means the person for the time being entitled to possession of private lands, and includes the resident manager of the occupier where the occupier does not reside on the land."

In the Rabbit Act we find that there are definitions of "owner" and "occupier," and in the Vermin Act there are definitions of "manager" and "owner." We do not desire that there should be anything to impair the efficiency of the administration, and I think therefore it would be much simpler if we had common definitions to cover everything in both measures. If the amendment is carried, the Bill will be brought into line with that dealing with rabbits.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: The amendment moved by the hon. member is quite unnecessary. If it is carried it will necessitate an alteration of the parent Act. Moreover, if it is carried it will be misleading.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I intend to support the amendment, because I believe it will help to make things a little more definite, but the more I go into these two Bills the more I am convinced that they should be thrown out and replaced by one comprehensive measure. I am sure that if both are passed they will lead to confusion and litigation. The two measures could be satisfactorily merged into one, and we would then know what we were doing. The notices of amendments appearing on the Notice Paper make us shudder at the kind of Bills we are likely to get if all are carried.

Amendment put and negatived.

Hon. H. STEWART: I move an amendment—

"That paragraph (b) be struck out and the following to stand as (c) be inserted in lieu:—(c) 'Owner' means: (i.) any per-

son entitled to an estate of freehold in possession of any land granted by the Crown; or (ii.) any person holding any land under any lease or license or promise of any lease or license from the Crown; or (iii.) the person in whom is vested any land taken or appropriated under the authority of any statute authorising land to be taken or appropriated for the purpose of any private undertaking; or (iv.) the person or body having control of any public reserve or in or by whom any public reserve is vested or held, and includes any person deriving title from or through any such person."

My object in moving the amendment is to avoid trouble which will be bound to arise if we have the various definitions. The amendment which I have suggested is well worthy of consideration even if it means an alteration of the two principal Acts. If the amendment is carried, the definitions of "owner" will be brought into line. It is a common proposal, and the definition as submitted by this amendment is the same as that which occurs in the Rabbit Act. The amendment which I proposed before was only for the alteration of the word "manager" to that of "occupier." I think the Committee are afraid that when a layman points out a matter of this sort he is probably on unsound ground from the point of view of the draughtsmanship. Surely, when there is a broad principle, that position can be safeguarded by the Parliamentary Draughtsman, so long as the intention of the Committee is made clear?

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I do not see that there is any need for the amendment. The definition in the Bill already covers all that is suggested by the hon. member.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I support the amendment. It would simplify the Vermin Bill to have it included. I do not think there is the slightest objection to it.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I do not intend to support the amendment. It is always advisable, in the case of any Acts in which it is desired to include the whole of a class of people who might come within the definition, as in the case of the word "owner," not to specify or particularise in any way, as suggested by Mr. Stewart in his amendment. If we made a definition specific, as it would be under this amendment, the result might be that at some time or other it might be discovered that some particular body or individual had been left out, who should have come within the scope of the definition. By making a wide definition such as is contained in the principal Act, and in the amending Bill as it now reads, it will be much more comprehensive than that suggested by Mr. Stewart.

Hon. H. STEWART: My object is to get uniformity between the Vermin Bill and the Rabbit Bill. My point would be quite as well gained if, when the Rabbit Bill comes before us, the definition of "owner" in the Vermin Bill as it now stands, and which is already comprehensive, was carried as an amendment to the Rabbit Bill. What we want is the best and broadest definition. As the matter has been discussed in this way I would like to withdraw my amendment.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 3—agreed to.

Clause 4—Substitution of new sections for Sections 9 and 10 and amendment of Section 16 (elected boards and periodical retirements):

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I move an amendment—

“That at the end of paragraph (1) of the proposed new Section 9 the following words be added: ‘The majority of whom shall be pastoralists.’”

There are two classes of vermin boards, one nominated by the Government and the other elected. It appears that six or seven road boards have now been formed into vermin boards, and they will probably continue to be kept in operation by periodical elections. My idea in connection with elected boards is that the majority of members should be pastoralists, because these are the people most concerned in the extermination of vermin on their land. It is much better that they should have most say in the conduct of the board than, for instance, the local blacksmith or the store-keeper.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: How would you define a pastoralist?

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I should say, as a person who kept stock.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I hope the Committee will not agree to the amendment. It will be tying the hands of the Government, and prevent the free selection of representatives to serve on the board. It would be difficult, I think, to find enough pastoralists to go on the board. The proposal would be a detriment rather than an improvement.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: This only applies to nominated boards.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Outside the North-West I think it would be impossible to comply with this amendment.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I understand it is not compulsory to make road boards vermin boards, and that there are some road boards in the wheat belt which do not intend to act in that other capacity.

Hon. C. F. Baxter: Quite true.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: In that case it would be difficult to find the necessary number of pastoralists to act on the vermin board.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I should say there would be plenty who would act.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I certainly agree that the men who are most affected should be those to serve on the board. I am not, however, quite sure whether it would be wise to make this amendment, because there might be some cases in which it could not operate.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: I am unable to support Sir Edward Wittenoom's amendment. His scheme might be all very well for pastoralists, but this measure will also apply to farming areas in the wheat belt, where the Government might find it hard to secure even one pastoralist. The matter of appointments to vermin boards should be left entirely to the Government. As regards the succeeding paragraph of this clause I shall have something to say later.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: Of how many members do the Government propose that a vermin board shall consist? My amendment deals with nominated boards. In the first instance, vermin boards in new districts are to be nominated by the Government. I have in my mind the huge areas of pastoral country, where the great difficulty is to get men to act on boards, to induce them to travel very long distances from their homes for the purpose of attending meetings. Suppose a board of six are to be appointed, and the Government nominate a blacksmith, a store-keeper, and a hotel-keeper. These would be all local men, and no doubt good men in their way; but they would not be of much use in administering a measure such as this. Of course I do not presuppose that the Government would appoint such a board; but, still, the thing might occur.

Amendment put and negatived.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: It is well understood that many roads boards are to be appointed vermin boards. But the members of roads boards are elected on a franchise totally different from that provided by the principal Vermin Act. Paragraph (2) of this clause provides that the members of a board appointed by the Governor shall vacate office on the second Wednesday in April of the year following their appointment, when an election is to be held. But Section 13 of the principal Act provides a franchise on the following basis: a man shall have one vote if he holds 10,000 acres, and two votes if he holds between 10,000 and 100,000 acres, and three votes if his area exceeds 100,000. In the wheat belt holdings would very rarely exceed 10,000, and thus the franchise established by the principal Act would have no application. The roads board franchise is on the unimproved value of land, and the unimproved value of even a small farm might be far greater than the value of 10,000 acres of pastoral land. I move an amendment—

“That the following be added to paragraph (2) of the proposed new Section 9: ‘upon the same qualification as exists in the Roads Act, 1911, Section 29.’”

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: This amendment is inconsistent with Section 13 of the principal Act, which distinctly lays down how elections to vermin boards are to be made; and that section would have to be repealed if this amendment was carried. I do not quite know what Mr. Hamersley intends. Does he desire that the whole of the voting shall be under the Roads Act?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: The point raised by Mr. Hamersley is very important, because the Vermin Boards Act, as it stands, is clearly intended to apply almost exclusively to large pastoral areas. Section 12 of the Act gives the right to vote to every person who is an elector under the Roads Act, 1902; but the succeeding section sets out the number of votes which voters shall have, and clearly shows that the Act was intended to apply only to districts in which there are large pastoral holdings, inasmuch as voting power is conferred according to the area held, starting with a minimum of 10,000 acres. The inten-

tion of this amending Bill is that vermin boards shall be established in the agricultural districts; and, to my mind, that obviously sets up a necessity for providing the number of votes which persons holding land within agricultural districts shall have. Perhaps the best way of meeting the difficulty would be to make separate provisions for voting in pastoral and in agricultural areas. I know the Honorary Minister is quite willing to have this clause further considered.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: Some time ago I indicated this discrepancy to the Honorary Minister, and I hoped that he would be prepared to place the matter on an equitable footing. Section 13 might very well be deleted from the principal Act. If voting power under this measure were put on the same footing as voting power under the Roads Act, it would apply to the whole of the pastoral areas under vermin boards, just as to areas under roads boards, because those pastoral areas have their own system of voting under the valuations of the holdings. The amendment would make no difference to those areas, because they would still have their qualifications, and it would meet the views of those persons who have to find the bulk of the rates. It is not fair that a man who pays only £1 per annum in rates should have the same voting strength as another who pays £50 or £60. I am not wedded to my amendment. I moved it in the hope that the Crown Solicitor would be able to put it in order.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: If the hon. member will withdraw the amendment I will have one drafted on similar lines.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: It all goes to justify my bringing forward of the amendment which was rejected just now. Clearly it was intended that pastoralists should constitute the vermin boards. There is no necessity to appoint a vermin board if it is to be elected on the same franchise as a roads board. I am opposing that. Vermin boards consisting of men who understand the question will do a very great deal more than any ordinary roads board.

Hon. G. J. G. W. MILES: I was pleased to hear the Minister say he would have a similar amendment drafted. I think Section 13 should be deleted from the principal Act. We should have vermin boards elected on a system of plural voting.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I support the amendment. It should be made compulsory for a roads board to act as a vermin board. If any man is not prepared to act in the dual capacity he should resign and allow another to take his place.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: The clause which we are discussing purports to amend Sections 9 and 10 of the principal Act. The section of the principal Act which deals with the question of number of votes is Section 13. I think Mr. Hamersley should fall in with the suggestion of the Honorary Minister and withdraw his amendment, on the undertaking that an amendment dealing with Section 13 and the number of votes will be drafted and submitted.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: I ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 5—Amendment of Section 22:

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Under Section 22 the board may appoint a clerk, but has no power to appoint inspectors. I move an amendment—

“That the words ‘and inspector,’ in line 2, be struck out, and ‘and such inspectors as may be necessary’ inserted in lieu.”

A board may find need for a number of inspectors.

Amendment (that the words “and inspector” be struck out) put and passed.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I move an amendment on the amendment—

“That ‘and other officers as the board may deem necessary from time to time’ be added to the words proposed to be inserted.”

It is quite possible that, apart altogether from the appointment of inspectors, the board may require other officers.

Amendment on the amendment put and passed; the amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I move an amendment—

“That at the end of the proposed new Subsection 3 the words ‘But if he is appointed as such his seat on the board shall forthwith become vacant’ be added.”

An inspector of the board will be a paid servant of the board, and therefore he should not have a seat on the board.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: In many instances the members of the board will be found ready to take on the duties of inspectors in an honorary capacity. I think the difficulty would be overcome if we inserted the word “honorary” before “inspector.”

Hon. G. J. G. W. MILES: I cannot agree with the amendment. I support the suggestion made by the Minister. In outback districts very often a member of a roads board acts in an honorary capacity as the inspector of a fence or a road. I am in favour of allowing a member of the board to act in an honorary capacity as inspector.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: I am not sure that the word “honorary” would carry the interpretation intended by the Minister. I have heard of persons acting in an honorary capacity and receiving payment. I suggest we should add the words “but any inspector who is a member of the board shall not receive payment for his services.”

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I do not think many will be found ready to act as vermin inspectors in an honorary capacity. My experience in South Australia was that the board had to offer a good salary and get a man fairly thick in the hide to take on the duties of inspector. The difficulty would be overcome if my amendment were extended by the addition of the words “unless such inspector is acting in an honorary capacity.”

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: It would be undesirable for a board to appoint one of its members to be a paid inspector. In my opinion the suggestion I have made would meet the difficulty.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I ask leave to withdraw my amendment.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: I move an amendment—

“That the following be added to the proposed new Subsection 3.—‘any inspector who is a member of the board shall not receive payment for his services.’”

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

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Clauses 6, 7—agreed to.

Clause 8—Insertion of new section after Section 35:

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I move an amendment—

“That in line 2 of the proposed new Section 35a, after ‘seven’ the word ‘nine’ be inserted.”

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

Clause 9—Amendment of Section 39:

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: This clause does not seem to be quite clear. I should like to know what it means. I think it refers to the joining of two districts and paying for a portion of the rate in a different district.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: This clause gives power to rate for portion of a fence in an adjoining district. If the fence is used as a stock fence it is rated as such, but if it is used as a vermin fence, then it is rated as a vermin fence. I move an amendment—

“That the following words be added to the proposed new subsections:—‘And the said section thirty-nine is further amended by deleting the words ‘at the rate of five pounds per centum per annum’ in subsections 1, 2, and 3 thereof, and inserting the words ‘at the prescribed rate’ in lieu of the words so deleted in each subsection.’”

It must be obvious to members that money cannot be borrowed at five per cent.

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

Clause 10—agreed to.

Clause 11—Amendment of Section 43:

Hon. H. STEWART: I move an amendment—

“That the following words be added to the clause:—‘And by inserting after the word ‘measures,’ in line 5, the words ‘including the laying of poison.’”

In section 43, if an owner neglects to comply with the requirements of the board, then measures may be taken to destroy the vermin. Before poison can be laid on any holding, seven days’ notice has to be given. I want to avoid the giving of two periods of seven days’ notice.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: There is provision already in the Act in regard to this, but there is no objection to the amendment.

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

Clause 12—Amendment of Section 46:

Hon. H. CARSON: I move an amendment—

“That the following words be added:—

“The Board may grant permits to any per-

son to trap rabbits and dispose of rabbits and rabbit skins within the district of the board, subject to the like conditions.’” These permits would be granted at the discretion of the board. There are four railway lines in my district, and it is in the interests of the settlers that we should make use of the rabbits and rabbit skins. This would provide funds for the further destruction of the rabbits.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I strongly oppose the amendment. When any attempt has been made to commercialise the rabbits, greater difficulties have arisen in eradicating the pest. We shall increase rather than decrease the pest. We do not want to foster the rabbit trade. If we commercialise the rabbits we might as well do away with sheep.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I have an open mind on this matter. I have not had any practical experience of the rabbits, but it seems that if we can get rid of 500,000 or 600,000 rabbits and the rabbits are used for food, and the skins are treated as a commercial commodity, then some good would result; but the general consensus of opinion amongst settlers is against commercialising the rabbit. If the rabbits are fostered, then they breed more quickly. The object of the amendment is to give these people permission to utilise the rabbits so far as the flesh and skins are concerned. But whether this would have any effect in connection with the commercialising of the rabbit, I am not able to say. I have here evidence of what happens as the result of allowing rabbits to be used in a commercial way. The Minister for Lands in Victoria (Mr. Clarke) said—

In view of the fact that the Imperial authorities did not require the surplus of Australian rabbits, all concessions respecting the poisoning of rabbits had been cancelled. Permission to trap instead of poisoning rabbits within a 20-mile area of chilling plants had only been granted in order to meet what was then represented the urgent need of the Imperial Government for rabbits. Arrangements were now being made for the carrying out of a vigorous poisoning policy, and the co-operation of district settlers and landholders was being sought. Crown lands would be included in the areas to be systematically worked.

I hope the Hon. Minister is listening.

Hon. C. Sommers: That is very convincing, too.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I have further evidence here in connection with trapping in Victoria. This is an extract from the “Australasian”—

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.

Concessions were going to be given to allow people to trap on account of the British Government requiring the rabbits, but now that the British Government could not deal with them, a cancellation order had been issued. So far as I can hear, the trapping for commercial purposes has the effect of increasing the number of rabbits. The men who work at this business reduce the number of rabbits in a certain area to very small dimensions and when they have practically cleaned up that place they go to another area, and after having worked there for six months return again to the former area, which is once more ready for trapping. Taking the matter into consideration, and after giving it careful thought, and weighing the evidence which I have read to hon. members, I feel compelled to vote against the amendment.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: I understand that rabbits can only be poisoned successfully in the summer time and that in the winter they rarely take the poison, because the feed is green and succulent. If it is not possible to poison the rabbits in winter, it would therefore be as well to allow settlers to do what they can in the way of destroying them by trapping, and if they can trap the pest in the winter and make a profit, it seems to me that they should be allowed to do so, so that they might turn their action to profitable account.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: By using different baits poisoning can be effectively carried out throughout the year, though of course not quite so successfully in winter time as in summer time.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I intend to support the amendment because it only proposes to grant permission to trap rabbits and dispose of them within the district of the board. The matter is optional with the board. I presume at Williams the board there would not grant this permission, because the rabbits are scarce in those parts. There was a time when I would have opposed this, but to-day, when we have rabbits with us, it is a different proposition. I speak on this question from years of experience. No landholder need allow any trappers on his land unless he likes, even if the board gives them permission to trap on his property.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: This will enable them to go anywhere provided they get a license.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: Not to trap on private lands. I differ from the Honorary Minister when he states that poisoning can be carried out successfully all the year round. It is a long way cheaper, in my opinion, to dig out burrows and fumigate them and trap in winter than it is to poison the rabbits. It is not possible to successfully poison during winter when there is green feed about. Poisoning can be carried on in summer when the feed is dry. That is the cheapest and most effective way of eradicating rabbits. But we must always keep this in mind, that we will never

eradicate rabbits in Western Australia no matter if we try for 100 years. The Minister says that trapping increases rather than decreases the rabbits. There was a time in the history of Victoria when it was a better proposition to grow rabbits than sheep. Victoria has exported millions of pounds worth of rabbits. At the present time I take this view. Farmers are compelled to kill rabbits to be able to grow wheat. When a man has killed a rabbit and he has that rabbit in his hands, and it is worth 1s., why should he be compelled to throw it away? If he marketed the rabbit the revenue he would derive would go towards the cost of eradication. Then again, in normal times, when it would be possible to export skins, which will be worth from 3s. to 4s. a dozen, it would pay handsomely for a farmer to trap the rabbits on his property.

Hon. E. M. CLARKE: I support the amendment because we are working on the assumption that the measures adopted hitherto have been a success. There is no doubt that the fences have proved a failure. Now we have no proof that the rabbits can all be poisoned. The whole of the power of granting a license will rest with the board, and if they see that a license is being abused it will be within their power to cancel the license, but as it has been pointed out, here we have a section of the community who are compelled to keep their land free from rabbits and then we dictate to them as to how they shall do it. I fancy they know better how to do it than those who will be administering the Act. It is said that if rabbits are trapped they will increase in numbers, but so will they increase in numbers if we poison them. I think that the matter is thoroughly safeguarded by giving the board power to grant or take away the licenses. We have heard about trapping in the other States, and it is true that millions of pounds worth of rabbits have been exported. I fancy now that we should be on the right track if we allowed trapping to be carried out here.

Hon. E. ROSE: I intend to oppose the amendment. I was sorry to hear the remarks of my colleague, Mr. Clarke. He evidently is thinking of the time when we had only tame rabbits amongst us, but now the rabbits are invading us in hordes. Not many months ago I attended with a deputation of representatives of the agricultural societies and of the pastoralists of the State, who waited on Mr. Willmott, the Honorary Minister, and asked him not to allow permits to be granted for the trapping and sale of rabbits. The deputation pointed out that it would be against the interests of Western Australia to allow the trapping and sale of rabbits. It is a well-known fact that in the Eastern States, where trapping has been carried on, the rabbits have increased much more rapidly than would have been the case otherwise. Hon. members have stated that a lot of money is to be made by the sale of rabbits and their skins. We know that the sale of rabbits in Western Australia would be a small item for a long while to come. Only the larger rabbits would be destroyed and the smaller ones would be allowed to go untouched. On these grounds I oppose the amendment.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: The department for the past 12 months has been carrying out a policy which the amendment desires to put into effect. In the report of the select committee appointed by another place it is stated that in the past 12 months the department has permitted the marketing of trapped rabbits on payment of a license fee of 2s. 6d. and numbers of settlers have earned a considerable sum of money where the train service has permitted the marketing of the rabbits. In that report there is also a recommendation to the effect that notwithstanding the deep-rooted objection to trapping by the department no restriction should be placed on bona-fide farmers and their employees in the trapping and marketing of rabbits, and that all fees in connection therewith be abolished. The amendment proposed is in accord with that recommendation, and also in accord with what the department has been carrying out for the past 12 months.

Hon. H. STEWART: I rise to oppose the amendment, unless the position is further safeguarded. Trapping undoubtedly establishes a vested interest and is against the eradication of the pest. If the Government were to establish a safeguard along the lines of the recommendation of the select committee, which is that no restriction should be placed upon bona-fide farmers and their employees in the trapping and marketing of rabbits, the clause would do considerable good. The clause might be amended to read as affecting the owner or occupier.

Hon. H. CARSON: It is a wise thing in my opinion to utilise the rabbit. In my district we have a coast line of many hundreds of miles in length, along which there are millions of rabbits. The Greenough and Dongarra districts are probably the richest agricultural districts in the State, and it would be advisable to allow the people there to trap rabbits and gain some advantage from them. This would also tend to decrease the numbers of the pest. The rabbits are increasing, there is no doubt, and it would be advisable to pass the amendment.

Hon. H. STEWART: I move a further amendment—

“That the amendment be amended by striking out the word ‘person’ and inserting ‘manager or owner’ in lieu.”

Hon. H. MILLINGTON: This appears to be a rabbit conservation Bill. Only the owner or occupier is to be allowed to trap rabbits. It may be that other people would be only too pleased to do so. Although the vermin boards are to be given so much power it appears that they are such dunderheads that they are not to be allowed to say who shall trap rabbits. If we have many other restrictions the boards will have no discretionary power whatever, and there will be no need to appoint any. I support the amendment which stands in the name of Mr. Hickey. It would rest with the board as to whether there was any trapping or not. I have confidence in the vermin boards, and do not feel inclined to restrict them in the way proposed by Mr. Stewart.

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: The object of Mr. Stewart is to carry out the exact words of the Committee's recommendation. In that event the words which he ought to use are “bona fide farmers.”

Hon. H. STEWART: I am agreeable to that.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The interjection made by Sir Edward Wittenoom with regard to the power which this section would give is well founded. If it be intended that the farmer or the owner of land should have the right to trap rabbits within his own area that should be clearly stated in the amendment. It would be unwise to pass the amendment moved by Mr. Hickey, as it might give the board power to enable trappers or others to go on the land of other persons. Something should be inserted to guard against that.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: The main object of the Bill is either the destruction of rabbits, or the checking of them as far as possible. There always will be a section of the people who look upon rabbits as part and parcel of their business. The question is, which is the better for the country, sheep or rabbits? There should be no doubt that the sheep and woollen industry must be far more important than the rabbits. If it can be proved that trapping will help to get rid of the rabbits, I see no objection to it, but all the experience goes to show that when one turns rabbit catching into a business, the pest immediately begins to multiply. We should be guided to some extent by the experience of the Eastern States. I must support the amendment.

The CHAIRMAN: I would point out that the question is not as to the trapping of rabbits, but as to who the person shall be who will trap the rabbits.

Hon. J. W. HICKEY: I have little to add to what I said on the second reading, but I am prompted to utter a word or two on account of Mr. Stewart's amendment on the amendment. It surprises me that such a motion should have been moved by the representative of a province which, though not at the moment affected, will very shortly be affected by the rabbit pest. I think we should be guided by the remark of Sir Edward Wittenoom, made early in the consideration of this measure, that the question for us to decide was whether the rabbit is or is not a pest.

The CHAIRMAN: I wish hon. members to confine themselves to the question actually before the Committee. After that question has been disposed of, hon. members will have ample opportunity of dealing with the amendment as a whole.

Hon. J. W. HICKEY: Is it not in the best interests of the people most concerned to confine the clause to a certain section of the community. The farmers in many cases will not have time to attend to rabbit poisoning; and, there being no labour available for the eradication of the pest, the result of carrying the amendment on the amendment will be that the rabbits will continue to increase. I see no danger in this connection, because the people who are to judge will be the people best qualified to judge. We can count on each

locality choosing the best means of dealing with the pest. The boards will have power to make regulations which will overcome all the difficulties that have been raised.

Amendment on the amendment put and negatived.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I think it must be obvious to hon. members that a system of wholesale poisoning of rabbits throughout the State with a view to their extermination cannot be carried on concurrently with a policy of selling the rabbit for food. In the Eastern States, where trapping permits are issued, poisoning is prohibited in the areas affected. Any board in this State issuing permits for trapping rabbits would have to prohibit poisoning during the term of such permits. The intention of this Bill is to arm the vermin boards with power to carry out the policy of the Act, which policy has been determined on the advice of the Government's expert advisers, and with due regard for the experience of the other States. The only safe policy is to endeavour to exterminate the rabbit by systematic poisoning from one end of the State to the other.

Hon. J. W. Kirwan: All the year round?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Yes.

Hon. J. A. Greig: No hope.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: The policy of wholesale poisoning cannot go on side by side with the trapping of the rabbit for the purpose of selling its flesh. If we adopt the latter principle we shall weaken our attack by wholesale poisoning. I do not think the slight result from the sale of rabbit flesh will compensate for the loss of efficiency entailed in the policy of wholesale poisoning. For that reason the Government cannot accept the amendment.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: In the Eastern States poisoning is permitted only near freezing works.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: And that has just been cancelled.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: In the back country, where no trapping is done, the rabbits are multiplying just as quickly as where trapping is permitted. My knowledge of that fact makes me support this amendment. If in the back country the rabbits were being kept under by poisoning any better than is the case in the neighbourhood of freezing works, I would not support the amendment. Moreover, rabbits fit for marketing purposes can only be trapped on the best country in the best of seasons. The skins of poisoned rabbits, however, can be sold just as readily as the skins of trapped rabbits. Poisoning cannot be carried on during the winter months of the year, when there is green feed. That I know from experience. The very choicest and most expensive of poisons would be needed for poisoning in the winter—apple jam poison, for instance. Therefore, trapping might well be permitted during the winter time. Farmers should be allowed to trap during the rainy season, and they should be permitted to make the best use of the rabbits they secure by trapping. In the Eastern States, January and February are recognised as the two months during which all land holders throughout the

State should poison simultaneously. That thins out the rabbits very much. Then, by trapping during the wet season, there is a chance of keeping the rabbits down. When the young rabbits, growing up, start breeding and bringing in their litters towards the end of the year, the tremendous increase begins. I hope the amendment will be carried.

Amendment put and a division taken with the following result:—

Ayes	7
Noes	11

Majority against .. 4

AYES.

Hon. H. Carson	Hon. C. McKenzie
Hon. E. M. Clarke	Hon. H. Millington
Hon. J. A. Greig	Hon. J. W. Hickey
Hon. J. W. Kirwan	(Teller.)

NOES.

Hon. C. F. Baxter	Hon. J. Nicholson
Hon. H. P. Colebatch	Hon. E. Ross
Hon. J. Duffell	Hon. C. Sommers
Hon. J. Ewing	Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom
Hon. V. Hamersley	Hon. H. Stewart
Hon. G. W. Miles	(Teller.)

Amendment thus negatived.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 13—Insertion of new sections in Part V.:

Hon. C. F. BAXTER (Honorary Minister): I move an amendment—

“That in the proposed new Section 46a, after the word ‘Act,’ line 3, there be inserted: ‘within the meaning of this Act or of the Rabbit Act, 1902.’”

Hon. J. W. KIRWAN: I understand we are going to amend the Rabbit Act. Therefore the Minister's amendment should include the words “and its amendments.”

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: In the first paragraph we find the words “the provisions of Part V. of the Rabbit Act, 1902.” In view of this, the Minister's amendment seems unnecessary.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I desire to withdraw the amendment. I will go into the matter with the draftsman.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I move an amendment—

“That in line 6 of the proposed new Section 46c the word ‘the,’ occurring before ‘road district,’ be struck out and ‘any’ inserted in lieu.”

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

[Clauses 14 and 15—financial—to be dealt with by Assembly.]

Clauses 16 to 22—agreed to.

New clause.

Hon. H. STEWART: I move—

“That the following be added to stand as Clause 10:—‘Section 40, Subsection 3, of the Act is amended by striking out “shall,” in the fourth line, and inserting “may,” in the third line, after the word “sum.”’”

It is dealing with the power of a board to enforce fencing and contributions. The general spirit of the principal Act is leniency towards holders who may find difficulty in meeting the demands. The existing provision is mandatory, and I propose to make it permissive.

The CHAIRMAN: The manner in which the amendment is put is out of order. The hon. member has reversed the order in which the words occur. "May" should be inserted first in the third line and "shall" subsequently struck out in the fourth line. For the symmetry of the draftsmanship I suggest that the amendment should be altered.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I take it that the hon. member's intention would be preserved and the section read more grammatically if he simply moved to strike out "shall" and insert "may." However, I cannot support the amendment. The provision as it stands is simply a statement of fact that a certain thing is recoverable, and it goes on to say that the board may recover in a certain way. As a matter of fact it is recoverable. If the hon. member wishes to give the board further discretion, that is a different point. The amendment he proposes really says that something which is, as a matter of fact, recoverable, may be recovered. I do not think the amendment is a good one.

New clause put and negatived.

New clause.

Hon. H. STEWART: I move—

"That the following be added to stand as Clause 19:—Section 54 of the Act is amended by striking out "shall," in the second line, and inserting the words "may unless the Minister decide otherwise." "

Again, this will make the provision permissive instead of mandatory. The Minister may desire to extend certain latitude to the board. At present the Minister has no such power.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I trust the Committee will not agree to the amendment. If we are to allow discretionary powers like this, there is no saying where it will end.

Hon. H. STEWART: If that is the view of the Minister, with the permission of the Committee I will withdraw the new clause.

New clause by leave withdrawn.

New clause:

Hon. H. STEWART: I move—

"That the following be added to stand as Clause 21:—Section 66 of the Act as amended by deleting the proviso therein." "

Following on the amendment of Section 44, after the period of seven days authority is given to enter and lay poison. The position is that no officer could enter and lay poison until another seven days had elapsed.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: I hope the Committee will not agree to the new clause. It is dangerous to allow poison to be laid without giving fair and reasonable notice. Take the case of sheep running in a paddock, and being hand fed; if pollard bait is used for poisoning rabbits, sheep accustomed to be fed would take the pollard bait.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: Does the Minister understand that this gives 14 days' notice?

Hon. C. F. BAXTER: Yes.

Hon. H. STEWART: This point was stressed by the Minister when introducing the Bill.

New clause put and negatived.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported with amendments.

BILL EMPLOYMENT BROKERS' ACT AMENDMENT.

Received from the Assembly, and on motion by the Colonial Secretary read a first time.

BILL—CURATOR OF INTESTATE ESTATES.

Message received from the Assembly notifying that the amendment made by the Council had been agreed to.

House adjourned at 8.52 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 3rd April, 1913.

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

[For "Questions on Notice" and "Papers presented" see "Votes and Proceedings."]

BILL—EMPLOYMENT BROKERS' ACT AMENDMENT.

Read a third time and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

BILL—CURATOR OF INTESTATE ESTATES.

Council's Amendment.

Amendment made by the Legislative Council now considered.

In Committee.

Mr. Stubbs in the Chair; the Attorney General in charge of the Bill.

Council's amendment—Clause 3—In the definition of "distribute" after the word "pay" in line 1 insert "deliver."

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: In the interpretation clause of the Bill the word "distribute" means to pay or divide the estate or property to or amongst the person or persons entitled thereto under any intestacy or under any will. The Legislative Council suggests that we should add the word "deliver" in the interpretation of "distribute." "Distribute" will then mean to pay, deliver, or