

which State Mr. Thomson and other members have alluded. This is what was done in Victoria: An agricultural land boom extended over a few years when the price of wheat was very high. During that period agricultural land was sold at extravagant prices and re-sold at still increased figures. Ultimately the industry reached a stage at which it was impossible for the farmers to carry on profitably. Their liabilities exceeded assets by £3,000,000. With the advantage of £2,500,000 that Victoria received from the Commonwealth for farmers' debt adjustment purposes, the board handling the work was able to make bargains with financial institutions which agreed to the payment of two-thirds of the indebtedness and to wipe off one-third. The banks did that voluntarily.

Hon. L. Craig: Did they pay that in cash?

Hon. J. M. DREW: Yes. The receipt of £2,500,000 from the Commonwealth meant that there was £500,000 short. That was repaid in cash and the banks were well satisfied. In some instances wheat land had been sold for as much as £20 an acre.

Hon. L. Craig: I should think the banks would be satisfied.

Hon. J. M. DREW: With regard to New Zealand, there had been a general land boom in the Dominion. Prices went up enormously and the prosperity of the country was threatened. The Government passed legislation with the object not only of reducing debts on agricultural land, but on all other forms of land used for every possible purpose. Then there was a measure along similar lines of principle passed by Australia in 1931.

Hon. J. Cornell: That was in an emergency.

Hon. J. M. DREW: Yes, a financial emergency, the effect of which was to repudiate.

Hon. J. Cornell: Interest on bonds was reduced by 22½ per cent.

Hon. J. M. DREW: To ensure the passage of a satisfactory measure, it appears to me that a select committee—I would prefer a joint committee representative of both Houses—should investigate the whole question, otherwise we shall have this legislation presented every session. While the manger is empty, the steed will be starving.

I support the second reading, and I trust members will recognise the seriousness of the situation. They should allow the Bill to go to a select committee in order to secure all the necessary information and to ascertain how the State stands with regard to the liabilities of the farmers.

On motion by Hon. H. L. Roche, debate adjourned.

*House adjourned at 3.42 p.m.*

## Legislative Assembly.

*Tuesday, 24th September, 1940.*

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

### MOTION—URGENCY.

#### *Agriculture Industry and Drought Conditions.*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have received the following letter, dated the 24th September, 1940, from the Leader of the Opposition:—

Sir,—I desire to inform you that it is my intention at the sitting of the House today to move under Standing Order 47A that the House do now adjourn to call attention to a matter of the utmost urgency, namely, the position arising as a result of the drought conditions throughout the greater part of the agricultural areas of Western Australia, particularly in regard to failure of crops, absence of stock feed, shortage of water, and the consequent financial problems of those engaged in agriculture. (Signed) C. G. Latham.

It will be necessary for seven members to rise in their places to support the proposal.

Seven members having risen in their places,

**HON. C. G. LATHAM** (York) [4.34]: I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

I regret the necessity for moving this motion. Those members who accompanied me on a trip of 700 miles through the agricultural areas last week suffered from the same feeling of depression that assailed me throughout that tour. I have been associated with farming in this State for 30 years, but never have I seen such depressed conditions as I did on this particular tour that I made with several other members. Particularly was the position bad in the country to the north-east and the eastern portion of the wheatbelt. It has been said in this House that certain retired farmers are living in the city and suburbs. Despite that statement, the financial position of farmers, particularly those in the eastern wheatbelt, is such that they find it impossible to carry on. Great difficulties would have been experienced without the drought from which we are suffering this year. To bring home to members what the drought conditions are like I point out that the total rainfall at Northam, which is usually about 21 inches annually, is, leaving aside the fall we had at the week-end, eight inches for this year. The fall tapered off to three inches at the extreme portion of the other districts we visited, and I believe it has tapered off still further in the Bencubbin area. I do not propose to cover all that we saw, but to leave it to representatives of the districts concerned to tell their own story. The conditions are indeed deplorable. A few miles from Nungarin I saw a large area of country without a vestige of greenstuff upon it. I stood on a hill and could see for probably five miles around me. The ground is almost as bare as one would expect it to be after a dry summer. It is no fault of the farmers that they find themselves in their present financial position. That is something over which they have no control. I assure the House that the temper of the people in the country is such that they feel like walking off their holdings in a body. A number of the younger members of the community have already enlisted. Had it not been for the fact that the defence authorities could take no more men into camp, there would I believe have been a complete evacuation of agriculturists from the areas concerned. I have prepared a list of the districts that

will be dealt with during the debate. We passed through Goomalling, where the rainfall was eight inches, through Dowerin, the rainfall of which I do not know, and through Koorda, where the rainfall was five inches. I am not referring to the growing period but to the rainfall for the whole year. In many districts  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches of rain fell in January, so that members can imagine how much rain was recorded during the actual growing period. Wyalcatchem is regarded as a good district but has had only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches of rain, and Trayning and Nungarin have had  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches each.

Mr. Berry: Over what period did Nungarin have  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches?

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I am giving the rainfall for the year.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: What is it for the growing period?

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I will come to those figures later.

The Premier: It is all very bad, no matter what you give.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Yes, Merredin has had four inches, Narembeen four inches, and Bruce Rock  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Last year Narembeen and Bruce Rock had average yields of 18 bushels to the acre, but the long dry summer and the fact that very little feed was available during the winter have resulted in practically all the food supplies of the people being absorbed. Quairading, which is also a good district, and has stood out as such for many years, has had a rainfall of five inches. Kellerberrin, from which is secured most of the chaff supplies for the goldfields, had a rainfall of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches, Cunderdin  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches and Northam 8 inches. The member for Brownhill-Ivanhoe (Mr. F. C. L. Smith) asked what was the rainfall for the growing period. I will give him some figures on that point. For instance, here is the rainfall for Nungarin: January, 3 points; February and March, nil; April, 10 points; May, 50 points; June, 63 points; July, 131 points; August, 11 points; and September, 40 points. Of course, the September figures would not include the rainfall at the week-end. However, the rainfall for Nungarin for the current year to date has been 3in. 8 points. That will give the House some idea of the recorded rainfall. Generally speaking, we found that in the areas traversed the stock had been turned on to the crops in order to keep going until shearing time. In most

districts shearing is in full swing now, and the clip is proving very much lower per head than that recorded during the previous season. What the farmers are up against is that their stock are eating the feed now, with the result that at the end of this month, or in October, there will be no feed left. One of the most deplorable aspects of the situation is that farmers have been rushing their sheep to market in an endeavour to find purchasers for them. The Minister for Lands will bear me out when I say that the yarding last week totalled about 19,000 sheep, whereas local requirements represented between 10,000 and 11,000 sheep. Members will appreciate the fact that if there is to be a weekly surplus of 7,000 or 8,000 sheep on the market, one result only will follow, namely, a total collapse of prices.

Mr. Mann: Another 19,000 are booked for this week.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: That is so. This means that the farmers will have no capital and certainly no income with which to carry on. I have a suggestion to make to the Minister for Lands, although I have not been able to ascertain whether effect could be given to it. I am fully convinced that there will be a great shortage of export lambs this year due to drought conditions, and I have been wondering whether we could use some of the marketable sheep that are fit for export mutton for the frozen lambs. The Old Country must require meat, and I know of no more favourable country than Western Australia from which supplies could be drawn. I know that shipping may present a difficulty.

The Minister for Lands: We have the Commonwealth Government trying to substitute mutton for some of the export lamb shortage.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I thought that would have been done, and I know the Minister does not want advice from me to urge him to take steps in that direction. When I suggested that something along those lines might be done, farmers were a little heartened. One man said he sold a certain number of weaners and all he could get for them was 4s. a head. It is a long time since I can remember sheep being sold at so low a price. The regrettable part of it all is that two and four-tooth ewes are being sold for butchers' meat. The Minister for Lands is fully aware that every available female sheep will be required for re-stocking North-

West holdings, quite apart from the requirements of the agricultural areas. When the drought breaks, as it must some day, there will be left very few female sheep with which to stock up the runs. That will be a serious problem and it means that the State will take many more years to stock up than under normal conditions. We should endeavour to conserve our resources now. At one siding—I think it was Trayning—2,000 sheep were put up for sale and the only bid received was for 60 weaners. No one wanted sheep, because there was no feed for them. The weaners represented a picked line and they were sold at 6s. a head. Members will realise the seriousness of the position from the farming point of view. It is not a question of the individual or of the industry itself, but a matter of a State's industry that is being retarded, simply because no one seems to be in a position to help. The farmers cannot help themselves, and therefore some assistance must be rendered to them. The member for Greenough (Mr. Patrick) made a tour of other parts previously and he came back with a far more cheerful story to tell. I know he has been in consultation with the Minister for Lands at conferences and I believe the outcome of the discussions will probably be of some benefit to the industry. I understand the maximum price of chaff has been fixed at £8 10s. per ton, but that does not mean that the farmer will receive anything like that amount. It means that the man who buys chaff cannot be charged more than £8 10s. for it, and it may provide an inducement to farmers to cut considerably more hay than they would otherwise contemplate doing. However, that will not be of advantage to the farmers in the areas to which I have been referring, because they have no credit or cash with which to purchase supplies. From that angle, something will have to be done.

The Premier: Who owns the sheep?

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: In some instances, if there is an element of ownership, the sheep are owned by the stockbrokers, or they may be under lien to the banks. In many cases they will be under lien to the Agricultural Bank. There can be very little value in them. The question is: Of what use is it for the Associated Banks or the Agricultural Bank to deal in sheep? No value attaches to the stock because there is

no market available, and the sheep will have to be fed. Whether the stock are fed on the farm or elsewhere would be a matter for those concerned to consider, but that will not be of assistance to the farmer. If the sheep are taken from the farmers, the latter will have no capital with which to replace the stock. I am looking to the future. The farmers at present find themselves with no income but only expenditure ahead of them for the year, and no credit available to enable them to purchase super, seed and chaff supplies, or to provide sustenance for themselves and their families. The action I have taken was decided upon because I think we may be able to do something for them by drawing public attention to the position confronting the men on the land.

The Premier: The farmer, like anyone else, is not allowed to starve.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: No.

The Premier: And he will not be allowed to starve.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: That is hardly the issue. The farmers are saying that they will walk off their farms.

The Premier: They would not be allowed to starve on their farms.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Two settlers have walked off their properties after having worked them for 30 years. On Wednesday night a farewell was tendered to one farmer who had walked off his holding after having been on it for that period.

Mr. Warner: And his three sons have gone to the war.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: That man said he had not a shilling to enable him to get away. I believe the man was a battler. Over a period of years there have been drought conditions and low prices, with the result that farmers have no reserves with which to carry on. There was a time when they were able to build up reserves, but adverse conditions have resulted in their resources dwindling away. Many of them now find themselves in an infinitely worse position than when they first went on the land. Northam has always been regarded as a safe farming district. As a matter of fact, I suppose there is no district in Australia which can be considered safer, but we find that while farmers there are able to get feed and chaff they have no income for the year and are definitely up against it. I hope that hon. members will not forget that this year will be an extremely

hard one because a much higher price has to be paid for everything purchased than was previously the case. The cost of commodities is becoming dearer and these people have no such thing as a basic wage. Their condition is worse than if they were part-time workers for the Government.

We have had requests, which seem to me to be very reasonable, for a release of wheat from the bins in order that stock may be fed for a time to enable them to be brought to a condition that will ensure their being marketed at a reasonable figure. I have been told that there is a lot of wheat in the agricultural areas in the bulk bins and that a fair amount of it is affected by weevils. The marketable value of that wheat should be determined and steps taken to make it available to these farmers. It is no use, however, taking the wheat out of the bins and giving it to farmers who require it and at the same time leaving the rest of the farmers to find the credits, because the other farmers are almost in the same unfortunate financial position as are the men who require the wheat. But if a sum of money could be made available for the purchase of this wheat at a fair price—and I am talking of damaged wheat and not the first-grade article—we would do much to assist the men in need. They would be enabled to carry on their sheep for a time at least. No man can feed his sheep entirely on wheat and expect them to thrive. They must have a percentage of roughage. On many of the farms we inspected we saw crops lying on the ground like a lot of burnt-up grass with no food value at all.

I do not know to what extent the Government can assist in the transport of chaff, but I fancy that a fairly large sum will be required for that purpose. I do not know whether there are sufficient chaff sacks in the State to meet the requirements; probably there will be if the chaff is not shifted in large quantities at a time, because second-hand bags will be suitable. A more important matter is the provision of seed wheat for next year. I want to draw the Premier's attention to the fact that the seed will have to be put into new corn-sacks. Second-hand sacks cannot be used to transport it over the railways. I do not know whether arrangements have been made to provide sufficient new sacks for

that purpose. Such stacks will have a value after they have been empty, and provision should be made for a supply. Of course the farmer will say, "I am not going to bother about providing seed wheat unless I can obtain a reasonable price." That fact has to be faced, but it is no use putting on a very high price and transferring the liability to a set of farmers whose financial position does not permit of their carrying it.

The Premier: Those farmers should not look at the matter from a selfish viewpoint all the time.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I do not suggest they will.

The Premier: You said they might not sell.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: That is so. The farmer will say, "I can take the wheat to the bins in bulk and that will save me the expense of buying sacks."

The Premier: If he got so much more for it, surely it would pay.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I was pleased to hear the Premier say by interjection that no one would starve, but these people do not know what their position is.

The Premier: They know what it has been for the last four years.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: As far as the Agricultural Bank clients are concerned, yes. I am hoping that something will be done to help these people as a result of the conference being called by the Federal Minister for Commerce for Friday next. The matter is so important that we may well ask the Government to send to the conference a representative who can point out clearly the actual position in this State. The State Government says that it has never had sufficient money to assist the farming industry to the extent it would like. Now is the time when we may obtain assistance from the Commonwealth. A little while ago a sum of £115,000 was made available to the State for removing farmers from what were called the marginal areas. I do not know how much has been spent on the transfer of farmers, but I should say that there has not been very much expenditure. Unfortunately we have not the figures before us.

The Premier: A good deal has been spent.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I noticed that a certain sum had been paid to the Agricul-

tural Bank. I do not know whether that was wise, unless the money was paid to the bank with a view to its being subsequently paid out to the farmers transferred. We shall have to wait until the report of the bank commissioners is available in order to ascertain what the position is. At any rate, that money could be used temporarily, if not permanently, for the relief of farmers. Something will have to be done immediately to provide food supplies. At Nungarin a woman told me that there was one farmer with a wife and seven children and he had not enough feed for his cows. In another instance a man was killing his horses in order to feed his pigs and so keep them alive. Sometimes we hear exaggerated accounts of conditions in the farming areas, but the statements I am making can be verified. It is a very serious matter if a man has to kill horses in order to feed his pigs. I believe that there is a glut of pigs at the present time, though I do not know to what extent.

Mr. Seward: Baconers are down to £1 per head.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: We seem to be up against it in every direction. I want the Government to tell the House what it proposes to do with regard to associating this State with the conference being called by the Minister for Commerce.

The Premier: We will be associated with the conference, do not worry. The conference is being called for the purpose of gathering information, I understand. We can give them all the information they require.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: It should not be necessary for a man to attend a conference to supply information. That is not what we want. We want results.

The Premier: It is not what we want either.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: If the Premier needs anyone from this side of the House to attend the conference, we will do all we can to help. We want to assist the Government because we realise the importance of assistance being granted to these people. We are here to throw in our lot with the Government and render any help we possibly can. The position is so very desperate that I returned from the trip feeling much more depressed than I have ever felt in my life, particularly when I realised that men who had been from 25 to 30 years on their farms now find themselves surrounded by stock, but with no feed to keep that

stock alive, and living on barren country which looks worse than when the farms were first settled.

The Premier: You knew what to expect when you went on the tour.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I hardly expected to find things as bad as I found them around Nungarin.

Mr. Doney: In any case it is valuable to see conditions at first hand.

The Premier: We know how serious the position is.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: If I talked for hours I could not say anything more than I have said to impress upon the Government the urgency of the position. I believe the Premier or the Minister for Lands received a telegram from a conference held at Merredin recently. The farmers in that area said that unless wheat was forthcoming within seven days they would help themselves to grain out of the bins. That of course is the attitude of people who find themselves up against difficulties and probably would not show much regard for the law on that account.

The Premier: You would not say that there is justification for that?

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Something should be done at once to enable the stock to be fed. All through that north-east country and in the Merredin district, too, there is need for supplementary feed on the farms.

The Premier: But you would not attempt to keep too many sheep in those drought-stricken areas.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: What are the farmers to do with them? Are they to destroy them by cutting their throats? Despite the fact that we have a Price Fixing Commissioner, I am satisfied that the price of meat to-day is far too high for the man on wages. I say the price of meat in the butcher shops is too dear; it is not commensurate with the price the farmer is receiving for stock on the hoof. There is a serious leakage somewhere. If meat supplies in the metropolitan area were cheaper, there would be a better market for meat and the producer would receive a better price for his stock. Weaners of 26 lbs. to 28 lbs. are being sold for 6s. and, against that, consider what we have to pay for lamb in the city shops. It is impossible to get lamb for less than 10d. or 11d. lb. Therefore I say that something is radically wrong. If the Prices Commissioner really

wishes to do something, he should see that the price to the consumer is fixed. That is what we intended when we passed the measure last session. We had the consumer in mind. If necessary, the Commissioner could then trace the price back. Instead of doing that, he makes the mistake of fixing a price for wholesale meat and does not follow it up to ensure that a reasonable price is charged to the consumer.

The Premier: He can do so.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Yes, but he has not done so. We cannot take notice of the Midland Market reports that are published in the newspapers. If anybody took pen by pen, he would find that the price was much lower than that reported in the Press. We should endeavour to make available to the people of the city, as well as of other parts of the State, meat at a much lower price than it is to-day. That would absorb some of the surplus. When we travel into those country districts and see truck-loads of young ewes—two to four-tooths—being forwarded to the metropolis to be slaughtered, and when we consider the probable value of those ewes next year, we must wonder what can be done to stop it.

The Premier: The farmers in the drought-stricken areas cannot feed them. What else can they do?

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I do not know what can be done with them.

The Premier: During droughts we always have a certain number of losses.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Then are we to cut the throats of those sheep? To do that would be far better than to leave them to die a lingering death by starvation. If the throats of half of them were cut, the other half could be carried for twice the period.

The Premier: And in a month, if we have a good rainfall, you might find plenty of grass available for them.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I admit that to do all that is necessary is not easy. As the Premier said, the farmer lives in hope of better times. I do not know any man who is a greater optimist than is the man on the land. He starts off by taking an axe and felling the forest. He anticipates getting a good fire to save cost in burning the timber. He puts in his crop, not knowing what lies ahead, but hoping that he will get a

payable return. Year after year he has struggled along against adverse conditions, and this year he is faced with serious loss. I was farming in the drought year of 1914, and I say the conditions to-day are worse than they were then, definitely so.

The Premier: Farmers did not have the stock then.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: They did not have the stock, and water difficulties were not so great. Water difficulties are serious at present, except where the goldfields main and rock catchment reservoirs provide supplies. Around Northam the farmers will probably have great difficulty on account of shortage of water, except where the goldfields main touches the district. In 1914 most of the farmers had some capital, and the Agricultural Bank was ready to assist them because they had not exhausted their credit. To-day they have neither. They have a lot of stock, no feed, very little water and no credit. They are simply struggling along, and the position for them is exceedingly discouraging. No words I can utter can adequately paint the picture impressed upon the mind of those men struggling against the heavy losses being experienced to-day. It is not a question of giving them sympathy; it is assistance they want and I hope we shall get a pronouncement from the Government as to what it proposes to do. An official should be sent to Nungarin, Merredin and Trayning at once to make a survey of the stock, the feed conditions and the conditions of the farmers in their own homes, and he should have authority to provide temporary relief. I say advisedly that an official should be sent there at once. The Chairman of the Agricultural Bank Commissioners passed through those districts a little while ago, but I wish to impress upon the Premier that conditions become worse so quickly.

I hope other members will tell the story of what they saw during that trip. I feel sure the House will support our request for rendering all possible help to the men engaged in one of the most important of the State's industries. We know how seriously the pastoral areas have been depleted of stock. This drought in the agricultural areas, unless we are very careful, will deplete them similarly. The agricultural areas to-day carry probably three-fourths of the sheep in the State. We cannot hope to achieve much by shifting stock to the South-

West. I do not know whether feed could be procured there at a lower price than in the north country, but I believe it would be better to bale the hay rather than send out chaff, because it would be cheaper and better feed and would involve less waste. I have no hesitation in moving the motion.

**MR. WARNER** (Mt. Marshall) [5.8]: I shall certainly support the motion for adjournment on this matter. To do so is only right in order that the case of the primary producers might be fully explained and that no member might entertain any doubt at all concerning the position of the producers. I hope members will view the position from the point of view of the farmers and also bear in mind the national aspect. The Leader of the Opposition has explained the tragic position along general lines, and I think he intended that other members who toured those districts should give a resume of the position in their respective electorates.

The Premier: I hardly think that is necessary.

Mr. WARNER: Every endeavour should be made to afford reasonable help to the primary producers, and this help should be given quickly. We should not be told that inquiries will be made or that something will be done in the future. Our object should be to keep the farmers on their holdings so that they will be able to produce the food required by the nation, under reasonable conditions and not like peons or free slaves. For many years and even in reasonable seasons the farmers in my electorate have often had to dispose of their products at less than the cost of production. The position has become serious; and only a very meagre living is available to the farmers and their families, and this in the most beautiful country in the world—Australia. Starvation has reduced farmers to such a state that the people in any other vocation would not have stood up to it without becoming bolsheviks or communists.

The Premier: Do you think it would help them if they did?

Mr. Sampson: Desperate conditions sometimes produce desperate outlooks.

Mr. WARNER: There are many of the Premier's supporters who would definitely have become good bolsheviks if they had had meted out to them the treatment suffered by the farming community in the last six or seven years.

The Minister for Lands: Meted out by whom?

Mr. WARNER: By having to produce food at starvation rates to themselves.

The Premier: Who did that?

The Minister for Lands: Who meted out that dire treatment?

Mr. WARNER: I will deal with that presently. Speaking of the farmers generally in my electorate, they have been loyal, have stood up to the adverse conditions and have done their best to carry on. Many of them were soldiers in the 1914-18 war, and some of them, after having carved out homes for themselves and worked like slaves during the intervening years, are joining up for service again. After the other war, they settled on the land hoping to carve a national asset out of the forest. They built up homes and reared and half educated their families—I blame the Government for this half education because of the lack of adequate facilities in the country—and they are worse off than before. I do not think they can stand these hardships much longer and something should be done immediately to improve the deplorable conditions existing in those districts. From what I have seen and heard, I am afraid that the farmer is often regarded by many city people as a joke. At times I have heard such remarks in this House, but they emanate from lack of knowledge of the hardships that the farmer has to meet. Why should this be so? I have previously explained my view of the value and position of the farmer. The wheatgrowers and the woolgrowers of this State have been the means of enabling the Government to carry on. They enabled the Government to function right till the time when the mining industry received a reasonable price for gold. But for the enormous quantity of produce raised by our primary industries, the State would have been in a much worse position financially than it is at present.

The Premier: The Government has also enabled the wheatgrowers to function, you must remember, through water supplies and other facilities.

Mr. WARNER: From my standpoint, something must be done to relieve the position of the farmers in my electorate speedily, so that they may be enabled to remain in production. From a national aspect, we cannot afford to let the farmers go. In recent years they have passed

through crises previously unknown in Western Australia's history. All the disasters that have come upon them are new. They are victims of circumstances over which they have no control. They endeavoured to build homes for themselves and their families, and now, after having deprived their wives and children of practically all the amenities of life, they are in haunting fear of being dispossessed of their land and all they have. I believe this Parliament and the Government will realise the necessity for immediate aid to the primary producers, if only to retain them on their holdings. My leader has already informed the House concerning that aspect, and I do not wish to indulge in repetition; but anyone who went on the trips we made and saw the position of the farmers would be hard-hearted indeed if he did not feel for those unhappy people. We saw them on their holdings and also at the various meetings that were held.

For years the treatment of the farmer has been bad in this respect, that merchants and financial institutions have deprived him of the whole of his proceeds. For recent years they have dealt out only sufficient to allow him to carry on in a state of misery. I do not know why this should be so. The farmer ought not to be deprived of a reasonable return for his work any more than any other man. The farmer is now in a position of not knowing whether he has to go off his land immediately. It is an age-long right of the farmer, as of any other man, to participate fairly in the fruits of his labour. Why should the farmer be deprived of that right? Why should not he have a say in the disposal of what he produces? It is perfectly logical and true to say that some of the farmers in my district have in a single year produced enough wheat to keep them for the whole of their lives. Notwithstanding that fact, it has been very hard for them to get food and clothing for themselves and their wives and children. I lay the blame on merchants and financial houses, who have snatched the whole of the farmer's profits, granting him only enough to put in another crop, on slave terms, and await the return of the vultures to grab it. How long this is to be permitted I do not know. Many of the farmers have been away from this country to fight for democracy, and many of their sons are at pre-



sent away for the same purpose. Another fight must come from those farmers and their sons for the opportunity to gain a reasonable livelihood in the country that they fought for or are away to defend. Methods of dealing with the products of the farmer will have to alter materially before that position is achieved. I believe that such a struggle will come in Western Australia before the war is over. I believe that the issue will be forced by the farmers themselves.

Presently I shall show the position of the farmers generally in the eastern wheat-belt. Sufficient was observed by us during the trip we made to convince us of the dire need for aid, besides what was stated to us at meetings. I have represented certain people in this House since 1933, for seven years. Of those seven years the first two produced only a low price for wheat. The next ensuing year was a drought year, with the result that very little wheat was exported. Last year there was a fair harvest, and much wheat was taken away from the district. However, as usual, the proceeds did not reach the farmer and his family. Six pounds per month for the farmer and his wife, with perhaps a little more for the children, represents a pitiable living. I have done all I can for them. I have been with them in their sufferings. I believe it will be acknowledged that I have done my very utmost for my constituents ever since I have represented them here. Nevertheless, all the speaking I have done appears not to have altered the sorrowful position. One year's crop comes off and goes away, and there is a dole for the next crop; and so it has continued until the farmers now feel heart-broken, feel as if they could not remain on their holdings for another season to gain another crop. They feel that they cannot stay on the farm for another year except under conditions of a little more comfort than has been the case in recent times.

The Premier: The trouble is that the farmers have had poor crops.

Mr. WARNER: The members who went on the trip held a meeting to consider the position, and the outcome was that we decided to divide into four parties to examine the two districts. The results were as I have stated. In this motion there is no propaganda. The motion is

being brought forward as the result of our travels. Incidentally, we travelled at our own expense. Had we been politically minded, we might have gone to other places while the Federal election was being held. However, we resolved to discover the exact position in the eastern wheatbelt. Practically the whole of the Mt. Marshall electorate is in the drought area this year again. Immediate relief must be given. It is not a question of what will be done in the future, or even in the near future; it is a question of immediate action. I believe that when the Premier has heard all we have to say, he will realise the need for instant relief. At Nungarin we were told that horses were being shot to conserve the fodder, or because there was no fodder for them. In other places horses were being shot and, together with considerable quantities of wheat, went to feed the pigs. And other districts were just as badly off. Some farmers who had seed wheat left over from last year have been feeding it to the sheep and the pigs. They have to rely upon seed from outside. That is an awful position for them to be in, after sacrificing their seed wheat. We have also heard of sheep dying in the paddocks; but generally speaking most of the sheep in those districts are in good store condition, and some are forward stores. That is something to be remembered in estimating what is to be done in the way of feeding wheat to sheep.

I have no ground for complaint concerning the action of the Government in furnishing water supplies for my district. I will acknowledge that the Government has done very good work in that respect. In my territory there are many water supplies. Indeed, the rock catchments there furnish more in the way of individual supplies than is the case anywhere else. However, this year the rains have not come to fill the catchments. Though most of them hold water, unfortunately fresh supplies have not come this year. During our trip we received reports that the Country Water Supplies Department had issued notices that in September, this month, the stand-pipes at the end of the pipe lines would be taken away, so that settlers on the pipe lines who are paying for water by way of rates may get supplies first. I hope that we have not been correctly informed.

I do not think the department will cut off water from farmers who are now carting water and have been doing so for months, just in order to convey that water to other farms. I would like also to know from the Minister for Water Supplies whether attention has been given to what I mentioned in the Address-in-reply debate regarding the Barbalin rock catchments. Is there water in them, or is water being pumped into them in view of the dryness of the season? At one of our meetings a farmer's wife told us they were so badly off for feed for the house cows that half-a-dozen children were missing their main article of food. That is the kind of story I get continually when travelling about my electorate. I must take notice of such statements. It is most saddening to listen to descriptions of the conditions there. I could continue for hours in the same strain, but I do not wish to detain the House unduly and therefore shall refrain from relating accounts of individual hardships. But the sufferings of the farmers in my electorate have been and are such as to compel me to lay the full facts before the Chamber. The tragic stories which have been told to me during recent years, with the exertions they necessarily imposed on me, have caused me mental torture and undermined my health. I intend now to read some records of observations made on the tour, and then to leave it to members to decide whether the present motion is justified. First I shall quote an article which appeared in the "West Australian" of the 17th of this month—

#### EASTERN WHEATBELT.

##### "Position a Tragedy."

##### Problem of Chaff Supplies.

The chairman of the Agricultural Bank Commission (Mr. S. B. Donovan) referred yesterday to an inspection of the eastern wheatbelt that he made last week, in the course of which he motored through districts controlled by the Northam, Bruce Rock, Merredin and Kununoppin branches of the bank.

"The whole position is a tragedy," Mr. Donovan said. "After a cycle of bad seasons unprecedented in the history of Western Australia, followed by a record wheat yield of 13.9 bushels an acre last year, everybody confidently hoped for a run of good seasons. This year upsets the theory that the seasons run in cycles. It is most discouraging to all concerned, and it is heart-breaking for farmers who in many instances last year produced 10 to 12 bags of wheat an acre, to see similar land not returning seed this year."

Mr. Donovan said that during his inspection he had taken the opportunity to discuss

questions of mutual interest with leading business people, bankers and farmers. Naturally, the great concern of all was the seasonal outlook, crop failures, shortage of sheep feed and water. The consequential problems were not easy of solution, as the drought was almost State-wide from the point of view of transferring stock to pastures elsewhere, or even of producing hay crops, such as in normal years would be considered not worth while to cut.

#### Undeveloped Crops.

The greatest hope was that September rains would at least give seed and, in some districts, a bag of wheat to the acre on the lighter land and perhaps a little hay. These conditions applied east of Mundin towards Moorine Rock. One hot, windy day would completely wipe out the crops on the heavy land. Unfortunately, no straw would remain for feed, because the crops had not developed beyond the flag stage and would disappear altogether, as many had done already. In several instances, sheep had been turned on to the crops.

Mr. Donovan said that he had motored from Merredin through Nungarin, Lake Brown and Mukinbudin to Kununoppin. He had seen very few paddocks worth pulling a machine into. Although light rain had fallen during the previous night, strong westerly winds soon reduced its value and fierce dust storms were met. North of Koorda and along the Kulja-Bonnie Rock line, the crop, feed and water position was much better, due to more favourable rainfall.

From Dowerin to Northam the crops were healthy, though backward, and would produce both wheat and hay, but undoubtedly light yields for those particular districts. Sheep feed in the Northam district was very poor. The best feed was to be found between Grass Valley and Meckering and crops there were reasonably good for the season.

Water would be a major problem where the country was not served by the Goldfields water supply or the Barbalin, Waddouring and Kunungajin schemes. The Kunungajin scheme at present watered 79,500 sheep, 1,720 horses and 900 cattle. There were many other tanks, from 250,000 to 500,000 gallons in capacity, studded throughout the country. Still, a large number of farmers relied upon their own dams and had been carting water for some months.

This is another report I would like to read to the House; it contains some remarks made by the Hon. G. B. Wood—

The tragic position of many farmers in the north-eastern wheatbelt was commented upon yesterday by Mr. G. B. Wood, M.L.C., on his return to Perth after a tour through the East Province. The outlook in many cases was very gloomy, he said. Stock were in need of feed, and it was to be hoped that early steps would be taken by the Government either to supply the feed necessary or to arrange for evacuation.

"I have just completed a trip," said Mr. Wood, "from Northam to Bullfinch via Ben-cubbin. During the trip I met many farmers,

including members of road boards and Agricultural Bank inspectors. The crops generally have finished without heading, and it is certain that no wheat will be delivered to the wheat bins in the north-eastern wheatbelt. The consensus of opinion among the farmers is that if more rain falls some of them may get their seed back. Many of them only expect sheep feed from their crops, and this only if more rain falls.

"The stock position is a desperate one, the grass having started to dry off. In many places east of Mukinbudin there has been no new grass at all this winter, only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches of rain having fallen. At Mukinbudin grasshoppers have made their appearance and as there is no grass no doubt what little crop exists will be eaten out.

"Generally speaking, the position is desperate and it is to be hoped that the Government is already considering ways and means either to feed the stock in these districts or have the animals evacuated. Whatever happens the outlook is very gloomy for the settlers in these districts."

On going further north of Merredin, we met men coming from the Westonia Road Board district who said that grasshoppers had made their appearance at Mukinbudin and were then right through the wheat country. In the words of one of these men, "The grasshoppers had taken everything as they went." The following is a letter received by me from Trayning; it is dated the 9th September, 1940, and is written by the secretary of the Kununoppin-Trayning Road Board, Mr. Felgate:—

I have been directed by my board to request that you will place before the Government the necessity for early organisation with regard to relief measures which it is certain will have to be extended to farmers in the wheatbelt to tide them over the forthcoming summer and until some returns are obtained from the crops maturing late in 1941.

You are probably well aware of the disastrous future for the forthcoming harvest, in which the great majority of wheat farmers will show a complete loss of crops sown this year. Indeed, it will be a particularly fortunate farmer who will recover sufficient wheat to cover the amount used as seed, and it may be safely stated that final results will be 85 per cent. down on last season's operations. In many respects the season may be compared to the widespread drought year of 1914, and a proper perspective may be obtained by taking the rainfall of this year, which to date is on a level with that of 1914. Figures for this year are herewith given: January, February, March, April, total, 27 points; May, 41; June, 140; July, 163; August, 17; September (to date), 12; total for year to date, 400 points. Taking the critical months of August and September, in which only 29 points of light showers have fallen and that both these months have also experienced unseasonable hot spells,

it is obviously impossible to grow wheat under such conditions, and the palpable result must be something approaching a complete drought. Many experienced farmers have already realised that, even with rain, it is far too late to obtain any grain yield and they have already turned their sheep on to the wilted crops.

The sheep position is nearly as bad as the crop outlook, as there has been no natural growth of feed during the past winter on account of the light rains. What small amount did make headway has already been burnt off again and the only reserves are the short and wilted crops which cannot last long under any circumstances. It would be absurd to offer advice to the farmer either to remove his flocks to better pasturages or sell them, as in the one case other parts of the State are equally drought affected and feeding grounds are not available, and in the other case the sales yards will be over-crowded with sheep going at a sacrificial figure, even if such a thing as a bid could be obtained.

Even if a farmer situated within the reticulated water area decides to hold his sheep, he has no assurance that this can be done, owing to the extremely low level of water in the reservoirs of the Barbalin scheme and to the fact that water restrictions will have to be rigidly applied. Farmers in the water area will perhaps have a little advantage to hang on to a reduced number of sheep, but as the water area only covers about one-third of this road district, the thought immediately presents itself: What is to be done about sheep in the other two-thirds? Farmers' dams remain unfilled, together with public dams. Wells in this country have a reputation for poor supplies and there are very few good soaks which could relieve the position to any extent.

In other directions the farmer has already been faced with increased prices for materials which are essential to his business and which increases he must bear without the right, as in other businesses, of handing the extra cost on to the consumer per medium of a price-fixing commissioner. Take, for instance, the effect of the decision of the State Price Fixing Commissioner in giving cheaper meat for the people of Perth and debarring the grower from obtaining a reasonable profit under the fair means of auction. By the right and law of supply and demand, the grower of meat was perfectly justified under the demand law at public auction of obtaining an advantage in prices, as such advanced prices would have been only temporary until the market was over supplied. In fixing the price no consideration was given to the grower in making inquiries as to how long he had to stand the cost of hand feeding his sheep before they were offered for auction. Without due inquiry as to the cost of production before a price is fixed there is the anomaly that thousands of persons in a city are much better off financially to obtain a cheaper supply of meat than the much poorer and struggling farmer who offers it at auction in the first instance. It is yet to be seen if the price-fixing restrictions will apply to the farmer and permit him to in-

crease the price of his products proportionately to the increased cost. It will be restrictions in the case of a farmer and regulations when applied to any other business when an increase is sought.

Whether it is justified or not, the fact remains that the farmer now has to pay increased prices for everything that he requires in the business of farming. Machinery and parts, which he must have, are greatly increased. Take superphosphates for instance, without which it would be impossible for him to obtain a reasonable return. This essential chemical has now advanced from £3 12s. 6d. per ton to £5 2s. 6d. per ton. In another case the introduction of mechanical power gave him an advantage of much lower costs when compared with horses and less drudgery in his work. No sooner has he converted to improved conditions of living and work, to which he is justly entitled if any advance in social conditions in this world is to be attained, than he is met with advanced prices of crude oil fuel from £6 4s. 6d. a ton to £8 12s. 6d. a ton.

The depletion of the farmers' scanty financial resources due to increased prices of commodities, sacrificing of stock and almost total loss of crops through drought will very shortly present a picture that will closely approximate war conditions in an invaded country. In an enormously rich country like Australia, whose riches have already been proved by her war efforts, there should be no spectre of ruin and misery hanging over the heads of those engaged in one of its greatest industries, particularly as such awful conditions have been brought about by circumstances over which they have no control.

No amount of inspections of drought-stricken areas, statistics, lengthy reports, and useless discussions can improve the situation. The already advanced appalling conditions are too well known. What is needed are men of Parliamentary action, both Federal and State, who, regardless of party interests, will demand that the machinery for relief will be immediately set in motion, and realise that, in the saving of the primary production industry, it is just as important, if not more so, than many of the country's war industries which are safely sheltered on a highly profitable basis.

That is the view of a man who has been secretary of the road board for over 18 years. The following review of the position appeared in the Press on the 19th September:—

In Goomalling, Dowerin, Koorda, Wyalkatchem, Trayning, Nungarin, Merredin, Narrobin and Bruce Rock road districts, sheep are in fair to good condition at present, but feed shortages are causing farmers to unload stock at any price, often sending away young ewes which will be urgently needed to build up the State's flock after the drought.

Farmers unanimously urge the immediate release of wheat at present stored in bins in order to feed sheep and pigs. At present many are compelled to feed seed wheat held over

from last season which may be urgently needed for 1941 sowing. The Merredin State Farm will have no seed this year, but it is stated that the crops at Wongan Hills and Chapman experiment stations will yield supplies of pedigree seed to maintain the strains.

At Nungarin it was stated that 30 horses had already been shot in order to conserve feed, and sheep losses were already occurring on some properties. In this area farmers had little hope of obtaining more than five per cent. of local seed requirements, as only 3½ inches of rain had fallen this year, about 1½ inches less than in 1914. The tremendous increase in stock population since 1914 had further complicated the position.

I also quote the following report:—

A motor tour from Northam, via Goomalling, Dowerin, Koorda and Wyalkatchem, to Trayning, has revealed a condition of affairs probably unprecedented in the annals of the State's agricultural development. Crops seen by the roadside were seldom more than 12 inches in height and, in many cases, were in head although barely half this height.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. C. G. Latham) and Messrs. C. F. Baxter, M.L.C., J. I. Mann and F. L. Warner, M's.L.A., who are at present touring these areas, interviewed road board members at these centres and discussed the crop and stock prospects.

In the Goomalling district, only eight inches of rain have fallen to date. It is expected that the crops will yield 50 per cent. of the local hay needs and provide seed and a possible saleable surplus, but, further eastward, conditions become progressively worse. Dowerin could only hope for part of the district's seed requirements and practically no hay.

At Koorda, it was stated, less than one-fifth of the farmers in the road board district could hope to obtain seed and hay crops were non-existent. Sheep owners were quitting their sheep at low prices, as they had no feed, and it was feared that horses would have to be shot as they were unsaleable in these days of mechanised farming.

#### Farmers' Morale Affected.

In the Koorda district particularly, the succession of bad seasons, culminating in the present disaster, has taken heavy toll of farmers' morale and the general attitude was one of defeatism. "The proceeds of our wool clip have gone to satisfy claims. We have no harvest, and our next source of income—the 1940-41 wool clip—will be from reduced flocks loaded with heavy feed costs. What can we hope for?" These statements were frequently heard.

At Wyalkatchem and Trayning, the outlook is equally serious. Thousands of acres of heavy land crops are already drying off and much has been fed to sheep. Farmers generally realise that flocks will have to be reduced from 30 to 75 per cent. and, in many cases, they are attempting to dispose of the whole of their flocks, despite a glutted market.

At Trayning, a prominent sheep owner recently offered 2,000 good sheep for sale, and received offers for 62 lambs at 4/6 a head. The same man had to send good Bungaree blood ewes to the markets.

The following report appears in to-day's "West Australian" concerning wheat for starving stock—I do not necessarily approve the proposed action:—

The Wheat and Woolgrowers' Union received advice yesterday from its Merredin branch that, at a largely attended mass meeting held there on Saturday, it had been decided that, unless wheat for feeding starving stock was made available within seven days, growers would make every effort to take it. The meeting telegraphed that decision to the Federal Government and to the Premier (Mr. J. Willcock) and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. C. G. Latham).

I can but add concerning this report that it shows the deplorable condition of the farmer. He must indeed be desperate if he wishes the public to understand that he proposes to take this action. During the last day or two I have received applications by farmers at Nungarin for wheat from bins to feed their stock. A quantity of about 8,000 bushels is required. One man is carrying 400 sheep and asked for 300 bags; another asked for 200 bags. In fact there are several who asked for 200 bags each and one asked for 400 bags. Thus we can understand why some of these so-called wild and woolly fellows have carried the resolution I have read. They are merely emphasising the position in which they find themselves. It is more charitable to put it that way than in any other manner. I think I have said enough to show what the position actually is. It is not only in the part of the State that I represent that the unfortunate people find themselves in serious difficulties; other parts of the State are equally badly off. I am definitely deeply concerned about the position in my district. It appeals to me to such an extent that I am going to ask the Government to endeavour to do something immediately to relieve it, and to give attention to the stock so that it may be prevented from dying of starvation.

**MR. DONEY** (Williams-Narrogin) [5.48]: The party of which I am a member enters upon this debate in a spirit of co-operation in which respect I trust that we shall find the Government and members generally on the other side of the House in a reciprocal mood. Without such reciprocity this motion is futile for the plan we

seek is possible only along co-operative lines. The Leader of the Opposition has made the position plain and other speakers on this side of the House have done likewise; thus a certain amount of repetition in the appeal we are making to the Government is inevitable. We shall, however, go to some trouble to prevent the duplication of information. I support the motion and particularly the aspect of urgency that has been stressed by the Leader of the Opposition. We are not pretending for one moment that the Minister for Lands has not all the information. He has that information; but that is insufficient. It is essential of course that all members in this Chamber without exception, and also members of another place should have this information, and naturally the public as well, and particularly the business section of the community in the city of Perth. The information that we are supplying is absolutely dependable; that is to say, there has not been, nor will there be any exaggeration whatever. We split ourselves into four groups and traversed the wheat and mixed farming districts from north to south and from the Darling Ranges eastward. Our tour was most depressing. The one pleasing feature was an unexpected uniform greenness in the crops—I am speaking of course only of the Great Southern part of the State. There the crops are of an exceptional greenness and there can be no doubt that the rain which has fallen in the last two or three days will do much especially in the area I represent, towards making useful crops out of many that would soon have wilted and died. Most of the grasses have gone to seed and only in the western parts is there any likelihood of rain effecting an improvement in that direction. The rainfall has been only about two-fifths of the normal; so it is rather hard to expect anything more than we are likely to get. For the first time the drought has fallen not only upon the eastern areas, but has also invaded the Great Southern and the South-West, as well as the coastal fringe. It is plain that from one district to another there will have to be constant transfers of seed wheat, seed oats and fodder besides a sharing of watering facilities. Thus the position is extremely urgent. A plan to facilitate the prompt orderly and inexpensive transfer of the required commodities must be provided now, otherwise there will be a great deal of misunderstanding.

ing and ill-feeling. Promptitude is absolutely essential, and equally essential is the co-operation between the several parties in this House as well as the Agricultural Bank and the Associated Banks, the insurance companies and those Government departments, which year by year collect dues from the farmers. There are also the fodder firms and machinery firms and most important of all the farmers themselves. It is plain also that this is a common disaster. That implies a common responsibility and that is the road along which amelioration should travel. The Minister for Lands will find a difficult task ahead of him. No doubt it will be extremely hard work. It seems plain to us that measures must be taken to prevent profiteering by those buying from and selling to the farmers. Equally is it necessary for measures to prevent harsh action by first mortgagees, and similarly measures will be required to see that interest is either cancelled or reduced or in some other way adjusted according to individual needs. Speaking generally, until the outlook brightens once more, the widest and most generous consideration will have to be given to all the needs of the farmers and I say that bearing in my mind the psychological outlook in the country. As the year progresses, and unless we have exceptionally good shedding rains, it is apparent to us that the outstanding problem will be that of water. Especially will that be so for the reason that key and private supplies in the various districts are on this occasion non-existent, the dams having either nothing whatever in them, or at the best only a foot or two of water.

Hon. C. G. Latham: They are damned dams.

Mr. DONEY: Yes, and damned little water, if you like, in the dams. The position is rendered so much worse on that account. There is the further unfortunate fact that the supplies in the coastal areas for this year, because of the drought, have suffered to some extent, though not to the same degree as the supplies in the country. I should like to say a word or two with regard to boring. That question I suppose can be referred to on a subject such as that we are now discussing. It will be plain that if it becomes necessary for the Railway Department to take water inland from the coast that department will have a difficult task indeed as the Minister for Railways

will agree, probably beyond the department's capacity to handle, which means that considerable time had better be given the question of finding local supplies by means of boring, etc. In the course of the tour to which reference has been made, we questioned practically every municipality and road board upon the subject of governmental boring in their areas and found that practically nothing had been done. The little work that had been carried out had been performed in only a half-hearted fashion. We are not grumbling about that because we know very well that practically the whole of the eastern areas with the exception of a small portion of the Midland Railway country is outside the artesian basin boundaries and for that reason the Government feels there is very little encouragement to carry out boring operations in areas officially regarded as non-artesian. I submit to the Government that the country which is supposed to be non-artesian is of such huge extent that it is conceivable a test might disclose subsidiary basins. So I am suggesting to the Government that it should test selected spots in the wheat belt in the hope of striking artesian supplies, or alternatively striking shallow well water.

Hon. C. G. Latham: That was tried, but with not much success.

Mr. DONEY: I know they were not over successful at Geraldton.

The Premier: They were not successful at all.

Mr. DONEY: Several bores have been sunk by private individuals outside the artesian limits.

The Premier: You mean sub-artesian bores, 200ft. or 300ft. deep?

Mr. DONEY: If sub-artesian boring were undertaken in the wheatbelt it might turn out to be of untold advantage to the farmers concerned.

Mr. Cross: The water might be too brackish for use.

Mr. DONEY: On the other hand, it might not be too brackish. In such matters the risk has to be run, whether the boring is sub-artesian or otherwise. I had intended to refer to the slaughtering of stock and to ameliorative measures connected therewith, but that has already been dealt with by the two previous speakers. I have in my hand a letter I received about an hour ago from the Geraldton district. It may be

of value to the Minister for Lands in that it offers a number of interesting suggestions. The writer, whose name I will not mention at the moment, stated—

C. P. Murray's report to Agricultural Bank makes dismal reading. We in the northern districts from Dongarra to around Northampton have been favoured with much more rain than other districts, consequently hundreds of acres could be cut for hay.

The Premier: Farmers are cutting hay.

Mr. DONEY: The implication is that the Government should interest itself in the cutting of that hay. The letter continues—

Surely some organisation should be set up to purchase either standing crops, or hay in stock, so that the hay could be sent to feed the stock where needed. Hay could be baled in fields and dispatched direct to farmers in drought areas. Where there is no water the stock could be brought to location near the pipe line and fed. To recommend the slaughter of stock when there is plenty of food in the country seems out of all reason. Some regulation of marketing might also be necessary for a few months. Supplies for the metropolitan market could be drawn from distressed areas for preference. This might avoid a glut and low prices.

The writer concludes—

If anything is to be done about securing crops or hay it must be done immediately as some of the best crops are now in hay.

I have read this letter so that it may have the close attention of the Minister for Lands.

The Premier: Hay is being cut along the northern roads, two strips wide. That is wild oat hay about 4ft. high, growing along the roads.

Mr. DONEY: Members on this side of the House are giving a resume of the outlook in respect of crops, seed, feed, stock, water, etc., in their districts. I have gone to some trouble to obtain an analysis of the position in the eastern portion of the Williams-Narrogin electorate, and have received some information from a Government official of long experience and sound judgment. In his memorandum to me he states as follows:—

In reply to your telegram dated the 13th inst. the following are particulars of conditions generally in the district.

The district referred to is one that covers the southern and eastern part of Wickepin, Harrismith, Kukerin, North Dumbleyung, Toolibin, Tinkurrin, and Noman's Lake.

The Premier: And Yilliminning?

Mr. DONEY: I think Yilliminning could be included. The writer goes on—

Grain: At present it is very difficult even to make a wild guess as to what the crops will yield. I should say that from present indications farmers will get some wheat, but the actual results will solely depend on weather conditions during the next two or three weeks. If a good fall occurs then there will be some very good crops, but if on the other hand no rain falls some of the crops will simply die off. I would say that 50 per cent. of the crops will yield wheat between four and nine bushels if normal conditions ensue.

Hay: I have made a tour of the district with reference to hay, and find there are ample supplies. Approximately 3,000 tons of surplus hay could be obtained in the district under present conditions, and with a good fall of rain in the next week or so the surplus would be considerably increased. North Kukerin has the most hay.

Stock: Stock are generally in fair to good condition, but owing to a shortage of grass this condition will not be maintained beyond a couple of months. Settlers are all becoming alarmed as to what to do with their surplus sheep. They are afraid that after shearing shorn sheep will not be saleable.

Water: Supplies are very low throughout the district, and if no further heavy rain falls it will be doubtful if present supplies last more than two or three months.

The position throughout the State, except in coastal areas, will before the end of the year become acute unless very copious rains fall, more copious than is usual for us to expect at this time of the year. We all hope such rains will fall. Those who seek to profit by this disaster—if there are any firms, and I believe there are some that would do so—that is, profit by buying cheaply from one farmer and selling dearly to another, could not be regarded as anything but mean, miserable and despicable folk. People in rural areas will put upon them a spotlight, from which they will indeed find it hard to escape. The views that have been expressed during this debate can be absolutely relied upon, for members who visited the areas concerned have seen those things, about which they have spoken, with their own eyes. If any active co-operation or assistance is required by the Government in this matter it will readily be accorded by members on this side of the House.

MR. BOYLE (Avon) [6.10]: I do not assume that the Government and the Minister for Lands are not fully aware of the dreadful calamity that has overtaken the agricultural industry. The motion has been moved so that the farmers may know to what

extent Parliament realises the position of affairs. The tour undertaken by various members of the Country Party through the agricultural areas was not carried out from any political motive, nor were politics discussed in the party to which I was attached. We attended meetings at various road board centres. Not only did we meet members of the boards but met many scores of anxious men and women who are in the front line facing this awful tragedy that has overtaken the agricultural areas. I estimate, so far as estimation is possible, that 7,000 farmers are facing absolute extinction. That calculation excludes the men in the North who are, by comparison only, enjoying a fairly good season. There are in hitherto favoured districts hundreds of farmers who see fading from their eyes, day in and day out, their very means of subsistence. Worse than that, they see disappearing from sight those flocks of sheep that they have so carefully built up over a number of years, as well as their livestock generally.

Mr. Doney: That is one of the worst aspects of the position.

Mr. BOYLE: Yes. Not only has the lack of rain caused trouble as regards the growth of pastures and crops, but it has led to the dams being practically emptied, in all cases where the farmers are not accessible to the goldfields water supply scheme. For the most part there is not enough water in the dams to suffice until the end of the year. The farmers will then have to face an almost waterless condition, particularly in the southern areas. A feeling is abroad in the country districts that the Government is proceeding much too slowly with relief measures. We have not been given much evidence concerning the intentions of the Government. My object in speaking is not to criticise either the Government or the Minister for Lands, but to advance what I hope will be regarded as constructive ideas. In the stricken areas to-day settlers feel that whatever the Government is doing is being left too late. I do not intend to adopt the suggestion of the Leader of the Opposition, and expound only on the conditions in my electorate. Unfortunately these are common to the wheatbelt, with the exception of the northern portion. No section of our great agricultural areas, from Wongan Hills south to the extreme south, has escaped this visitation.

The Premier: In varying degrees, of course.

Mr. BOYLE: I admit that, but the variations are so small as to be hardly discernible.

The Premier: Some situations are hopeless; others are far from being of that nature.

Mr. BOYLE: The position depends upon the type of soil on which the crops have been sown. Some of the crops in light land in the Narembeen district and south of Kellerberrin will give fairly good returns if rain falls within the next few weeks. They will not produce hay but may perhaps produce three or four bushels of wheat to the acre. I doubt very much if the whole wheat-belt of Western Australia will average more than five bushels to the acre this year. Probably not more than 10,000,000 or 12,000,000 bushels will be returned for the whole State.

The Premier: That will give us about 30 per cent. of the average crop.

Mr. BOYLE: From the total yield 3,000,000 bushels will be required for seed. Some farmers in the northern district hope to get six-bag crops, but farms in the eastern and southern districts can at the best yield only light returns.

*Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.*

Mr. BOYLE: I was referring to the feeling prevalent in the country districts that the Government is moving too slowly. In support of that suggestion, I noticed the report in the "West Australian" of a meeting of farmers at Merredin, to which reference was made by the member for Mount Marshall (Mr. Warner). The farmers who attended that meeting threatened to take wheat out of the bins. The Minister for Lands and the Premier, too, will bear in mind that more than three weeks have elapsed since the deputation from the Wheat-growers' Union asked for a definite reply regarding the use for starving stock of wheat in bins. Evidently that reply has not been forthcoming, and I take it that the men who attended the Merredin meeting were imbued with the sense of that law which is older than history—the law of necessity. On one side in their district they see flocks of sheep with only a few weeks' subsistence ahead of them and, on the other hand, bins absolutely crammed with wheat. I ask the Government to let those farmers know, without further delay, what is the intention regarding the wheat in the bins. The fact that telegrams



are sent by the Minister for Lands to the Australian Wheat Board does not mean that the wheat will be released under any conditions other than those of purchase. It must be borne in mind that the Australian Wheat Board acts as the trustee for the wheatgrowers of Australia as a whole, and has no authority to allow wheat to leave the bins unless it is sold and the resultant money credited to the pool. That course is enjoined upon the board by Statutory Rule 98, under which it is operating. I say emphatically that it is of little use for the Government or the Minister for Lands to send telegrams to the Wheat Board seeking the release of wheat for starving stock. There is only one way in which that wheat can be released, and that is by way of purchase from the trustees. Having that in mind, the Merredin farmers who gathered at their meeting can surely be excused if they do not appreciate the niceties between Statutory Rule 98 and the law of property and the hundred and one other laws of similar effect. They can surely be excused if they are more inclined to obey the law that necessity does know, the law of self-preservation. I cannot understand the Government's attitude. To me it seems extraordinary to find such a position in this year of drought and calamity during which the Government has received advice, I take it, from Agricultural Bank officials throughout Western Australia. In every portion of the agricultural areas there are Agricultural Bank managers and advisers to the Government. As I told the House previously, this is a time when the Government must make a definite announcement, when there should be a state of national emergency declared with regard to the agricultural industry. I did think for a while that the Industries Assistance Act could be availed of and that Section 9, relating to assistance to settlers, could be invoked. On the other hand, that section lays down that the Government can, by purchase, provision or guarantee, render assistance to drought-stricken farmers, but I realise that means the building up of indebtedness. The Industries Assistance Act does not allow for any free distribution, or for gifts to anyone. It sets out that a debt is created, and summary recovery can be effected under Section 51 of the Agricultural Bank Act out of the next succeeding crop, which is a ridiculous position.

Mr. Abbott: Why?

Mr. BOYLE: Because it would be impossible for any farmer, even with the advantage of a good season throughout the wheat-belt next year, to face up to any added interest bill under a statutory lien, or on seasonal advances.

Mr. Abbott: But it would depend upon the circumstances of the particular farmer.

Mr. BOYLE: I quite follow that suggestion. The circumstances in which 7,000 of these particular farmers find themselves are desperate, and they are the men of whom I speak. I will quote figures regarding some farmers in Western Australia and am rather impelled to that course by remarks made by the member for Brown Hill-Ivanhoe (Mr. F. C. L. Smith). That hon. member lives in a farmer's paradise at Nedlands. He referred to a number of retired farmers, with money, who had been taking up residence in his district. If those men have money, they must have gone out of farming because they found it uncongenial. I remind the member for Brown Hill-Ivanhoe that one swallow does not make a summer, and a few retired farmers with money provide no indication of the prosperity or otherwise of the producers who are operating in the wheatbelt. As the member for North Perth (Mr. Abbott) interjected, that would not apply to every farmer, and I hope it will not do so. Relief measures will not apply to farmers north of a line from Wongan Hills, in the sections known as the North Midland and the Wongan Hills districts. I have already mentioned that most of the wheat and hay this year will come from those areas. On the other hand, to prove to the House that the bulk of the farmers to-day, or at any rate 90 per cent. of them, cannot stand any further imposition or added debt burden, I will direct the attention of the House to Table No. 12 in the report of the Federal Royal Commission on the wheat industry. Therein they will find details regarding the credit and debit balances of Western Australian wheat farmers with the Associated Banks alone. Dealing first with the credit balances, the table shows that in 1928, 4,721 farmers had credit balances totalling £661,354, representing an average balance per farmer in Western Australia of £140 1s. 9d., compared with the Australia-wide average per farmer of £194 14s. 1d. That was in the prosperous year 1928, during the so-called

prosperity decade—from 1920 to 1930. In 1933, or five years later, the commission found that of the Associated Banks' clients there were 4,226 wheatgrowers with a total credit balance of £519,761, or £122 19s. 10d. per farmer, as against the Australia-wide average of £161 19s. 2d. Now let us come to the debit side. These details refer to men who do not go to Nedlands or any other salubrious suburb, but who are working on the wheatbelt to-day. The gentlemen at Nedlands are not carrying out farming operations. The men on the wheatbelt to-day are those who are undertaking that task. The Federal Commission found that 3,917 wheatgrowers with the Associated Banks had a total debit balance in the form of overdrafts or mortgages of £5,591,461, or an average of £1,799 12s. 8d. as against an Australia-wide average of £1,196 16s. 3d. That was in the years of prosperity, in that glorious golden age between 1920 and 1930.

Mr. Hughes: What was the value of the assets?

Mr. BOYLE: I will tell the hon. member, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Hughes: Give us the value of the assets on which those overdrafts were secured.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The member for Avon had better address his remarks to the Chair and refrain from taking notice of interjections.

Mr. BOYLE: I said I would give the hon. member the information through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In 1933, or during three years at the inception of the depression period in Western Australia, there were with the Associated Banks 3,509 farmers with an aggregate debit balance of £8,391,039. The average debt per farmer was £2,391 5s. 9d. as against the Australian-wide average debit balance of £1,642, 8d. 2d. From 1928 those men had built up a debit balance amounting to £8,391,039, or an average of £2,391 5s. 9d. The men were owing that amount to the Associated Banks against the miserable credit balance they enjoyed of £519,761. I will explain later on that even that is not real; it is illusory. I propose to tell the House this: These men with credit balances with the Associated Banks representing a miserable £122 each, would largely be clients of the Agricultural Bank of Western Australia with possibly

an average debit of £2,000 per farmer. The Agricultural Bank is not a trading bank but a mortgage bank, and therefore it does not hold credit balances for its clients.

The Minister for Lands: Nor does it hold them for its own use.

Mr. BOYLE: I would not say that. I suppose the Agricultural Bank could be regarded as having the best backing in Australia, seeing that it has the Treasury behind it.

The Minister for Lands: But it cannot make use of the money as the other institutions can.

Mr. BOYLE: Possibly not; I am not making that point. I have examined the position. Out of 25,000 bills of sale registered normally in Western Australia, in the wheatbelt alone out of 9,000 wheatgrowers over 8,000 have bills of sale registered to enable them to carry on. That means there are 8,000 temporary mortgages registered against farmers to enable them to continue operations. It is utterly hopeless to expect those men, during this period of travail and calamity, to allow their debit balances to be further increased. It is impossible; the men will not stand it. It is useless to mince words in that regard. The Government must face the position that some form of emergency legislation will have to be introduced to deal with the situation. I cannot understand the Government adopting the attitude it did regarding the invitation from Mr. Cameron. I understand that invitation was received yesterday. That was an invitation to the Government of Western Australia to send its Minister for Agriculture to Melbourne to confer with Mr. Cameron.

The Premier: A few days' notice. What a fair thing that was! The Federal Government appears to think that we should drop our guns, leave important matters and rush to the Eastern States.

Mr. BOYLE: What a shocking admission for the Premier to make!

Mr. Hughes: Why does not Mr. Cameron do the job himself? Can he not do it?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Avon must address the Chair. I cannot have constant interjections.

Mr. BOYLE: The first responsibility rests with the Government of Western Australia. The Western Australian Government is a sovereign institution as far as agri-

culture is concerned. It has the control of these commodities in its own hands. It has all laws relating to the matter in its hands. Mr. Cameron made it clear, according to the Press report, that the conference was being called to enable him to confer with the Minister for Agriculture in the four wheat exporting States in Australia.

The Premier: To ascertain the position.

Mr. BOYLE: And to provide chaff and stores for the farmers.

The Minister for Lands: That is a lot more than he told us.

Mr. BOYLE: I refer to the "West Australian's" message from Melbourne. I am surprised to learn that the Press report from Melbourne is different from the message received by the Government.

The Minister for Lands: I will read the one we received.

Mr. BOYLE: I shall be glad to hear it. As far as leaving other matters in order to go to the Eastern States at such short notice—

The Premier: Do not you think the Minister for Lands has a big job to attend to right here in the next three or four days?

Mr. BOYLE: I think the Minister for Lands has a big job to attend to at any time.

The Premier: That is not the answer. Do not you think the Minister has a big job to do here?

Mr. BOYLE: I think the Minister would be better employed attending that conference in Melbourne, as suggested by Mr. Cameron. We have been told that the Minister for Lands sent telegrams to the Wheat Board and the Federal Government and I regard Mr. Cameron's message as a response to the S.O.S. request that came from Western Australia. If the Minister desired to go to Melbourne, I am sure the House would facilitate his doing so. It would not be too much for the House to adjourn for a week to enable him to go.

The Premier: It is not the House but the business of the country we must attend to first.

Mr. BOYLE: There will be very little business in this country to attend to if the agricultural industry goes west.

The Premier: Keep on the track. If you were on the railways you would get the sack.

Mr. BOYLE: I notice that the Premier retired quickly from the railways.

The Minister for Mines: The country wanted him for a more important job.

Mr. BOYLE: He did not wait for his pension rights.

The Minister for Mines: He was a leader on the railways and he is a leader here.

Mr. BOYLE: The Premier always had rails to guide him when he was in the Railway Department. If he has any to guide him now he certainly gets off them now and then.

The Premier: There are lots of people who have rails to guide them but who get into trouble.

Mr. BOYLE: I urge upon the Government again, and I cannot over-emphasise the matter—

The Minister for Lands: Before you leave the matter of Mr. Cameron's message, I wish you would elucidate your statement that the Government is avoiding its responsibility.

Mr. BOYLE: If no representative from Western Australia attends the conference in Melbourne on Friday, the Government will have evaded its responsibility.

The Minister for Lands: That is deliberate misrepresentation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I ask members on the Ministerial bench to keep order. The member for Avon will please address the Chair.

Mr. BOYLE: I am endeavouring to do so.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind hon. members that they must cease interjecting.

Mr. BOYLE: I cannot understand where the telegram which appeared in the "West Australian" to-day originated. That telegram definitely sets out the matters that are to be discussed, yet we are told by the Minister for Lands that no telegram couched in such terms has reached the Government. Where on earth did the newspaper roundsman in Melbourne obtain his information? Reverting to the assistance that will have to be given to farmers, and the necessity for keeping that assistance in a watertight compartment so as not to involve the two points of interest and repayment of capital, I again quote from the Royal Commission's report. That report is encyclopaedic in so far as it appears to have sifted the industry as it has never been sifted before. On page 251 we find the following:—

Apart from Labour, the interest on borrowed capital is the largest single item in the costs of the average wheatgrower.

On page 234 appears the following:—

Overshadowing all other factors which influence the economic strength of the wheat industry stands the debt structure, the readjustment of which is unavoidable. The Commission has been forced to the realisation that under present conditions of costs and prices a large number of wheatgrowers are becoming more and more involved financially and more and more desperate as to the future, and that the minimum necessity is such action by the industry and by the nation as will provide efficient farmers with a reasonable security of tenure within the industry which gives them work in which they are skilled.

There is no need for me further to stress the fact that whatever assistance is given to farmers and wheatgrowers must not entail the payment of interest or the repayment of further capital sums.

Mr. Cross: You want an absolute gift!

Mr. BOYLE: Yes. The member for Caning (Mr. Cross) has had a brain wave. We want an absolute gift but it will be a gift not so much to the farmers of Western Australia as to the State as a whole. It must be made in order to keep the wheat industry on its feet. An average of £600,000 a year is paid to the Railway Department in freight by that industry. I am afraid that more than merely hundreds of thousands of pounds will be required to relieve the desperate situation of the farmers. A tremendous sum will be involved. I would only be guessing if I mentioned any amount. Whatever sum is necessary, however, must be raised. These men must know immediately the measure of relief that will be accorded them. The Premier has said that no farmer will be allowed to want. He told us three weeks ago that not a sheep would be allowed to perish.

The Premier: No, I did not! How can people keep all their sheep alive in a time of drought? Some must necessarily perish if the drought continues.

Mr. BOYLE: We will assume that some of them in the natural order of things will perish. I am speaking broadly. I heard the Premier say that sheep would not be allowed to perish. It is no use the Premier knowing that the flocks will not be allowed to disappear. It is little use our knowing it if the men in the back country do not know it. They are the men who want to know and that is what is behind this motion. We think a definite statement from the Government to the farmers is urgently required. I do not insinuate that the Government is not alive to the calamity that

has occurred but I wish to give instances to indicate that other people do not seem to be in the same state of mind. I had a telephone call from one of my constituents in the Kellerberrin district who wanted to shift 3,000 sheep from Kellerberrin to the salt-bush outside Bullfinch. That necessitated the temporary construction of two miles of pipeline from the head of the pipe at Bullfinch to that particular area. I was told by the Public Works Department that it would cost £500 to put down the line and that the man would have to pay 10s. per 1,000 gallons for the water. What an utter lack of co-ordination! There is an instance in which a man in extremis seeks aid and receives the same treatment as would be accorded to an ordinary applicant for a water supply! There appears to be no co-ordination whatever.

When I was at Kellerberrin the other day I read a letter from the Under Secretary for Public Works to the Kellerberrin Road Board. I presume the Minister knows all about it. The letter stated that there must be a curtailment of water used in the district other than that supplied for agricultural and mining purposes. Those were the only two exceptions. I would not disagree with the desire of the Minister to conserve water that would be used on public parks, regrettable as that might be; but I find that the stand pipes are being removed further north, that men are not to be allowed to draw water from the stand pipes and cart it away. Yet, according to the "West Australian" of yesterday's date, the people of the metropolitan area are assured of a full water supply. In a "News and Notes" item in the "West Australian" people were informed that whatever curtailment of water supply there might be elsewhere, they need not worry as the restrictions would not apply to the metropolitan area. Apparently the decision made known in a circular from the Public Works Department that a curtailment of water supply for the agricultural areas was to be effected will be carried out. In the letter signed by the Under Secretary for Water Supply it was plainly stated that agricultural and mining requirements would be met. I think that was an extremely commendable attitude for the department to adopt, but right on top of that came the notice that the stand-pipes were not to be drawn upon. The Barbalin people have been told to curtail their drawings on the water supply. The State

spent £65,000 about three years ago to connect the Barbalin scheme with the water main at the No. 4 pump and I heard recently that 180,000 gallons a day were being pumped from the No. 4 pump to the Barbalin dam. Yet those people have been told they must curtail their use of water. Water is just as important as feed for livestock. I hope the Minister for Works will assure the House that the statement that the metropolitan water supplies will not be interfered with is wrong.

The Minister for Works: It is quite right.

Mr. BOYLE: Of course it is! The Government has built the Canning Dam and I do not think any member on this side of the House is opposed to that. The dam has at present 8,800,000,000 gallons of water. The result is that we shall have the spectacle of lawns, parks and gardens in the metropolitan area being kept up to concert pitch while the countryside is depopulated. That is what will happen.

The Premier: We have to connect up the two.

Mr. BOYLE: On the 30th June next. That is when it will be connected. Why not take a little chance now with the Mundaring scheme in which is impounded 2,200,000,000 gallons of water, and has a draw of 3,500,000 gallons a day?

The Minister for Works: There is an abundant supply in the one case and a limited supply in the other.

The Premier: We do not want to waste it.

The Minister for Works: There is one year's supply at Mundaring, if you are so full of information.

Mr. BOYLE: I am not so full of information that I mind having my store added to. The Minister for Works says that the supply of water to the people of the metropolitan area will not be restricted. Why not extend that privilege to the people along the goldfields main so that water will be available for their stock and for themselves? That scheme means more to the farmers along the goldfields main than any lawns, parks or gardens in Perth can mean to the State.

The Premier: You do not mean that human beings are in danger of dying from lack of water?

Mr. BOYLE: No, but human beings will be inconvenienced if the water supply is

rigidly curtailed. The suggestion is to cut down the country supply by 40 per cent.

The Minister for Works: Do not you understand that there are two different sources of supply?

Mr. BOYLE: The Premier says the two reservoirs—Canning and Mundaring—are to be linked. I read that the work was to be started immediately and finished in March next.

The Premier: There is a war on and that has interfered.

Mr. BOYLE: There will be something more serious than a war locally. There is a danger of our having to re-settle the whole of that country. When the Premier finds his revenue from those areas diminishing, he will be an extremely worried man. I urge the Government to make an early statement of its proposals. Let the men and women in those areas know what the Government proposes to do. Three weeks have passed, and what we have been told publicly is that the price of chaff has been fixed at £8 10s. a ton on a 25s. freight basis. We do not know how much of that chaff will find its way to the people who need it. We do not know what wheat will be available from the bins. We do not know what seed and super supplies will be assured to those farmers next year. We do not know whether the stock can be railed away at reduced freights. One man applied to send his sheep to a more favoured area and was told that he must pay full freight both ways.

The Premier: Who told him that?

Mr. BOYLE: The Railway Department. I suppose the Premier will say that the department is wrong, too.

The Premier: The individual who made that statement was wrong.

Mr. BOYLE: The Government should make a statement of its proposals. It will not find anyone on this side of the House who is not prepared to assist 100 per cent. Why leave us in the air? Why leave us to go to our constituents and tell them that the Minister for Lands is sending telegrams to the Wheat Board or that the price of chaff is fixed at £8 10s. a ton in Perth? If I am any judge, there has been a great deal of reticence, and I think that in the public interests it should not be so.

The Minister for Lands: You said early in your speech that you would make helpful suggestions.

Mr. BOYLE: I have made them.

Mr. Cross: What are they?

Mr. BOYLE: We had an opportunity to send a representative to a conference to be opened in Melbourne on Friday.

The Premier: He would have had to leave by train to-day.

Mr. BOYLE: He could leave by plane to-morrow.

The Minister for Lands: As Hall Caine said, it does not matter if a wife is left a widow.

Mr. BOYLE: I hope the Minister is not impugning the efficiency of our national airways service.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is nothing in the motion about the national airways.

Mr. BOYLE: That is so, and I regret that the Minister mentioned it. I appeal to the Government to make a statement. I hope the Minister for Lands will address the House to-night and will define the position. I am aware that the Minister has not been idle during the last three weeks; he has called conference after conference. But the position is becoming more serious daily. There are people who are desperate enough perhaps to take wheat forcibly from the bins—a most regrettable thing.

The Premier: Do not incite them.

Mr. BOYLE: They do not need any incitement from me. I am telling the House what is public property; a report has been published in the Press to-day. I regret that such a thing happened, and I hope the responsibility for anything of the kind will not be attributed to the dilatoriness of the Government in stating the measures to be taken and announcing how soon they will be taken.

MR. SEWARD (Pingelly) [8.7]: As one of those who took part in the recent tour by members of the Country Party, I feel called upon to say a few words, but if I were not actuated by that motive, I certainly would have been moved by the statement just made by the Premier with regard to the conference to take place in Melbourne on Friday. It is well known that a few weeks ago a conference of members of the Australian Council of Agriculture was called and this State, for some reason or other, was represented by a Minister who had no know-

ledge whatever of the matters under discussion. That was no fault of the Minister; his departments were concerned with other activities.

The Premier: But he did know about the proposals.

Mr. SEWARD: The Minister for Lands was the only Minister who should have attended, and it was a most regrettable fact that he did not attend on that occasion.

The Premier: Very regrettable seeing that he was ill in bed for four or five days.

Mr. SEWARD: He was not in bed when the representative of this State was chosen. I regret that he was taken ill subsequently and that in any circumstances he could not have attended the conference, but that does not overcome the fact that the Government did not choose the Minister for Lands to represent the State at that conference. During the debate it was asked by way of interjection, "Why has the conference for Friday been called at such notice?" I would support the Government on every occasion when this State is not given adequate notice of conferences to be held in the east. It is not fair to the representative of this State to be called upon to grab his hat and coat and go east at such short notice. But this conference is being held because the Minister for Commerce has called it at the earliest possible moment after the results of the Federal elections were known.

The Minister for Mines: Are they known?

Mr. SEWARD: As regards the Minister for Commerce, yes.

Mr. Needham: They are not known yet.

Mr. SEWARD: Thus the Minister for Commerce, in calling the conference for Friday next, has shown that he is alive to the desperate position of the agricultural industry in the various States. He has summoned a conference of State Ministers to meet him.

The Minister for Lands: Well, I am not flying east.

Mr. SEWARD: If we could take a holiday last week, then I say—without any authority to speak for this party—that my leader would be only too ready to agree to an adjournment of the House over next week if that was the only thing necessary to enable the Minister for Lands to attend the conference.

The Minister for Lands: Speaking for myself I had no holiday last week.

Mr. SEWARD: I am not suggesting otherwise; I am merely stating that the Government saw fit to adjourn the House over last week for something that I consider was no concern of the Government's, namely the Federal elections, whereas the welfare of the agricultural industry is the greatest concern of the Government. I know that the Minister for Lands is a hard working man, and if it were possible for him to get away only by our adjourning the House, the House should be adjourned to enable him to attend the conference.

The Premier: We have not had to do that yet; the Leader of the Opposition has always been most courteous in that regard.

Mr. SEWARD: I shall not repeat the many statements made about the desperate position in the country. Unfortunately we are all perfectly well aware of it. I was in what may be termed one of the more favoured parts of the State as regards rainfall, namely the area between York and Tambellup and eastward to Lake Grace and Kondinin. The position is very desperate indeed. In no district where we could the settlers assure us that they could carry their sheep during the coming season. We know what will happen if, after the shearing, sheep are rushed into the market. They are being sent in now, as has been stated by various speakers. The market will tumble down until a position is reached when sheep cannot be given away. A suggestion has been made that some of the sheep should be killed. I can imagine inhabitants of the Claremont Asylum making a suggestion of that kind.

The Premier: Who made the suggestion?

Mr. SEWARD: I am not saying that the Government did; it was made in the Press. I want to assist to save some of those sheep. In view of the need for stocking up in the pastoral areas, if we have also the additional need to stock the agricultural areas when the rains come, we may find ourselves in a very serious position. Steps should be taken immediately to prohibit any potential breeding ewes from being sent to the fat stock market. No ewe should be slaughtered if it can be saved; wethers only should be marketed. I commend this suggestion to the Minister in order that our flocks of ewes might be preserved. As to the means for doing that, we could of course send fodder into the various districts to feed the sheep, but unfortunately we can-

not convey water there and the water is the greatest problem of all. Right through the Great Southern areas, on a trip of 700 miles, we did not see one dam that was full of water. The highest was about three-quarters full. None of those settlers estimates that he can carry on at all after Christmas with the present supplies of water. There is a large tract of country—I do not know it very well—west of the Midland line from about Watheroo right up to Dongarra. In that portion of the country there is a lot of sandplain, to which the farmers along the Midland Railway send their sheep during the summer months. The object I have in view in mentioning the matter is this: I know that water is obtainable at very shallow levels throughout that country.

Mr. Patrick: It is very poor country.

Mr. SEWARD: I know that. I merely offer this as a suggestion for preventing the killing of sheep. When those sheep are branded, they might be sent out into that district. There they would have a certain amount of scrub feed, and some wheat could be sent into the district for supplementary feeding. It is costly to truck water and feed long distances, but there the wheat is available in bins fairly close to the area, and a certain amount of that wheat might be taken, with roughage added, to the sheep. Then, if water is available, many thousands of sheep can be saved to Western Australia. The Minister says he wants suggestions, and I offer that suggestion.

Now I wish to review briefly the agreement which has been entered into regarding the price of chaff. I may be wrong in my conclusions, but I have to rely on the report which appeared in the "West Australian" of the 19th of the month. As an outcome of the conference, the price of chaff has been fixed at £8 10s. per ton on rail at Perth, where the rail freight does not exceed 25s. per ton. That, by the way, would apply to a siding 318 miles from Perth; so that in all those cases where the rail distance is less than 318 miles from Perth, the difference between the actual freight charged per ton and the £1 5s. per ton should be added to the £4 5s. per ton which the grower is to receive. That information, I think, is contained in the article. I think the price of £8 10s. per ton in the stack will apply to all Western Australian hay.

The Minister for Lands: Not in the stack.

Mr. SEWARD: No; £8 10s. on rails Perth. That will apply to all the hay cut this season.

The Premier: That has not been stated, though.

Mr. SEWARD: I am glad to have that admission from the Premier.

The Premier: That is not an admission; it is a statement of fact.

Mr. SEWARD: Well, a statement of fact. It does not apply to the whole of the hay cut this season. I regard it as an important matter, because of a case brought under my notice only a few days ago where the price of chaff had been fixed at £7 or £7 5s.—it does not really matter.

The Premier: The price of super was brought down by 4s. per ton, you know.

Mr. SEWARD: I am speaking about chaff. One thing at a time is quite sufficient for me to deal with. This particular farmer was waited on by a chaff buyer and offered £3 10s. in the stack for his hay. Chaff, as I say, was then £7 or £7 5s. The farmer sold that stack of hay. To the best of my knowledge and belief, that stack of hay is still in his paddock, but within a fortnight of his selling it chaff had risen another 10s. per ton. If that kind of thing is to go on, very little chaff will be cut in this country.

The Minister for Lands: The merchants are going to be restricted to 10s. per ton profit, and any return of their sales must show a spread of three weeks.

Mr. SEWARD: We shall see as we go on. I am glad to have that admission also. I think there will be a lot of faked returns coming in. The trouble is that we have to come here in order to drag this information out.

The Minister for Lands: Rot!

Mr. SEWARD: It is not rot. If the Minister will just contain himself for a few minutes, I will prove to him that it is not rot.

The Minister for Lands: I will not listen to that rot.

Mr. SEWARD: Why did Mr. Patrick have to reply to a letter in the Press stating that the farmer had been offered £2 5s. for his hay? The Minister does not know everything that happens in this country.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member should address himself to the Chair.

Mr. SEWARD: I am looking at you all the time, Sir. This man sold his stack of hay at £3 10s. per ton in the stack, when the price of wheat had been fixed; but the price has been put up 10s. per ton since he sold his hay, and the buyer will be the only one to benefit. If he sells on the new basis of £8 10s., he will have a nice profit of 10s. per ton on that stack of hay. No wonder the grower begins to think he is not getting quite a fair deal! Under the agreement, which I take from the "West Australian," I notice the merchants are allowed £3—or not exactly the merchants, but an allowance of £3 per ton—has been made to cover the cost of cutting up, bagging, cartage to railway, and also, I presume, commission and further etceteras. I am very anxious to know what the etceteras come to. In reviewing the figures I find that cutting costs about 10s. per ton. Bags, I believe, at the present time are worth 13s. per dozen. Allowing 22 bags to the ton, the cost is 24s. per ton for bags. Carting is 1s. per mile. Allowing five miles from the farm to the siding means 5s. per ton for carting. That totals £1 19s. per ton. For agents' commission I allow 5s. per ton. That means charges of £2 4s. per ton. There is another 16s., representing the etceteras. I would like the Minister to explain what this 16s. is for. I think the Minister interjected that agents were to get a commission of 10s. per ton.

The Minister for Lands: That has been published for a fortnight.

Mr. SEWARD: I have allowed 5s. per ton.

The Minister for Lands: You did not have to come here to drag that out.

Mr. SEWARD: No; but I am giving the Minister a little information if he will be patient. The reason that I allowed 5s. per ton is that that has been the ruling rate in my district for some years. Last year an agent came down there and expressed himself content with a commission of 2s. 6d. per ton. In allowing the agents an extra 7s. 6d. per ton I think the Minister has treated them very well. This was when the agents were all competing for chaff. They were then prepared to do it at 5s. per ton. But there



is no competition to-day. A pool has been formed, and there is only one buyer, and if the farmer does not like to accept the price the buyer offers him, he does not sell his wheat, because he has no one else to go to.

Mr. Hughes: That is orderly marketing.

Mr. SEWARD: Yes, very orderly for the agent. If the farmer does not accept the price offered by the agent, he has no alternative. I say that because in many districts there is no chaff-cutter. There are chaff-cutters in Northam and York, and in other large cutting areas; but in many other areas there is no chaff-cutter. The chaff-cutter concerned is in the hands of the merchant. Therefore, if he does not buy sufficient chaff in a district, no chaff-cutter goes there, and of course the farmer will not be able to sell his hay. That is the trouble facing the grower in the country districts. He is quite agreeable to accept the price of £8 10s. to the consumer, which he regards as fair. The grower is supposed to get £4 5s. per ton. I have not heard of the grower being offered that price per ton. I have heard of a few offers, but there has not been one as high as that. I wish to point out to the Minister that £4 5s. in Pingelly, even if offered, is not the proper price, because the rail freight from Pingelly is only 15s. per ton. Therefore the grower should receive another 10s., or a total of £4 15s., per ton on the basis of the proposed agreement. But that price has not been offered him. The merchant can offer anything—£2, or £2 10s.—and if the grower does not take it, that is the end of the matter. I suggest to the Minister that if the Agricultural Bank inspectors were commissioned to go out and inspect growing crops and make the farmers offers for them as they are growing—if a crop is full of weeds the inspector would make a reduction, but there would not be too many of such crops—the effect would be highly satisfactory. The inspector could make the grower an offer to cut the hay at so much per ton. Then the merchant could come along and do the cutting-up in return for the commission of 10s. In that event the Government would get far more hay than otherwise. Two weeks ago I was shown 250 acres of Dundee wheat. It would not pay anyone to take a chaff-cutter out to cut that, but a haling machine could be sent out. Agricultural Bank inspectors know the

crops, and they could get far more hay for the Government than would be obtainable under this other arrangement.

The only other matter I wish to refer to at the moment is one I mentioned on the Address-in-reply. I took the Minister up on a statement he made that there was room for unlimited expansion in the export of pig meat from this State. I queried that at the time, and we had some very bitter complaints made during our trip of last week by men who have been sending in pig meat to the markets and have had to accept £1 per pig less than they got about a month earlier. That, of course, is due to the lack of storage space in Western Australia. One can only wish that the Government last year, when it was asked to make more storage accommodation available, had received that request a little more favourably. It is no use rushing in and urging farmers to go in for pig meat or anything else unless they can be assured of a market. There is no market for pig meat now. Pigs are being rushed in, and the farmers are meeting with great disappointment through having their pigs sold at fully £1 below what their value is. With those few remarks I heartily support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, urging the Government to take immediate steps to deal with the serious position now existing in Western Australia. When our tour was made the rain which fell last week in parts of the State had not yet fallen. It will be a godsend where it fell. Unfortunately in many of the places we visited very little of that rain had been received. That urgent and rapid action is necessary has, I think, been proved by members who have spoken to the motion.

MR. BERRY (Irwin-Moore) [8.29]: I wish to associate myself with the motion, more particularly as I realise that even though a large proportion of my district is better favoured than other districts, the remaining portion is suffering just as severely as is the wheatbelt. The entire season has been a tragedy. It started off with bad lambing results. The rains were late coming in, and in great parts of the country did not continue at all after the initial outburst. The rainfall figures were given by the Leader of the Opposition. I do not wish to go over ground that has already been covered so ably by members of the Country Party. I am aware that

they made a tour of the country and saw its state. Seeing it with one's own eyes creates a feeling of pathetic sympathy for the people who are in dire trouble there. I wish to support one or two of the statements made by the member for Avon (Mr. Boyle), particularly his statement about the deputation from the Wheat Growers' Union that called at Parliament House some little time ago. I think the member for Avon said it was three weeks ago; actually, it is more. I think it was on the 22nd of last month. Even yet those farmers have not been told what is going to be done. I agree with the statement by the member for Avon that the Premier gave the deputation an assurance that the sheep would not suffer.

The Premier: I did not say that. How can people prevent a drought?

Mr. BERRY: That was the impression I gained from what the Premier said.

The Premier: How can we prevent a drought?

Mr. BERRY: Australia will have to take action to save the sheep, drought or no drought. It is a national matter. We are sending our sons away to fight for us and for our national assets. Are we to let those assets just die in the bush, close to bins full of wheat that apparently has become weevily? That is why the Merredin people are making a fuss. They are not going to stand by and watch their sheep die while there are bins full of weevily wheat, or so it is reported to us. I cannot myself definitely assert that the wheat is weevily, but from reports I have received in the city I definitely believe that to be a fact. We all know and admit that the state of affairs is serious, yet for a whole month we have not brought forward one concrete proposal to rectify the position. By notice I asked certain questions today. Some of us who have crops are more fortunate than others; but we want to know where to get binders to take these crops off. We do not know, and apparently we are not going to be told. That applies generally. We cannot allow our sheep to die. How can we replace them? Where is the State's revenue to come from if our assets disappear? I know very well what is blocking the assistance to the farmers. It is the question of "sound finance" again; "sound finance" which recently at a meeting in Perth said it was better to allow

the sheep to die than to feed and maintain them! But not one word was mentioned about the debts on these sheep. Are these debts to die with the sheep? Farmers have been counselled to destroy their sheep, but are they to carry the debt on the sheep so destroyed, pay interest on it, and then buy other sheep under bill of sale, thus incurring an additional debt on which they will have to pay more interest? The whole thing is ridiculous. It is time we took the matter in hand and dealt with farmers' debts effectively. I am not going to use the hackneyed expression that money can be found for war; we have heard that too often, but the time has arrived when we should take immediate action to conserve this national asset, private bank or no private bank. I know how difficult the problem is for the Government, but it must be faced. We must approach the Federal Government for money to save our sheep, not only for the sake of Western Australia but for the whole of Australia.

A suggestion was made to me today that perhaps the situation could be relieved in a small way by sending the sheep to Wyndham for canning or elsewhere in the North for grazing rather than allow them to die. I have no doubt the Minister is alive to such a suggestion and as to whether there is any possibility in that connection. I am told by a station-owner in the North-West that his run is well grassed and well watered, but unstocked. How far that opens up an avenue of possibility I do not know, but I feel sure that the Royal Commissioner inquiring into the pastoral industry can furnish figures, and it would be worth while for the Government to take action as early as possible if only to save our eyes. It would be better to send them to the north than allow them to die in the wheatbelt, where they could not be replaced for years.

The member for Pingelly (Mr. Seward) brought something to my mind. He said that we had coastal strips in Western Australia. I am interested in them, but more from a fishing than from a pastoral point of view. I can assure members that there are people at Safety Bay who are running sheep right on the coast. The sheep have been there for quite a while, perhaps a year, and are being grazed in the open, but within fenced land. As far as I can ascertain, there is no poison or any plant

there deleterious to stock. I know there is the question of "coastiness" to be considered, but this can be overcome. There is abundance of water to be had at a depth of six, eight, or ten feet. It can be obtained even on the beach at four feet and pumped indefinitely without losing its level. As I say, there is a quantity of feed and water there, so why not turn the sheep on to that land? They might as well die there as in the bush, but at least they will have a sporting chance. They will be given a better chance than the bankers and insurance people would give them. Those people only say, "Let the sheep die." It might be better to allow a few bankers and money lenders to die financially rather than lose our valuable stock. The latter are hard to replace.

Mr. Lambert: Some politicians died politically a couple of days ago.

Mr. BERRY: If we allow these sheep to die, I hope some local politicians will die politically too—they will deserve it. If I speak much longer, I shall only be repeating what the Country Party members have already said. I have not yet got over my throat trouble and my voice is husky, but I do express the hope that the Government—if it will not be represented at the conference to be held next Friday—will at least send a telegram saying, "Give us the necessary money." We must do everything we possibly can for our farmers and their stock. They cannot be expected to carry on their operations under their present load of debt. As a matter of fact, it is ridiculous to ask farmers to carry on their holdings to-day when they are so heavily encumbered, and now that this further disaster has overtaken them I feel quite convinced, as I think one of the previous speakers said, that unless we take this business by the throat and organise and do something practical and speedy, we shall have an exodus from the wheatbelt which will astound members. There is no alternative to such an exodus. If I were in the same position as some farmers today, I would not wait a second, but would say, as some of these poor folk must say, "It is no use carrying on, I must go at once." I hope that when the Minister speaks, as I feel sure he will, he will inform us of the decision arrived at as the result of various deliberations in the city recently, so that we can send a message of hope to our farmers by telling them that something will be done speedily to ensure

their remaining on their farms, and not merely as debt-ridden people. With regard to chaff, the position can only be advantageous to the farmer if we decide to give him a fair price for hay in the stack. I understand that those farmers on a £1 freight basis are to receive £4 5s. in the stack. I understand also from an interview I had with Mr. White, the Price Fixing Commissioner, that he is attempting to fix the profits of the merchants. If he succeeds in fixing a price for primary products in that way, thus preventing the farmer from being exploited by the middleman, then I think Mr. White will have done the farmer another fine service. We have battled unsuccessfully for years to control the middleman. If that is Mr. White's intention, he definitely has my backing. I gather also that there is still hay in Western Australia which has been purchased by merchants for as little as £1 7s. 6d. a ton. Apparently that hay has not yet been consumed. The Price Fixing Commissioner became alive to this fact; he obtained all the information in detail and averaged the price that had been paid at the different hay sales. He then added £2 10s. per ton for working expenses, plus £1 for freight and 10s. profit to the ring merchant. In that way he arrived at a price of £7 5s. per ton. That is the position as I understand it. I congratulate Mr. White. The member for Pingelly mentioned this, otherwise I should not have referred to it. Anyone who will fix the price to the middleman will do the primary producer a tremendous service, a service that we ourselves have attempted to render for years past. I must admit I am pleased that we have taken no action in this Chamber to prevent Mr. White from doing what he has done with regard to the price of hay and to help the farmer.

I again exhort the Government to tackle this drought problem. It is no use saying that it is a Federal matter. It is our matter. If we sit back and say, "Oh, it is a Federal matter," then everything which is inconvenient to us will become a Federal matter and be shelved indefinitely. It is our duty to see that the Federal Government faces up to its responsibilities. As I said before, I hope our Government will say to the Federal Government, "We require a sum of money and we must have it debt free to save not only the national assets of Western Australia, but the national assets of Australia."

**MR. McDONALD** (West Perth) [8.45]: We who sit in this part of the House appreciate to the full the gravity of the position which confronts a number of the agricultural areas of our State. We share the anxiety which has been expressed by members who have spoken and which I know is felt by members of the Government. I have listened very attentively to the account of personal observations given to the House by members who have spoken, and the reports which we ourselves have received and the things which in some cases we have seen, in those areas, indicates that the situation, as the Minister for Lands of course knows, requires extremely careful action if a good deal of loss is not to be incurred by the farmers and the State. I do not propose to say more than this: that we are very ready and indeed anxious to extend to the Government and other hon. members our fullest co-operation in meeting the situation which has arisen in those areas. I do not pretend to be able of my own personal experience to contribute very much—indeed I do not propose to contribute anything—in the way of specific suggestions. The matter has had the consideration of the Minister for Lands and all members who represent farming areas. Members on this side of the House have a full appreciation of the situation confronting those areas and will extend their fullest co-operation to any measures the Government may bring forward to relieve the position.

**MR. LAMBERT** (Yilgarn-Coolgardie) [8.46]: I desire to associate myself with the remarks of some of the previous speakers. The excellent speeches made by certain of our friends opposite have justified the motion for the adjournment of the House and have emphasised the unfortunate position of the farmers. In my district, from the rabbit-proof fence to Southern Cross, where the Agricultural Bank has over £1,000,000 involved—or did have before the writing-down and abandonment of a lot of those areas took place—a good deal could be done to assist the farmers. Apart from the purchase of hay and other cereals the Government could assist by permitting the utilisation of the railways, if not free, at least at absolute cost for the shifting of stock. It could utilise to a greater extent the goldfields water scheme to supplement supplies as far as Southern Cross. I know very well there is

a shortage of water at Mundaring Weir. As the Minister for Works stated a short while ago by way of interjection there is only one year's supply in that catchment. Consequently the position is serious, but it is not so serious that necessary supplies of water cannot be made available as a result of which farmers will be assisted to carry on. I understand from a statement made by the Commissioners of the Agricultural Bank that it is absolutely impossible to buy chaff not only here but also in the Eastern States. Apparently, therefore, the situation is as bad in the other States as it is in Western Australia. The speeches made by members opposite and the assurance given by the Leader of the National Party (Mr. McDonald) indicate that all of us are fully alive to the very serious position the farmers are facing to-day, and that the fullest co-operation and encouragement will be given to the Government in any step it may take to help the farmers over this deplorable period.

**MR. HUGHES** (East Perth) [8.50]: I have been very interested in the debate and particularly in the statement that 7,000 farmers are not going to stand for the continuance of the present system. I think that postulates the dawn of hope.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: It is only a statement.

Mr. HUGHES: Apparently the farming community has reached the end of its tether as an interest-producing institution. That had to come. For years the farming community has been building up a debt structure and paying interest until the stage has been reached when the payment of interest is killing the industry. Whether a private individual, a business or an institution of any sort is concerned, the moment interest reaches a certain figure the individual or institution must die because of inability to bear the load.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: Then prices are increased.

Mr. HUGHES: Will that remedy the position? We would all like to give assistance to the farming industry, but whence is the assistance to come? Any help the State gives to the farmers must come from the rest of the citizens.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: The sky would be a good place for it to come from.

Mr. HUGHES: That is so. I suppose the sky produces the main element that keeps the farming industry going.

The Minister for Lands: And pays the interest.

Mr. HUGHES: Yes, the sky provides the water that pays the interest.

Mr. Watts: The sky is the limit sometimes.

Mr. HUGHES: The only assistance the Government can give must come from the rest of the citizens of the State and a large number of those citizens are in much the same position as the farmers. We must not lose sight of the fact that next Tuesday petrol rationing will be instituted and a large section of people in other parts of the State will be seriously affected. Other sections of the people will be badly in need of financial assistance to carry them over this period.

What I could not understand about the speech of the member for Avon (Mr. Boyle) is that all he seemed to want was a statement from the Minister in order that the sheep would have water. I could not follow how the sheep could drink a statement from the Minister for Agriculture. I do not see what assistance any statement the Minister may make will give to those thirsty sheep. If financial assistance is to be rendered I ask hon. members who are rightly pleading to this House for help for their constituents where that assistance is to come from. The member for Avon rightly said that the farming community was not in a position to bear any more debt structure, either principal or interest. Therefore anything in the nature of financial assistance must be given on the clear understanding that neither is any interest to be paid on it nor is there to be any repayment of the principal. If that is so, the rest of the State must borrow money on which it must pay interest to give this financial assistance to the farmers, and it must also accept the responsibility for the repayment of the principal at a subsequent date. I suggest to the representatives of the farming constituencies that the rest of the State is not in a position to accept any more burden of debt in respect to either principal or interest.

Mr. Seward: It is a pity you do not apply that to secondary industries.

Mr. HUGHES: The member for Avon produced two sets of figures. On the one hand he showed a number of farmers who had credit balances. I should say they were the poor farmers, not, as he appeared to think, the rich farmers.

Mr. Boyle: I do not think anything of the sort. I pointed that out.

Mr. HUGHES: On the other hand he showed a larger number of farmers who had debit balances at the bank. Obviously those farmers with debit balances, in order to get overdrafts from the banks, must have lodged securities to the extent of double the value of their overdrafts.

Mr. Watts: Not always. I know one man who owes £19,000 on a security that would not bring £16,000 if sold to-morrow.

Mr. HUGHES: We can rest assured that in the main there is a good margin between the money advanced by the banks on overdraft and the security of the assets held against the overdrafts.

Mr. Watts: Theoretically, yes.

Mr. HUGHES: When the banks reach the stage that the capitalised interest is exhausting the margin between the value of the security and the principal debt, they step in and take possession.

Hon. C. G. Latham: No, they do not.

Mr. HUGHES: I know that they do, and that they are very careful to ensure that at no stage does the total debt exceed the market value of the property. That is a fundamental of their banking principles.

Mr. Watts: That has not applied in the last year or two.

Mr. Doney: They cannot stop depreciation of values.

Mr. HUGHES: The moment they detect a depreciation of values, they ask clients to reduce their overdrafts.

Mr. Doney: The client simply does not do it and remains on the farm.

Mr. HUGHES: When the clients cannot do it, the banks take steps to protect themselves.

Mr. Doney: No, they do not. They would if they could, but they cannot.

Mr. HUGHES: During the whole period of the depression, I think I am safe in saying that not one-tenth of one per cent. of the principal money lent on first mortgage throughout the length and breadth of Australia was lost by depreciation.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Are you referring to the agricultural industry? One of the principles of banking is to spread the risk.

Mr. HUGHES: But the banks watch each individual security.

Mr. Styants: They do not take much risk.

Mr. HUGHES: No, they always have a good margin.

Mr. McDonald: It is not their money to take the risk with, except a very small fraction.

Mr. HUGHES: I do not agree with the member for West Perth. If the hon. member will look at the "Year Book" he will find that banks operating in Australia have a large amount of shareholders' capital, which was subscribed in the first place to carry on the business. Further, he will find that in the last 25 years, in addition to paying dividends ranging from 14 per cent. down to 8 per cent., they have built up in reserves a sum almost equal to their original subscribed capital. I think I am safe in saying from memory that the Yokohama Specie Bank—

Hon. C. G. Latham: That is not operating in Perth.

Mr. HUGHES: It is located in Sydney and is carrying on business throughout Australia.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Not here.

Mr. HUGHES: It is financing trade operations throughout Australia.

Hon. C. G. Latham: That is better.

Mr. HUGHES: In 10 years that bank built up in reserves an amount equal to the original subscribed capital and paid dividends of over 10 per cent throughout.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: Did that bank lend money to farmers?

Mr. HUGHES: It lent money wherever it could trade.

Mr. McDonald: What about the Primary Producers' Bank?

Mr. HUGHES: That bank closed its doors.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Why?

Mr. HUGHES: It entered the field late and brought in, speaking from memory again, primary producers who persisted in posing as bankers. What was the ultimate result of the liquidation of that bank? According to the last report, I believe it was going to meet its commitments.

Hon. C. G. Latham: To its depositors.

Mr. HUGHES: That is the one instance throughout the whole of the depression of a bank having failed.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Other banks failed; one in Queensland.

Mr. HUGHES: The Primary Producers' Bank was a very small institution.

Mr. McDonald: Look at those that failed in the nineties.

Mr. HUGHES: If the hon. member would only realise that this is the year 1940!

Mr. McDonald: If the hon. member would only read history, he would know more about it.

Mr. HUGHES: I could give the hon. member some historical information about the failure of banks.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hope the hon. member intends to link up his remarks with the motion.

Mr. HUGHES: Yes, it all has to do with the debt structure. There was a run on the State Savings Bank of New South Wales. Because certain people failed to come to its aid the bank was forced to suspend payment. It had in cash about 2s. in the pound of the depositors' money. There was also a run on the Western Australian Savings Bank, which had 1s. 10d. in the pound of its depositors' money, or 2d. in the pound less than had the savings bank in New South Wales. The Commonwealth Savings Bank came to the rescue of the Western Australian Bank, swallowed it, and saved it from default. The reason why the Commonwealth institution assisted the Western Australian Bank, and allowed the New South Wales Bank to default, was that the authorities wished to discredit the Premier of New South Wales, but did not wish to discredit the Premier of Western Australia.

Hon. C. G. Latham: You had better talk about something you understand.

Mr. HUGHES: I was here on the spot.

Hon. C. G. Latham: And I happened to be a member of the Government.

Mr. HUGHES: What did the hon. member do with our savings bank?

Hon. C. G. Latham: To protect the depositors' money we handed it over to the Commonwealth Bank for a fixed period.

Mr. HUGHES: And so the hon. member protected the depositors. Why did the Commonwealth Bank take it over when it was in danger of default?

Hon. C. G. Latham: Why was it in danger of default?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I wish the hon. member would not interject. The member for East Perth is getting off the track.

Hon. C. G. Latham: He is annoying me.

Mr. HUGHES: It cannot be denied that farmers are very much concerned with the problem of banking. To a large extent banks exist on the interest they have been drawing for years from the farmers. True, that is killing the farming industry, as it is many other industries, and the principal must come to an end. Many farmers have heavy overdrafts with the banks, which were well secured at the time when the moneys were advanced. Banks will not allow overdrafts to exist once they feel that the margin of security has diminished beyond the safety line. They, therefore, protect themselves. They will make a farmer default on the worker, the country storekeeper, and on everyone to whom he owes money, except the banks themselves. When the depression hit the farming industry thousands of farmers were, through no fault of their own, unable to meet their obligations. As the result of the farmers' debts adjustment legislation the working man had to accept 2s. 6d. in the pound for his wages. I know of scores of cases in which the workers suffered. One man worked for two years for a farmer. He was owed in wages about £156, but was forced to accept 2s. 6d. in the pound.

Mr. McDonald: By whom was he forced?

Mr. HUGHES: He was forced to accept that amount because we passed legislation for the adjustment of farmers' debts. We gave no right for readjustment in the case of secured creditors. Three parties were concerned. There was the wages man, who after working for years had to accept 2s. 6d. in the pound on the wages due to him; then there was the country storekeeper, who in good faith continued to give the farmer credit and actually kept him going, despite the bad times.

Mr. Rodoreda: They had a worse deal than did the farmers.

Mr. HUGHES: Yes. The third party, the secured creditor, usually the bank, did not write off one penny of interest. When we wrote down debts we wiped out seven-eighths of the worker's debt and seven-eighths of the storekeeper's debt. When the country storekeeper had, say, £6,000 worth of debt wiped off by law and was indebted to the merchants, he could not say to them, "By statute £6,000 worth of my assets have been wiped off, and I now want 75 per cent. of my debt to you wiped off." The country

storekeeper had to pay in full to the last penny. Many of them were ruined because the law prevented them from collecting debts due to them, and yet forced them to meet their own obligations. If we are going to have any suspension of debts let us have a complete and universal suspension. Let it not be possible for one man to say to his creditor, "I need not pay you," while another creditor who is also a debtor, is forced to meet his obligations. There is only one way to overcome that position, namely by means of a complete moratorium. I should be reluctant to agree to any partial moratorium for any section of the community. Whilst the farmers had their debts adjusted, the banks and financial institutions exacted the last penny from those who owed them money. One farmer was indebted to a machinery merchant for machinery purchased under hire purchase agreement. During the depression he could not meet his commitments. As the result of being relieved of his obligations to his labourers and his unsecured creditors, he was later on in a position to pay his arrears to the merchant. He was then charged 10 per cent. on all arrears accruing throughout the depression period.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Was that on a hire purchase agreement?

Mr. HUGHES: Yes. I said to the firm in question, "You have been working on a bank overdraft yourselves and have been paying 5½ per cent. interest throughout the depression. Now you want to charge this unfortunate man 10 per cent. on his arrears. You want to make 4½ per cent. profit out of his misfortunes." Finally the firm said, "We will share our portion of the depression and give you a rebate of 4½ per cent. on the interest, and charge you the 5½ per cent. we pay to the bank." I wonder how many farmers paid the full 10 per cent. The wheat industry, I should say, more than ever is a national industry. I should say that at the present time, from the point of view of the nation as well as from that of the State, we cannot allow any one of our rural industries to languish, seeing that in the near future we may be called upon to provide food in much greater quantities than has been the case in the past. We should preserve all our food-producing industries; but we cannot preserve them if they are to be submerged by burdens of debt. The way we should tackle the problem is to go to

that angle first. We must have some alteration in our financial structure and our financial system if we are to maintain those industries. Not only in the farming community but also in the commercial community people work on overdrafts. I venture to say that if an analysis was made it would be found that commercial enterprises and manufacturing enterprises are in the same position as was disclosed by the Wheat Commission with regard to farming. All those industries work on overdrafts and suffer from an excessive burden of debt. The member for Avon (Mr. Boyle) mentioned the numerous bills of sale held over assets in the primary producing industries; but I confidently believe there are just as many bills of sale held over the assets of the commercial and manufacturing communities. The rate of interest is too high. The matter is one that only the Federal Government can handle. If it is a case of securing financial relief, only the Federal Government can handle it at the present time. I fail to see what Mr. Cameron wants a conference for. If there is going to be a conference and it has to be adjourned the sheep will be dead before they receive the water they need. Mr. Cameron and his colleagues are now in possession of the most drastic and far-reaching powers. There is practically nothing they cannot do under the authority that is now vested in them. What I think is lacking is the will to do. If only they would show some strength instead of wanting to have a conference or a committee meeting and talking; talking, talking every time a problem crops up. If they would only have the strength to do something, as they have the power, something could be done. So I would say to members on my right, "Why not ask Mr. Cameron not to worry about having a committee meeting or a conference?" In a Swedish text book which teaches the English language, a child is asked to define what is a committee, and the answer is, "A committee is a body that keeps minutes and wastes hours."

Hon. C. G. Latham: I wonder would that have any other application?

Mr. HUGHES: Yes. If the Leader of the Opposition thinks that any time occupied by this House in listening to anybody but him is a waste of time, he may be right or—

Hon. C. G. Latham: Does the cap fit you? If so, I am sorry.

Mr. HUGHES: If the Leader of the Opposition would only take out to the farmers some of the pearls he has the opportunity to gather here, he would be doing them a great service.

Hon. C. G. Latham: I should be misleading them sometimes.

Mr. HUGHES: The only way something can be done is for Mr. Cameron to show a little strength and capacity.

Mr. Cross: He has not any.

Mr. HUGHES: Now is his opportunity. There is no excuse now. There has just been an election in which the people have confirmed Mr. Cameron and his colleagues in the far-reaching powers under the National Security Act and its regulations. There is no excuse now for them not to go on.

Member: There has been no excuse for twenty years.

Mr. HUGHES: I suggest that the Federal Government might relieve the farmers of their burden of debt by advancing to every farmer sufficient money to pay off the first mortgage on his property and—

Hon. C. G. Latham: Then the second mortgages would become the first.

Mr. HUGHES: What a brilliant student of economics the hon. member is!

Hon. C. G. Latham: You know there is an enormous number of second mortgages to-day.

Mr. HUGHES: Why is the hon. member so worried lest the farmer might get out of some of his mortgages? Why does he always want to have the farmer with a mortgage on his back? I suggest that the Federal Government advance to each farmer sufficient money to pay off his first mortgage, which would then be transferred to the Federal Treasurer, so that the first mortgage would not disappear and thereby allow the second one to come in as the first. The Federal Government could do that, charging the farmer 1 per cent. interest on the money. The Federal Government could crystallise all principal repayments until a period after the war. The result would be—

Member: Chaos!

Mr. HUGHES: Is the answer that if nothing is done there will not be chaos, but try to do something and there will be chaos?

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: If you did something orthodox, it would be all right.



Mr. HUGHES: The Federal Government could issue from its Treasury sufficient notes, and advance them to the farmers, to pay off the first mortgages, taking over those first mortgages itself as security over the lands. That would have two far-reaching effects. It would relieve the farmers and other primary producers of about 80 per cent. of their present interest burdens. No principal repayment could be required until after a period succeeding the termination of the war. The stock answer to that suggestion is, "If we did that, we would be inflating the currency." Of course, a lot of people would say, without stopping to analyse the idea, that it was foolish, and that the member for East Perth was just a crank. When I was a small boy, I remember hearing about a crank on wheels, who was going to propel vehicles with motor spirit. The man was cartooned in "Punch." He was a standing joke. That was Henry Ford, who said he was going to run motor cars. All the wisecracks and orthodox thinkers regarded him merely as a crank on wheels. There were two other lunatics, the Wright brothers. They used to go on cliffs and said they were going to fly by means of aeroplanes. They were regarded as butts for the sneers and jokes of the cartoonists.

The Premier: I do not think they were. I think they were encouraged.

Mr. HUGHES: There were many jokes made about the Wright brothers.

Hon. C. G. Latham: You did not read Frank Reade when you were a boy!

Mr. HUGHES: I do not mind being dubbed a crank by the member for York (Hon. C. G. Latham) because I am satisfied one of us is a crank, but I think we ought to postpone judgment in that respect until time makes the decision. If the Federal Government is prepared to come to the aid of the primary producers in the manner I have suggested, that aid will have two far-reaching effects. It will reduce the interest burden on the farmer by at least 80 per cent. and put into circulation, at the present time, a similar proportion of floating and liquid capital, of which much will be absorbed in borrowings for war purposes and be available at from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 per cent. That would provide this country with what every developing country needs more than

anything else, namely, cheap money and plenty of it. It might be said that by doing that we would inflate the currency. I am not so scared about the word "inflation" as many people are. We may see a lot of inflation during the next decade, wild and woolly inflation, linked with no security at all. We may see that if we do not take the problem in hand and arrive at some scientifically planned control of the monetary system. I suggest it will not mean inflation, because if we had in Western Australia £1,000 worth of real estate we could go to any financial institution and borrow up to two-thirds of that value, on the condition that we repaid the principal with interest at from 5 to 6 per cent. That form of security is the best in the world and is the one on which trustees, by law, are allowed to lend. Trustees are supposed only to invest their funds in gilt-edged securities. If it is regarded as good security for the repayment of principal plus 6 per cent., surely it is better security for the repayment of principal at 1 per cent. Yet the very people who will lend on that security for their money, say that if we allow someone else to do it we will inflate the currency. I cannot understand why a person with £1,000 worth of real estate cannot go straight to the Commonwealth Treasury and secure 600 notes, instead of having to go to a private bank to secure 600 notes derived from the Treasury. What virtue do those notes acquire by going into the coffers of private banks? That is the curious part of it. The banks say that notes coming direct from the Treasury would represent bad business and inflation, but if they go from the Treasury to the bank it is all right. They then become good for the original amount and an additional 6 per cent per annum.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: You were just speaking about inefficient bankers when you referred to the Primary Producers' Bank.

Mr. HUGHES: I did not.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: You spoke about producers posing as bankers.

Mr. HUGHES: I am not trying to pose as a banker.

Mr. Watts: I thought you might be.

Mr. HUGHES: During my lifetime I have gone to considerable trouble to inform my mind on this question, and before

I sit down I shall propound a question to the member for Brownhill-Ivanhoe (Mr. F. C. L. Smith), and I shall be most grateful to him if he answers it satisfactorily. I have never yet been able to get anyone to answer it for me. If money is advanced against a security, that does not constitute inflation. Only when money is advanced against no security whatever, does the transaction become inflation.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: That statement is a lot of nonsense.

Mr. HUGHES: Very well. Does the hon. member suggest that when someone goes to him with the necessary security and secures an advance of £1,000 at 6 per cent. and he hands over the necessary amount in Australian notes, that represents inflation?

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: Yes; that is inflation.

Mr. HUGHES: It is news to me that every time a bank or a financial institution or a private citizen makes a loan by way of first mortgage on real estate he inflates the currency.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: Well, he does.

Mr. HUGHES: I do not think the hon. member will get many orthodox economists to go that far. As a matter of fact, what the orthodox economists know as inflation is where money is issued against no security at all. I can give the hon. member an illustration of inflation. As soon as the last war broke out there was a run on the banks, and in Great Britain there was a danger that the Bank of England would not be able to meet the demand.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: You are not Barclay Smith, are you?

Mr. HUGHES: The British Government printed 260,000,000 notes, which were called "Bradburys" and made them available to the Bank of England. That was purely an inflationary issue because the notes had nothing behind them except the signature of the Treasurer. If the British Government had initialed the 260,000,000 notes and issued them against the security of £400,000,000 worth of real estate, the transaction would not have represented inflation. That is the position as I understand it. I shall be deeply indebted to the member for Brownhill-Ivanhoe if he will explain the true meaning of inflation, if it is not in accordance with what I have outlined.

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: I may tell you later on.

Mr. HUGHES: I have gone to considerable trouble to understand these matters. At the earliest opportunity I made myself a qualified accountant. When I had the chance to go to the University, I studied economics under Professor Shann who was adopted as the sheet anchor of the orthodox economists in Western Australia. I took the opportunity of studying and qualifying in the subject of public finance at the University, and I have read extensively in the field of unorthodox economics. I do not propose to be censured for not having tried to find out what is right. All I say to the member for Brownhill-Ivanhoe is that I have tried to find out these things. If I have been unsuccessful, he will be doing me a great service by enlightening me. This is the question I hope he will answer for me. The Commonwealth Note Department has issued 55,000,000 £1 notes.

The Premier: What about giving some for water for the sheep?

Mr. HUGHES: We can only give the water through the notes. In that way relief could be given to the farmer. I suppose if a hundred million sovereigns were to fall from the sky to-night the Treasurer would feel relieved.

The Minister for Lands: If anybody got there he would be relieved.

Mr. HUGHES: It would not matter twopence; so long as the sovereigns fell the Treasurer would be considerably relieved. The Commonwealth Parliament has allowed the Note Department to issue 55,000,000 £1 notes, against its reserve of £15,000,000 in gold. What I want to know from the member for Brownhill-Ivanhoe is, what virtue is there in 55 millions? Why is 55 millions all right and 53 millions and one all wrong? Why is 55 millions good sound finance, and 155 millions not? What is the virtue in 55 millions? What is the magic in the number 55 millions?

Mr. F. C. L. Smith: It is like a conjurer who gets a shilling out of a handkerchief. It is a wonder he does not get a sovereign.

Mr. HUGHES: I hope I will get a more lucid and intelligent answer than that. What is the virtue in 55 millions? Why not 155 millions? If there is virtue in 55 millions and no virtue in 155 millions, where is the point at which the virtue stops? I have never found anybody yet—banker, economist or member of Parliament—who

has been able to give me a satisfying explanation of the magic of that 55 millions.

Mr. Seward: You never will.

Mr. HUGHES: But I have had a promise, and I do not think the member for Brownhill-Ivanhoe is going to fail me.

Mr. Seward: It is impossible of performing.

Mr. HUGHES: He is going to tell me all about it. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have been very patient and I have been wandering.

The Premier: I agree.

Mr. HUGHES: But I feel there is the major problem that confronts our primary industries of Australia and reaches beyond our primary industries. We must give some relief to our primary industries; that is the angle from which we must tackle this problem, because we cannot take, here in Western Australia, something from other sections of the community to give it to the farmer. I feel safe in saying that of the 50 members of this Chamber, all are in agreement that relief should be afforded to the farmer. We would give the farmer all the relief in our power; the only point upon which we are at variance is the method to be adopted. I suggest that is the basic way in which we should tackle the problem. Such a suggestion should come not only from the Country Party members, but from every member of the Chamber. We should put forward some suggestion like that to the Federal Government, which has the power to give relief and can give it. It is a national necessity. We must preserve our primary industries, particularly at the present time.

**MR. J. H. SMITH** (Nelson) [9.40]: I desire to say a few words in support of the motion. The position of our primary producers is of paramount importance to the State. Every member of the House feels concerned and is desirous of doing his utmost to assist the Government in any effort it might make to help the farmer through this dire calamity. It appears to me the Treasurer must forget all about the Budget he delivered a week or two ago and become reconciled to the fact that instead of budgeting for a deficit of, say, £100,000, if necessary he will have to budget for a deficit of £1,000,000 or more at the end of June next.

The Premier: Where is the money to be found?

Mr. J. H. SMITH: The money must be found and will be found. What did we do with our deficits in years gone by, when the then Treasurer was known as "Happy Jack?" Money was provided right through the piece. We are facing a national disaster because of drought conditions. Never in my experience have I known of such a severe drought in Western Australia. The Minister for Lands, with the assistance of the Treasurer, must immediately do something to remedy the position. I am not concerned whether the Minister for Lands attends the conference on Friday or not. I believe the Government, with the support of every member of the House, is big enough and capable enough to tackle this problem. The drought does not affect only the farmer; the fruit industry is also affected in the same way. We have hundreds of fruitgrowers depending entirely on their orchards for their livelihood and the Treasurer will have to come to their rescue. He will also have to come to the rescue of the dairying industry, which cannot continue at the present price of butter fat. We shall shortly have a shortage of butter. The drought extends into the South-West; not half the dams there are filled, nor is there any storage or reserve whatever for the coming year. I do not know how the dairying industry will be able to carry on. I have just travelled through my electorate from one end to the other and can assure the Minister for Lands that there is no hay for our stock. Every year in the past we have been closing up 20 or 30 acres of our holdings to cut hay; but I am afraid we shall have no reserves for next year.

The Premier interjected.

Mr. J. H. SMITH: I tell the Premier that the position is serious, although I do not want to appear in the guise of the poor relation. The matter of paramount importance, however, is to save our sheep through this drought. This applies to the eastern part of my electorate, where it adjoins Narrogin, Katanning and Wagin. There is no water in the dams, and those of my constituents who are rearing fat lambs and growing wool are greatly concerned, because they know they cannot carry half their stock this year. That is the position in my electorate, although we are not in the same position as the poor unfortunates in the drought-stricken areas. I hope the

motion will be carried without a dissentient voice, and that the Minister for Lands and the Premier will be big enough to deal with the position and see that relief is given to the farmers.

**THE MINISTER FOR LANDS** (Hon. F. J. S. Wise—Gascoyne) [9.45]: I have listened very attentively to every hon. member who has spoken in support of the motion. The motion emanated from the Leader of the Opposition following a tour made by members of his party covering many hundreds of miles of our rural districts and although very much information which the hon. members gleaned during that trip was in their possession before they left Perth, there is no doubt that direct contact with the serious position in many of our farming areas has left a very vivid picture in their minds as to the gravity of the situation. I have no fault to find with the desire of the Leader of the Opposition, by means of the motion, to draw the attention of the public to the seriousness of the situation. The only fault I find is with those members who have unnecessarily, by profuse verbiage and exaggeration, failed to help the position in any way. No exaggeration is needed to state the case amply. I will not plead guilty to evasion by the Government of its responsibility to give attention to this matter. Consideration has been given to every avenue along which Government assistance could possibly be rendered. Furthermore, consideration has been given to the possibility of inducing in other people who have a responsibility in this matter an attitude at least of friendliness or sympathy with a view to their affording some practical help to distressed farmers. The endeavour on the part of one or two members of the Opposition to censure me and the Government by means of this motion was most unwarranted.

It has been said that this season is not comparable with that of 1914, that it is much worse. The member for Avon (Mr. Boyle) went so far as to say that the position was hopeless south of a point say at Wongan Hills; but that is not so. The position in some of the country south of Wongan Hills is much better than it was in 1914 judging from reports we have concerning conditions there in that year. The hon. member went on to say that he doubted whether the State's

average would be five bushels per acre. If it is five bushels per acre that will be approaching 50 per cent of the annual State average; but in 1914, taking into consideration the acreage planted, the return was 1.9 bushels—that is under two bushels—per acre. I suggest to hon. members that if they are fair in their thoughts, criticism and judgment they will admit that there are many consequential problems hinging upon the desperate seasonal conditions which are not easy of solution. They might all be easily solved if we could give effect to the proposals of the member for East Perth (Mr. Hughes); that is, if we could obtain sufficient money by some means—whether orthodox or unorthodox—and thus dispel not merely the disastrous immediate effect of the drought, but also the desperate financial circumstances in which many people are placed.

During the debate the member for Pingelly (Mr. Seward) again made a charge against the Government that has already been answered. He charged the Government with failure to send the Minister for Agriculture to a conference to be held in Sydney. The reply is that the Government has always ensured that this State was adequately and properly represented at any conference called by the Commonwealth Government. It has always ensured that the State's case was amply presented. I would go so far as to say, without any feeling of egotism, that had it not been for the representations made in the Federal sphere, by the Ministers of this Government, we would never have had the contributions we have received towards herd testing and tuberculosis investigation. As a direct outcome of the representations of Ministers from this State the whole of Australia has benefited from moneys contributed by the Commonwealth towards the reconstruction of marginal areas. It cannot be denied that to this State's representatives is due the credit for the granting of money under that legislation to other States. Yet we have to listen to complaints that this Government is not doing all it might do in the interests of the farmers inasmuch as it did not send a Minister of a particular department to a particular conference or that it is not prepared, at short notice to send a representative to a conference called not with the idea of there and then finding a solution of this particular problem, but merely of confer-

ring and discussing what might be considered ways and means towards its solution.

I say definitely to hon. members opposite that this State's case will be fully presented at the conference in Melbourne on Friday. I also say most humbly that the solution of administrative problems that are worrying me and my colleagues in the Government could not be reached if I were on the train at this moment between Perth and Kalgoorlie en route to Melbourne. I do not feel that we should give consideration to suggestions that would mean running away from the work that is involved and the problem that is presented. Before I resume my seat I hope to prove to the House that, because we have taken this attitude, we have at least given more consideration to the matter than could possibly have been given had one of us been en route to attend the conference called by Mr. Cameron. To deal with that matter first, the member for Pingelly suggested—and I regret having made the remark that he was uttering rot—that he had to come to this House to drag out certain information. This was made public by me many days ago. I cannot help it if the hon. member does not make himself acquainted with the whole of the case before he dares to criticise, and with bitterness, the fact that he was then only getting information which had been available to all the State and all Australia for many days.

Mr. Cameron rang twice yesterday morning to my office. I had a long conversation with him and discussed the points that he cared or desired to raise as possible matters for consideration at the conference on Friday, feeling that the position was really desperate in two or three States in regard to the hay position, the stock position, the seed position and also the preparations for planting next year. There were no proposals; he did not suggest in what way the States, collectively or individually, might approach the matter from a financial angle. That was not mentioned. In the course of a long conversation pressing for Western Australia's representation, I advised him that we were in the midst of an endeavour to make secure the hay position, which was a matter not of weeks but of hours, and I told him I was not prepared to jeopardise the arrangements I had so far made and drop the responsibility on to someone else while we went to the conference to discuss the position. Mr. Cameron did not chide the Government because

of inability to agree to his proposals, but he wired the Premier yesterday afternoon asking whether we could be represented. He said he would be grateful if an arrangement could be made at this late hour for the Minister for Agriculture to attend on Friday. That would have meant leaving on to-night's train. I made a retort when somebody stated that a plane would get me there in time. I wish to make it very definite that I am not at any time prepared to travel by plane, east or west, on conference business arranged by the Commonwealth. There are many of us who probably are not good fliers. I fly when I have to. I do not like it, and I do not think it is right that we should be expected to leave here in the morning, say on Thursday, be ill for 12 hours in a plane, and then amply present the case of this State at a conference on the following morning. I find that in no instance during my many trips—not of my own choosing—to Melbourne and Canberra to endeavour to do the right thing by the State have I been absent more than the minimum time possible, eleven days away and nine spent in travelling, and I am not going to be put in the position of making it possible for our presence to be demanded at a day's notice.

What treatment have we received on some other occasions? I recall one last June when I had to cancel very many engagements, some of them with members of this House, to attend conferences or accompany them to various places, in order to meet the convenience of the Minister for Commerce. Only one day was suitable to him, and he demanded that that should be the day on which the conference should meet at Canberra. Every Minister for Agriculture attended. It was a matter of vital moment to every State—to elucidate the serious position of the apple and pear-growers. Mr. Cameron opened the conference in Canberra at 10 a.m. and left at 10.30 in order to be in Sydney that night to attend a dinner. He returned on the following afternoon. Mr. Cameron's attention was drawn to this discourtesy; I do not think it concerned him very much. Two Ministers said they would never attend again, if it were not for the emergency confronting the nation, because of that discourteous treatment. Yet we are chided by members opposite because we do not leave at a day's notice to attend a conference, the proposals for which have not even taken a tangible form. I submit as an

ample defence that the Government would not have been doing the right thing by the farming community of this State, even from one aspect, the hay position, if it had agreed to be represented at the conference. This morning, following our refusal to attend on the ground that we could not arrange it at such short notice, and Mr. Cameron's cordial acceptance of that as a reason—undoubtedly there is nothing but cordiality between Commonwealth Ministers and this Government—he sent an urgent priority wire as follows:—

If possible glad you air mail to me in Melbourne your views regarding production wheaten hay for stock feed; also particulars of measures taken or contemplated to cope with present position in wheat industry. Wheat Growers' Union of Western Australia has telegraphed me as follows:—"Mass meeting of wheat growers Saturday unanimously resolved that failing provision wheat starving stock within seven days, wheat growers will make every effort take same." Before replying to them, glad to know by telegram nature of any discussions you have had with them. Cameron, Minister Commerce.

Both matters will be attended to. Members of the House, farmers, and the general public of the State, may rest assured that a very complete case, as much to the point as could be presented if we had been Ministerially represented, will be given to the Minister for Commerce for consideration on Friday. I suggest that this State's anticipated requirements of 300,000 tons of hay would have no prospect of being cut a week from now if arrangements cannot be finalised within a day or two, even during the time the conference will be held in Melbourne. Before dealing with general matters and the points raised by the Leader of the Opposition, I wish to stress the desire of the Government to ensure that the State has all the hay requirements that can possibly be conserved at this period. Some weeks ago the Under-Secretary for Agriculture, the Superintendent of Wheat Farming, and the Chairman of the Agricultural Bank Commission, were asked to confer and immediately investigate the hay and fodder position in this State, to go further, to recommend to the Government what could be done as a matter of policy to ensure that the maximum amount of hay would be conserved during this season. That was done some weeks ago. Had the Government been dilatory or neglectful, had we not endeavoured to anticipate the seriousness of the position as it exists to-day, we might even

have felt guilty, and might have been guilty if the Leader of the Opposition had then launched a motion to adjourn the House to draw attention to the situation. I admit he has a public duty to perform. Much attention has been given to the matter. All the information available, when a decision has been reached, has been made public, and every statement made has not been lightly set out. Members may follow the whole story through the Press, how the Government desired to confer with every interest, to get the proper perspective, to get a measurement of the hay stocks in the State. We had a report from every Agricultural Bank manager in the State, from wherever we had a representative of the Agricultural Department or the Agricultural Bank. We had a far more embracing picture on our tables before hon. members went to acquaint themselves personally with the position. We knew from every district just how many acres of crops would be potential hay crops, and would cut over 10 cwt. to the acre. I know that following the survey recently made by members, the Leader of the Opposition has gone to a lot of trouble to tabulate and segregate the information, and get as clear a picture of the situation as possible. I submit that we endeavoured before taking any hasty action, before endeavouring to protect the farmers' interests, whether as hay-cutters or stock feeders, to obtain all the information it was possible to get from all sources. One member suggested we should send immediately to Nungarin in inspector to measure the position. We have the position already measured, and have had it measured for three weeks.

Mr. Doney: The aspect in regard to production is constantly changing, and the later the information we get the better.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: If we had waited until later that would have been too late.

Mr. Doney: Quite so.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I refuse to be lectured by members opposite, who say we should act now in regard to something we have already endeavoured to anticipate and measured some weeks ago. No aspect that we could think of has been overlooked. We have desired not merely to present a truthful case, and assess it on facts upon which we could depend, but we have endeavoured to interpret for ourselves, and seek the assistance of others qualified

to judge, just how acute the position is. With regard to hay, following the assembly of all this information, I thought the best thing to do would be to get the opinion of every section of the community. I think it is a fortnight ago to-night that I asked the Leader of the Opposition whether members of his party could be represented at a conference I was about to call, particularly those representing districts that were materially affected. I invited every section of the trade, and I think we had a very useful conference. We had the benefit of the recent experience of the member for Greenough (Mr. Patrick) and that of the Hon. G. B. Wood. We had the benefit of the experience of farmers who have been hay-producers for 40 years. We had trade representatives, both retail and wholesale. At the conference, the results of which were published, an endeavour was made to assure the State of an adequate supply of hay for immediate and future needs. That, I think, members will be generous enough to concede, is in itself a fairly big problem. We were faced with the position of having hay crops in districts where the hay requirements amounted to only a few tons a year, and we had the position of crops sown for hay in country that had never been treated or prepared for the use of reapers and binders, and where of necessity the stubble had to be left 1 foot high unless proper machinery was used in the cutting of the crop. In addition, we had to contend with crops that would ordinarily have yielded five bags of wheat to the acre cutting only from 12 to 14 cwt. of hay. We knew there were many people not concerned, as the Government was, with an assurance of adequate supplies and any guarantee that the producers would be suitably recompensed for their labours. People were present at the conference who cared very little for that aspect of the situation, but who as merchants desired to see that they were still kept in the trade and that their margins remained.

It is not necessary to recount all the happenings, nor to give in detail the Press statements that were both fairly voluminous and generous in all the circumstances, in an endeavour to clarify the position of those who could cut hay if they had the proper machinery, or those who had short and light hay crops in districts where hay production is the usual enterprise. The Price Fixing Commissioner was invited to the conference, de-

liberately invited, to enable him to get a background of the position in every district of the State, and as an indication to him of what action he might have to take in order to prevent exploitation and also to assist the Government in ensuring an adequate price. As has been remarked here to-night, the price he suggested was on a chaff basis of £8 10s. per ton on rail Perth for prime, which, working back from 25s. freight basis would give the farmer £4 10s. per ton in the stack. Even that as an inducement has not satisfied farmers who have potential hay crops. It has not satisfied farmers in districts where it is not usual to cut large quantities of hay. They want to know what guarantee they are going to get for a paid price of £4 10s. in the stack. They ask whether the Government is going to guarantee that price. It is as well to be quite clear on the point that that figure of £8 10s. represents the absolute maximum price which prime chaff will reach during this season. If seasonal circumstances do not further deteriorate, if they appreciate or improve, if we get finishing rains which we were not even game enough to contemplate a week or so ago, both the wheat and the hay position will materially improve. If we get copious falls, the stock feed position will improve. It cannot improve to the point that we shall have an over-plus of hay in the State. It cannot improve to the point that we can anticipate that the price will recede below, say, £7 10s. free on rail Perth.

The Government is so confident that that is the position, and feels that the necessity is so dire, that it has the responsibility of endeavouring to ensure as far as it can a large quantity of hay in this State. Feeling that even if the position does improve, the price will not get back below £7 10s., the Government is prepared, and has decided, to take certain action, an announcement of which was made long before there was any mention to me of this motion to adjourn the House. The action is that for the very large quantity needed for Agricultural Bank stock and horses and governmental institutional requirements, the Government is in the market for forward delivery, say for delivery five months hence, at a price of 70s. per ton in the stack, for tremendous quantities. And the Government has done that to ensure a minimum, something which the Price Fixing Commissioner cannot do. Our price-fixing

legislation only gives the Price Fixing Commissioner power to control a maximum.

Mr. Patrick: That is a weakness in the Act.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: That is in the Act, and it is a weakness, and we cannot obviate it. Will not members opposite be generous enough to say to the Government that by endeavouring to stabilise that price, even anticipating that seasonal circumstances will improve, the Government has scotched the move by those desirous of exploiting the position, who were offering 50s. per ton on a take it or leave it basis?

The Premier: And less than that.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: And less than that. The Government has endeavoured to create a minimum price, and I have no doubt that on a freight basis the Government will be paying for some of its requirements more than £3 10s. It is in the market at the moment, and firms who were conferred with to-day are prepared to follow that lead. What an inducement that should be, even where five-bag crops are anticipated! That represents not merely a return in excess of the most ambitious wheat equivalent, but also an endeavour to meet the urgent needs of the State in all its districts. There have been problems which have been examined in regard to the reaping and binding machinery available. One hon. member said it would not be possible to get the necessary machinery in the State. Well, we have made arrangements to-day in one district which we think will induce 30,000 acres to be cut. We have made arrangements to purchase a very big tonnage in that district as an incentive to show what the minimum price will yield. It will be interesting for hon. members who are fearful of the reaping and binding position to know that in the last 10 days 43 reapers and binders have left the works in Perth for districts that have never before cut hay commercially—43!

The Premier: I met one on the road.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: So I challenge hon. members opposite to allege in any way unfair criticism on our endeavour to meet everything we could anticipate and to solve this particular problem. And this is only one problem. An hon. member mentioned, "If only wire were available for baling!" It might not be out of place to mention what we have done in that connection. There were no supplies of baling wire

in this State and we knew that in spite of distressing circumstances in parts of the district of the member for Nelson (Mr. J. H. Smith), there are parts of that district where stock have been taken out of the clover crops to conserve the crops and permit them to grow to hay. Several farmers in the better circumstanced parts of the district are even top-dressing this week.

Mr. J. H. Smith: To try to get a bit more.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: To get a bit more to cut for hay. Clover hay interests were represented at the conference called by the Government. We think we will get about 5,000 tons of clover hay baled. However, there was no wire. Manufacturers in this State would not get the rods to draw the wire. The Broken Hill Proprietary output is almost entirely tied to the Federal Government. Forty thousand tons of wire emanating from Broken Hill per annum have all been apportioned, and the manufacturers in this State have been getting 240 tons per month. We knew that that was the position, and very urgent wires—without any suggestion of a sneer—were despatched. The fact that the Government has sent many wires may be commented on by members opposite. We sent urgent wires in regard to that position to the Prime Minister in the Premier's name, and also to the Minister for Commerce, pointing out that we could, if we had the wire available, safeguard the position to the extent of thousands of tons of clover hay, besides wheaten and oaten hay. Hundreds of tons of bale hay were needed for our North-West cattle trade in every year. No raw material was available to us. I regret that that is so, but Eastern States manufacturers had been granted a surplus over their requirements and we are guaranteed the wire for our immediate needs. I have all the telegrams and communications here for any hon. member to see. We are assured of all the wire we now need. As a matter of fact we are getting enough rods, through the diverting of certain orders by Malloch Bros., to have 10 tons available in this State. I mention that as an indication of what we were trying to organise to meet the present desperate position. There will be in the Press to-morrow, and has been put over the air to-night, a considered statement that we prepared last night in an endeavour to give to the farmers every possible inducement



that the Government can extend to ensure a price that will encourage farmers to cut hay where it is possible to do so. I feel certain that in the districts from Goomalling to Grass Valley and Northam and other places where the hay cutting industry is carried out on a large scale, there will be maximum activity despite any urging from agents that the price will not be remunerative. I am certain there will be big supplies. The Government is operating in five districts and for its requirements is paying a minimum of £3 10s. a ton in the State.

To leave that aspect, the question of food for stock has again been the subject of severe criticism by one or two members opposite, in that the Government has not yet made any pronouncement. We have had the matter very much in our minds and this and allied subjects have been given close attention. Every endeavour has been made day by day to improve the situation and to find a complete solution before issuing a statement or forwarding an answer that would not satisfactorily cover the position. Immediately the situation was presented to us by certain members of this House and by representatives of the Wheat Growers' Union, that very night, following upon three members of the Cabinet conferring on the matter, a certain plan was outlined. We called together all those financially interested in stock and properties who had responsibilities in the matter. The Government knows that it has considerable numbers of stock over which it has direct liens, but 90 per cent. of the stock is under mortgage or lien to one financial institution or another. In those circumstances the farmers in very many instances have little equity in the stock. The Government presented the case very fully to the firms involved and endeavoured to show that they, with the Government, had responsibilities not merely in trying to keep the stock alive, but particularly to ensure a sufficient number of female stock being retained, if it were economically possible to do so. I suggest to members opposite that where there is no roughage or where there is likely to be no water, they would not advocate the Government keeping the stock in situ in such circumstances.

Members: No.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Of course, they would not advocate that. Many

of those sitting opposite are practical farmers and they know it is impossible to keep stock in those circumstances on concentrated feed alone, even if they were given 1lb. of wheat and 1½lbs. of chaff daily, unless there was roughage available. They know that.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Of course 1lb. of wheat would be far too much.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Well, ½lb. of wheat. They know that it would not be economically possible where stock today has already to carry a debt of from 8s. to 10s. per head. In those circumstances, they know it would not be possible to keep the stock for the next five months. The stock could not be held and fed solely on feed purchased for that purpose. Probably long before that period expired, despite that attention, they would become weak and would be lost. There is a responsibility cast upon all concerned to endeavour to keep all the stock possible to provide a nucleus for future flocks, and the Government has endeavoured to secure an assurance from firms concerned with that end in view. This week the Agricultural Bank is shifting 400 horses to southern districts. They are being shifted from where they are now, because it is not economical to keep them there. They cannot be watered, fed and kept there as economically as if they were located 200 or 300 miles further away. We have an area at Wialki which constitutes an oasis in the abandoned properties surrounding it. We have available there 5,000,000 gallons of water at the very least with sufficient pastures to keep 4,000 or 5,000 of our sheep, and we are shepherding the stock there to avoid hand-feeding.

Hon. C. G. Latham: How long will that last?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: I have a report from a man who is not over-generous in his reviews of the situation under existing conditions. He feels that there is an assurance, with the feed now visible on that country, that 4,000 sheep can be kept until June, 1941, without any trouble. He adds that there is ample supplementary feed available in the areas to carry a much larger number but not for so long a period. The Agricultural Bank trustees are endeavouring to safeguard the position of all stock directly controlled by the institution. We have received assurances from other financial houses that they will endeavour to keep the maximum number of stock that the farmer thinks

he can hold, but they will not face the deliberately uneconomic holding of stock where there is no water and no roughage on the ground. I mentioned in a statement in the Press some days ago that the State would have to face the economic maintenance of our stock and that old ewes and shy breeders would have to be disposed of in the most profitable market possible. Against that, we have tried to get an assurance from the Department of Commerce that we can supplement our lambs for export by shipping carcasses of mutton. But there are disadvantages involved, and our quotas may be interfered with. Members will be aware from a previous review provided in this House, that there are stated quotas for all forms of meat, and Western Australia has its proportion allocated to it. We are hoping that, although the meat works will not operate to capacity with regard to lambs, there may be opportunities to dispose of aged sheep that are in fair condition in our outer areas, at a figure that will not represent a sacrifice price.

The Government realises to the full the necessity for conserving all female stock in the State. It has endeavoured, because it is fully aware of the pastoral position as well as the farming position, to meet the need, which is inevitable, when better seasons return. With regard to releasing wheat from bins, the Government has endeavoured to give an assurance to all those farmers whose stock must be maintained, that wheat will be purchased and furnished for the stock whenever it is economically possible. I have not heard that the farmers concerned have approached the institutions involved. Those farmers have, however, approached the Government. They placed on the Government the onus of all their troubles and worries and many of their responsibilities. It is not right that the Government should be expected to shoulder full responsibility in such matters. It has taken its measure of responsibility in every avenue in the farming industry, in spite of anything hon. members opposite may say to the contrary. The Agricultural Bank's attitude to the farmer is this: no farmer who is unable to carry on with his food supplies and is desirous of continuing his farm with some prospect of success will be allowed to go short. Millions of pounds have been written off for interest and In-

dustries Assistance Board advances. The guarantee given to the farmers by my predecessor, Mr. Troy, to the effect that after three years of drought I.A.B. advances would be frozen, and that from one year's crop the maximum that would be taken would be the interest for that year's debt, involved the Government last year in refunds to farmers in many of the districts traversed by the hon. members who have spoken, to the extent of nearly £15,000. That is something which has not previously been made public. We handed back to the farmers cash to that amount, and many of them have been carrying on with the benefit of such funds. Without any apology being necessary for our action, we have endeavoured to give the farmers the utmost assistance within our capacity, and that is our attitude this year.

Hon. C. G. Latham: There will be nothing to pay back this year. The farmers will have no income.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: We are not asking for payment. We are asking the farmers to set out a statement of their case.

The Premier: We are hoping!

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: If the farmers can do so, we expect them to pay something. But the door is open. They are asked to furnish returns, to send in a report of their seed wheat, chaff and sustenance requirements.

Hon. C. G. Latham: Has that request reached the farmers yet?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: An instruction has been issued to all Agricultural Bank branches to send out the requisitions. Some returns are already in. Hon. members opposite must know that these matters involve the expenditure of many thousands of pounds, not merely sums for the purchase of chaff and hay, but for all kinds of things which are essential to the farmer to enable him to remain on his property. The member for Mt. Marshall criticised the amount available, the £6 for a married couple and 10s. per child, but it must be borne in mind that these people live on a farm and that there are some compensations, whether it be merely something from the poultry-yard. Without going through much matter which could be dealt with at great length to prove that the Government has taken every step pos-

sible to anticipate this problem and to solve it, I think the points I have covered fully answer the criticism levelled against the Government, and that I have convinced members that many of the decisions we reached were made available before this motion was launched. This is only one of very many pressing problems confronting the Government at the moment, and there are very many. While I am prepared to concede to the Leader of the Opposition that his attitude generally has been most generous, and that his choice of words on this motion can be described as fairly presenting the position, I think he appreciates that, within the limits of the Government's capacity, it is doing all that can be done. There are very many aspects which should come before the Federal authorities and I am not trying to shift any responsibility or blame. There are such aspects as the relationship between excess profits and excess dividends in secondary industries and uneconomic farming. That is a field which should immediately be examined. Not any matter affecting protective tariffs but excess profits over and above the coverage of such tariff privileges, and we know that these excess profits and excess dividends obtain. Hon. members who have studied the position know that 137 companies registered in the Eastern States last year paid dividends of 7 per cent. and over, some of them up to 50 per cent., and all this in some measure or other has contributed towards uneconomic farming. That is a sphere which should be thoroughly examined. I do not take any notice of the attempt made by the member for Avon to indict the Government. He said we should have dropped everything to attend the conference to be held on Friday. I can assure the hon. member that our case will be adequately explained at the conference, and that we hope, as an outcome of the conference, a request will be made to meet Ministers of other States, preferably here, and members of the Commonwealth Government to devise ways and means to present a conjoint case on behalf of the four States now in a somewhat similar position. We have been given estimates of hay and wheat crops. One authority suggests we shall have a 15½ million bushel yield this year.

Mr. Patrick: In Western Australia?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: Yes.

Hon. C. G. Latham: We must have a lot more rain.

The Premier: The estimate depends upon the quantity that will be cut for hay.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: It will depend on the quantity cut for hay and the rain. I can only describe such attempts at estimates as "guesimates."

Member: That is better.

The MINISTER FOR LANDS: There is little available data upon which to make a constructive estimate at this stage. I reiterate that the Government makes no apology for its endeavour to contribute to a solution of this problem. It has earnestly tried to do so, even to the extent of not considering personal convenience or health. I hope that members opposite and indeed all members of the House will give us credit for that endeavour.

MR. WATTS (Katanning) [10.46]: Nobody, I think, doubts the complexity of the matter with which we have been dealing this evening, nor do I think any of us doubts the obvious genuineness of the Minister for Lands in the observations he has just made. Doubtless we who come from country districts are inclined to look at the business in a little different light from that in which the Minister views it. I regret that the Minister did not see fit to touch on that aspect of the question referred to in the letter which was read to the House prior to the commencement of the debate, having reference to the financial problems of the farmers. I should have thought that the member for East Perth (Mr. Hughes) gave him ample opportunity for remarks further to those he made on this subject.

The Premier: He came in, made a speech for an hour, and then went home.

Mr. WATTS: I feel that that matter is really of more importance to the farmers in this State than anything that was referred to by the Minister. I say that because while supplies of hay, the quantity of seed wheat, pasture for stock, etc., are of great importance, the time is coming, if it has not already arrived, when the question of the liabilities of those engaged in agriculture will become of such pressing importance that the matter of dealing with it in a general and as far as possible satisfactory manner, cannot longer be overlooked. I was hopeful that the Minister would have introduced to us some of the ideas which I

take it he has considered over the past few months and perhaps over the past few years concerning this very difficult subject. Only some three or four weeks ago, having in mind the obvious lack of income which is going to face a great portion of the farming community this year, and the fact that their liabilities—seasonal in many cases—have been incurred in good faith and obviously cannot be paid from revenue or income non-existent or likely to be so, we asked the Minister to consider whether legislation should not be passed in the nature of a moratorium or partial moratorium in order to protect the farmers in their very trying circumstances. So far as I know the Minister has not yet favoured us with a reply to the suggestion that was then put forward, although he undertook at the time to give the matter consideration. It is as well that this House and the people of the State, so far as we can get them to follow the debates of this Chamber, should be acquainted with the attitude which exists among reasonable men in the country districts. I have here a letter from the Kent District Road Board, which is the local authority in the Nyabing district east of the Great Southern Railway. I know the members of that board at the present time to be extremely reasonable and honourable men. I think that members on this side of the House who accompanied me into that district last week, were impressed with the belief that those road board members whom they then met were, as I classed them, decent, honourable men, all of them farmers, all of them anxious to do the best they can, and many of them in considerable financial difficulties. The letter reads—

At a meeting of my board held recently the position of the primary producer was discussed at great length, it being pointed out that under the present system of financing the farmer it becomes almost impossible for him to carry on successfully. Consequently the following motion was carried:—

That until the Government can formulate some policy of stability for the primary industries it is considered that a moratorium should be placed on farmers' debts. Secondary industries are now protected, but not so with primary industries. The board believes that until some such protection is afforded a moratorium will give the farmer a chance to make a future recovery and at the same time protect him from his creditors. From time to time commissions have been appointed to study various aspects of farming, and it is supposed that now a fairly accurate figure could be given as to what the cost of production is. Having this figure, the next

step would be its application and then the adjustment of secondary industries, thereby affecting the whole community and not one section as at present. The board is indeed mindful of the position the war has placed the Commonwealth in, especially in regard to the curtailment of usual markets. But as this industry is responsible for building up the country's prosperity, it is imperative it should be placed on a footing which for the present, at any rate, will give those engaged in it a chance of lifting their heads as honourable citizens.

I draw attention particularly to the last few words: "A chance of lifting their heads as honourable citizens." I am firmly convinced that the great majority of the misfits have left the land and the men who are there to-day are only too anxious to lift their heads as honourable citizens.

Mr. Cross: One has been there for 30 years and has been kept by the Government.

Mr. WATTS: What is the hon. member worrying me about? It is a long time since he was down in that country. These men are not given the opportunity to lift their heads as honourable citizens. I am not attempting to throw the onus upon the Government for that lack of opportunity, since I realise, as I think we must all realise, that it is a subject of many considerations, some of which are entirely outside the control of any Government. But the situation does arise. It is frequently said in regard to suggestions that legislation should be passed to effect some adjustment of the secured debt problem, to create some partial moratorium in circumstances such as now exist, that there would be an effect on the farmers' credit. I have always questioned that statement, and I question it more strongly to-day, because at the present time there is little if any ability to obtain credit unless one can give some satisfactory security for it. We find that if there were an adjustment or writing-down—or whatever we care to call it—of the secured debt, which in many cases despite the observations of the member for East Perth, is in excess of any reasonable value that could be placed on the property, the payment of the remaining debt owing to the secured creditor would necessitate the property earning income, and in order that it might earn income it would be necessary for the secured creditor to supply reasonable needs for carrying on the property. I submit also that it would be possible, the debtor's position having been adjusted by the writing-down on a basis that could be arranged by legislation—a fair and equitable

basis—to get that credit by giving security over other assets if there were any in existence—and in many cases there would be—not included in the original security. May I point out, too, that unsecured creditors, also referred to by the member for East Perth, have had written down a very considerable portion, I think on the average about three-fourths, of their liabilities. They have accepted over all something in the vicinity of 5s. or 6s. in the pound of debts owing to them in all cases dealt with by the trustees under the Rural Relief Fund Act. But they have not refrained, where there was any prospect of the farm of the debtor being carried on and producing further income in the future, from supplying him with the necessary credit from year to year, so far as their own capacity for supplying goods or money would admit. So it seems to me—and I put it strongly to the Minister—that if it be an obstacle in his mind against giving an answer to the request made to him three or four weeks ago that he give careful consideration to these aspects with a view to establishing, if he can, the fact that this limitation of credit about which we hear so much is largely a bogey, which I believe it is, it will not prevent his giving a favourable answer, and I hope that he will indicate his attitude to these persons in the financial difficulty in which they find themselves.

I want to know how much longer is the security of the secured creditor to be, as it were, reflected only in the insecurity of the farmer. Is wholesale bankruptcy to be the alternative to some measure of financial relief being afforded by legislation? I do not know whether I am likely to come into conflict with the fact that legislation that might control interest should be in the Federal category. I do not know whether the Commonwealth Government has yet taken under its wing the whole question of the control of banking under Section 51 of the Constitution, or whether it has contented itself with the Commonwealth Bank, but to my mind that does not matter. If it is State legislation that is required, the Minister is in a position to give consideration to it. If it is not State legislation that is required, the Minister should go to the Federal Government and make representations in that direction. He should make those representations as strongly as possible, and I can assure him that in doing so he will have the support of all the members on these benches.

Therefore I hope the hon. gentleman will give more consideration to the problems of the finances of the farmers. To supply them with hay and chaff, and see that arrangements are made this year for this, that and the other requirement will not solve the difficulty that is gnawing at their vitals in many instances at the present time. This will have one effect only, namely that of placing upon them another liability. To offer the average farmer another liability will only make the position very much worse. I say that we are all in this business. For years low prices have ruled and there have been difficulties of one sort and another. Now we find we are in as bad a position as we were in any previous year, and we must bear in mind that agriculture is one of the major industries of the State.

The Minister told us that this year was not worse than 1914. I have no doubt there are parts of the State where it is a little better, but in that portion of the Great Southern which I represent, which is considered to be one of the reasonably favoured areas of the State, we have had just about half the rainfall we received in the same period of 1914. To the end of September in that year we had 12 inches of rain at Katanning, and to the 22nd of this month we have had only 640 points. Members will therefore see that the position there is considerably worse than it was in 1914. If rain falls in sufficient quantities, there will be a considerable improvement in the position, but it must come within a few days. If it does not, then I am afraid the position both east and west of the Great Southern railway will be very much worse than it was in 1914. In that year hay crops gave many farmers very substantial returns, but similar returns will be non-existent this year, and as for water supplies, they will hardly exist at all.

Only with the greatest difficulty will water be provided not only for stock but also for the inhabitants of the towns and settlements in that district. It is not owing to any lack of preparation that the water supplies are so short. In our travels we called on one farmer who had a large property of about 9,000 acres and he told us that he had spent £3,500 on water conservation, but his supplies were so short this year that he doubted whether he would be able to carry his stock after the end of November. In that case there was no question of the

farmer having failed to spend money to provide water supplies. I have heard the statement made here that farmers do not make preparations to enable them to meet difficult times. The provision made by this gentleman is a fair sample of what has been done in other districts to make such preparations. He has spent money on providing water catchments and holding ground, and what has he got? Not enough water to carry his stock after the end of November.

The Minister for Railways: Are the tanks covered?

Mr. WATTS: No; if they were they would probably have cost him 15s. an acre instead of 7s. 6d. an acre, but in normal years they have proved eminently successful because they have had plenty of water at the end of the winter and have carried the stock until the arrival of the next rains. It would be useless to cumber the farmers with further liabilities on their land. I remember seeing in one district a farmer with whom I had been acquainted for about 30 years, a man for whom I have considerable regard, one who has done fairly well as farmers go. His observation was that he had been on the land for 30 years, had put a good deal of his money into his holding, and had been going steadily back for the last 10 years and was now growing too old for work. He said that the present conditions would rapidly help the farmers to go off their holdings. We cannot afford to permit them to leave more than they are doing at present.

Our whole economic system depends upon a satisfactory state of affairs being evolved for the men on the land. I did not come here with any copperplate scheme for a settlement of this problem. I am prepared to admit—and the Minister knows this—its many complexities, but I say it must be tackled from the point of view that it should not be the farmer alone who has to carry the burden. We are all in it. None of us is responsible for the lack of rainfall or for many of the other difficulties besetting the agricultural industry in Western Australia and indeed in the rest of Australia from time to time, but if the farmer backed his judgement as to what land he would take up or what particular crop procedure he would engage in, in many cases it was done on the advice, and one might almost say by the consent of

responsible officers of the Government who were appointed to assist and advise the farmers. All of us, whether we are in the Government or out of it, whether we are connected with politics or not, are responsible. None of us can entirely escape the responsibility for seeing that whatever the difficulties the farming community is experiencing to-day, they are put right so far as is possible by ridding them of their liabilities and making sure that when their income is non-existent, their expenditure is cut to the bone. I see no value in debiting a farmer with £100 of Agricultural Bank interest when he can pay only £40, or in allowing the other £60 to carry compound interest for the rest of his life. The State can gain nothing by that. It would be better that the Government should take the £40 and be done with the debt and say to the man, "You have done the best you can so far as we are concerned, and the remainder of the liability no longer exists." I would have been greatly pleased if the Minister, in dealing with the motion, had seen fit to make some such suggestion as that with a view to alleviating the fears of the farmers.

I am afraid the Premier will find, before the year is much further advanced, that his estimates of revenue will by no means be realised. He will suffer from that point of view as others will have to do. It would be better to admit at once that we have to make further substantial losses and make them, rather than continually be hoping that something will turn up. That has been the popular policy in Australia for a long time, and is one which calls for a conference of the best ability we can find in the State with a view to endeavouring to devise a scheme that will finally provide a solution of the greater portion of the financial difficulties of the farming community. It would be to the advantage of the State and all country towns if these matters could be dealt with. We were going into a small eastern wheat belt town, east of the Great Southern, when I noticed how many empty shops there were. It was found on inquiry that the empty shops were occasioned by the fact that there was no money in the district to warrant their being kept open. I take it that the people who made a living and were employed there have now gone elsewhere. If that process is going on elsewhere, as I am afraid it is, and is allowed to continue and reach a large

scale, there is likely to be a substantial exodus from the land. The Government will find itself facing another financial problem in providing sustenance or other occupations for those who have been thrown out of employment. I fear there may be another substantial exodus from the country. I cannot see a great number of farmers who are on the borderline financially—unless it is made plain to them, and early too, that their circumstances are going to be alleviated—remaining on the land under present conditions. If their position is alleviated they will remain. I believe the tide will turn, and that the general condition of agriculture will improve. When that happens the State will get its return for the loss it may suffer to-day. I regret the Minister is not going to the conference on Friday, though I admit the notice was extremely short. Perhaps it is not to be wondered that in the circumstances he felt he was unable to be present. I feel that if conferences of that nature are called, especially in the circumstances we have been debating this evening, it is desirable that the Minister for Lands and Agriculture of Western Australia should be present, and take every opportunity to put before the Government our position and our desires in these matters. The Minister referred to the relationship between excess profits and dividends, and economic farming. I would be glad to know from him that he proposes to pursue his investigations in that direction as early as possible. I admit that a great deal of expense, that might be avoided in fairness to all parties, is being incurred by the farming community in purchasing necessities. We in the country feel that the so-called cost of production is much higher than it ought to be. We have not always been able to trace the trouble to its source, but in all probability the Minister has discovered at least one avenue where an excess charge is imposed probably directly and certainly indirectly upon the farming community. The matter to which he referred can safely be said to come within the purview of the Federal Government. His representations to the Federal department concerned would be more than acceptable to me, and I believe to many other people. The Minister has dealt with a number of conferences in connection with various matters, and one of them related to the stock feed question.

Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but in the matter of national emergency he should at least be prepared to confer with others so that his opinions may be intermingled with those of others and a useful decision arrived at by the majority. I hoped that representatives of our financial institutions were all of that opinion. When the Minister was asked two weeks ago what was happening concerning the stock feed problem, he informed us that he had had some difficulty with one of the persons with whom he had communicated, and would be likely to have that difficulty until the Rural Relief Fund Act Amendment Bill had been disposed of in another place. He was then good enough at my request to table the papers. I find that the gentleman who apparently declined to attend the conference called by the Minister was the inspector of the Bank of New South Wales in Western Australia. I take the opportunity to read to the House the letter he wrote to the Minister in response to the Minister's request that he should consider attending a conference on the lines suggested. Copies of the correspondence are on the file. The gentleman in question replied to the Minister—

Referring to your letter of the 28th inst. (August) regarding the feeding of stock, I have just had a tour through the eastern and north-eastern wheatbelt, and was shocked to note the conditions there existing. On my return I had your letter, but before replying to it also saw the Bill to amend the Rural Relief Act, and it looks as though I would not be able to reply to your letter until the fate of the Bill is known.

I would not have drawn the attention of the House to that letter had it not been for the first sentence, which disclosed that the writer was shocked to note the conditions existing in the wheatbelt. He was not sufficiently shocked to agree to the suggestion that he should attend a conference dealing with the question.

The Minister for Lands: He came along ultimately.

Mr. WATTS: I am glad to hear that. I submit it is just as well he did attend, for the Minister would have been justified in taking up a very strong attitude concerning the letter. It is time all people in this country realised that we have a Parliament. If Parliament sees fit to pass legislation, which after due consideration it considers to be in the interests of the people of the country, that should be the last word. In

view of the conditions existing, the first paragraph of this letter amounts merely to a suggestion to the Minister, "Unless you can use such influence as you possess to have this Bill rejected, I am not very anxious to co-operate with you." As I said here about three years ago, I see no reason to lend colour to the growing popular belief that the financial institutions have already too great a say in the government of this country; and I see less reason to-day to think it. It is high time we should realise that what is best for the greatest number of our people is what the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council of this Parliament should consider. Whether it means less for another section of the community or not, if that loss should be made and can be justified, we should see in the interests of the people that it is made.

In conclusion I would again commend to the Minister for Lands the point that he should give further and ample consideration to the financial position of the farming community, bearing in mind that it is becoming more and more ridiculous to add to the liabilities which exist against the farming properties of that community; that the time is arriving when in a great number of cases there must be a concerted effort, after due consideration by responsible authorities, to lessen the liabilities that exist and also to take some measures to see that the annual expenditure is somewhere near commensurate with the annual income, notwithstanding that the annual income may be reduced by circumstances such as we have been discussing this evening. If the hon. gentleman will work on those lines, we shall be prepared completely to say then, but not otherwise, that he is doing all that he can in the interests of the farmers of Western Australia.

**HON. C. G. LATHAM** (York—in reply) [11.17]: There are only two speeches to which I shall give any attention, because most of the speeches were made in support of the motion. As regards the member for East Perth (Mr. Hughes), I dismiss his speech with just this: I believe that the speech has done more to lead the farmer astray than to help him. I only wish the solution of the problem were as easy as it is for the member for East Perth to make such a speech, because I feel sure that under our present system it is impossible to pro-

vide the relief that the farmers require. Therefore, for a responsible member of this House to make statements such as those uttered by the member for East Perth only misleads the farmer and gives him no help whatever.

I am pleased with the reception the Minister for Lands has given to the motion, because I do know that the hon. gentleman has worked very hard in organising those in the industry to obtain necessary supplies with a view to distributing them to those who need them. However, he did give the House a great deal more information than the public has had up to date. While he said that he made a statement to the Press prior to the motion being moved by me, I have not seen it; and I have followed the matter very closely.

The Minister for Lands: It was prepared yesterday afternoon.

**HON. C. G. LATHAM**: It was only prepared. I am pleased to know that I have not missed it. I want the Minister to realise that there is no intention of censuring him or censuring the Government. The reason for moving the motion was that the facts could be seen by anyone who went into the districts affected. They were seen by the inspector of the Bank of New South Wales, and by the chairman of the Agricultural Bank Commission, and by many people. The real reason is the depressing feeling one gets when one discusses the troubles with the men engaged in the industry. I want the House to realise this point, that one can imagine the mentality of a man who finds that the whole of his assets are absorbed, that in fact his liabilities are in excess of the value of his assets, and that he has to come along cap in hand to the Government of the State or to a financial institution asking for further help, while at the same time knowing full well that he is increasing his liability. This is the attitude he adopts. He says, "I have worked all these years, and at the end of them I have nothing; and now I am to be a mere shepherd or caretaker for some financial institution that is going to put me off immediately an opportunity arises for it to dispose of the property." That is what such men are facing. How we can overcome the difficulty I do not know. If it were so easy as the member for East Perth has suggested, letting the Commonwealth Government take over the



first mortgages, that would probably be a solution; but I cannot see it eventuate. I am sorry the Minister for Lands objected to my statement that he ought to send a representative up to Nungarin and Trayning. I do not know what authority the local representative has; but I do say now, and without attempting to lecture—which the hon. gentleman seems to resent—that it is urgent someone should go there to give immediate relief required. I do not know what extent of authority could be given to that inspector, but I assure the House that things are really desperate in those two districts. Therefore I do hope the Minister will not take offence at my saying that a man should be sent up there at once. Every day the position becomes worse. Mr. Donovan passed through there a fortnight ago, when many of the farms were not so badly affected. Since then the whole of the crops and the grass are dead. Those people have no credit. One cannot imagine a storekeeper giving any further credit when there is no income whatever in sight. That was the point I wanted to make. I am sorry the Minister took up the matter in a way I did not intend he should. I have now the information that the Government have gone into the field to purchase hay. That is a very good sign.

The Minister for Lands: We could not make it known until we had finalised the matter.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: I do not blame the Government. One cannot rush into print before one has made one's contracts. However, it is encouraging information that the chaff will be purchased. Those people cannot purchase chaff themselves, because no one is prepared to give them any credit. Unless the Government or a financial institution grants further credit to them, there is only one alternative, and that is to kill the sheep. Of course it would be impossible to put up canning works in the time now remaining, because the sheep will be in poor condition within a couple of months. It is impossible to send them to Wyndham. We might as well get rid of them here. Sending to Wyndham would be totally impracticable.

The Minister has not told us what was the result of the conference he had with the stock merchants and the Associated Banks. We are vitally concerned in what their attitude will be. I wish to assure the Minister

that there is no man on this side of the House who is not willing to lend him all possible help. Certainly I have not got up here, and neither has any member of this party, for the purpose of making the position more difficult. But we had to ventilate it. I believe that will not do any harm. It will probably tell the Melbourne conference which meets on Friday what is the position of the farmers in this State. It might assist. We have nothing to gain by moving motions of this kind. In point of fact, the adjournment of the House had been discussed prior to Mr. Cameron's announcement in this morning's paper. Therefore it was not a put up job at all. It may materially assist.

The Minister for Lands: I did not think it was a put up job.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: The Minister told us that £15,000 had been returned last year. There will be no return this year, unfortunately. There is no income at all this year. I do not know to what extent the woolclip will be free, but I believe that only a small amount will be available for carrying on the farmer. As for the men we met, they included Agricultural Bank clients as well as those who came under the Associated Banks. They had received no word that they could make application for immediate assistance.

The Minister for Lands: That is a normal procedure every year.

Hon. C. G. LATHAM: Always it has been a case of, "Immediately after the harvest we will go into your case." There is no harvest this year, so the position of the farmers is desperate. I hope the district managers will be acquainted with the fact that if they find people are up against it something must be done to provide for them. The Minister spoke of the excess profits made by companies in the Eastern States. There is one way only by which that can be dealt with, and that is by arriving at a complete understanding between the States and the Commonwealth. I agree that the only people who have been loaded up with costs they have not been able to pass on are those engaged in primary production. Everyone knows that. Yet we do not seem to be able to get together to provide relief for those people. Even when we advance marketing schemes for the assistance of growers they are very reluctantly agreed to by Parliament. The Arbitration Court is a very fine institution in that when men find that the cost of food

and clothing is such that they cannot continue under existing conditions they can approach the court and secure an increase in their wages. When a manufacturer finds that he cannot produce goods at a reasonable price that will enable him to compete with the products imported from overseas, he can take steps to secure protection by an increase in the tariff. On the other hand, the farmer on whom we depend for the credits enabling us to pay interest overseas, is never given a chance. Until recently he had to accept the dumping price that his goods brought in the London market, and he had to supply local requirements at the same figure. At the same time he had to pay for all his requirements at Australian prices. The legislation passed during the last year or two has made some difference, but the difficulty has not been wholly overcome. To-day the farmers are being strangled by the burden of debt from which they have no hope of relief. There is one solution only for remedying the evil. Everyone will have to participate in a common sacrifice, and the debts of the farmers will have to be cut down by at least 50 per cent. If that is done, then they may be able to see a vestige of daylight. I do not desire to be wholly pessimistic, for I believe that next year the market will be such as to afford encouragement for production. Europe cannot possibly continue in the face of the starvation that must ensue. That will provide us with an opportunity. Let us face the facts and make a start now so that we may hearten the men on the land. Let us assist them to meet the adversities of the industry. Let us give them a chance to look forward to a future when they will have an opportunity to secure some equity in their farms. I thank the Minister for the statement he made to the House, for he provided information that I did not possess before. I assure him that if he requires help from any member of the Country Party, there is no member who will not readily respond to the call. It is our duty to do so, and we shall readily do all we can. I ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

#### **BILL—AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS ACT AMENDMENT.**

Returned from the Council without amendment.

#### **BILL—PROFITEERING PREVENTION ACT AMENDMENT.**

Received from the Council, and, on motion by Mr. Watts, read a first time.

#### **QUESTION—VERMIN, DESTRUCTION.**

*Rabbits on Crown Lands, &c.*

Mr. DONEY asked the Minister for Agriculture: 1, Has the Government considered the need for steps being taken to eradicate vermin—particularly rabbits—on Crown lands and abandoned farms in order that the efforts of local authorities and individuals to free adjoining roads and lands of vermin may be made more effective? 2, If so, what decision has been arrived at? 3, If not, will immediate consideration be given to the matter?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS replied: 1, 2, and 3, For the past four years the Government has provided a sum of money from which vermin boards are assisted to destroy rabbits on abandoned holdings. A circular letter is sent to each board advising that the Department of Agriculture is prepared to recoup them the amount expended on polard, poison and bran used on such holdings. The Forests, Water Supply, and Railway Departments deal sympathetically with any requests for the destruction of rabbits on properties under their control, and the Department of Agriculture is prepared to assist vermin boards to deal with Crown lands that are known to be breeding grounds.

#### **QUESTION—DEFENCE FORCES.**

*Civil Servants' Privileges.*

Mr. DONEY asked the Premier: Where a temporary officer has served continuously in the public service and enlisted whilst so serving, can arrangements be made so that whilst such officer is on military service he shall be regarded as on leave without pay, his title to long service leave being, in consequence, in no way disturbed?

The PREMIER replied: The Government's policy in this connection has already been announced. Special military leave is granted to permanent Government employees enlisting for active service, but this concession cannot be extended to temporary or casual employees, whether on the salaried or wages staff.

## BILL—KALGOORLIE HEALTH AUTHORITY LOAN.

Read a third time and transmitted to the Council.

## BILL—PETROLEUM ACT AMENDMENT.

Report of Committee adopted.

*House adjourned at 11.32 p.m.*

## Legislative Council,

*Wednesday, 25th September, 1940.*

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

## QUESTION—EDUCATION.

*Perth Technical College.*

Hon. C. F. BAXTER asked the Chief Secretary: In regard to the additions to the Perth Technical College, 1, What funds have been provided by (a) The Commonwealth? (b) The State? 2, Were tenders called? If so (a) under what system (day labour or piecework)? (b) What amounts were tendered? 3, If tenders were not called, why not?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: 1, From the Commonwealth Youth Employment Fund, £15,000; from the State Loan Funds, £31,922; from Jubilee Fund, £13,200; total, £60,122; 2, No; 3, This is a matter of policy.

## QUESTION—AGRICULTURAL BANK.

*Farm Valuation Basis.*

Hon. A. THOMSON asked the Chief Secretary: Will he place upon the Table of the House the basis upon which the Agricultural Bank determines the value of farm properties under its control?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: Valuations of securities are mainly based on the situation of the property, rainfall, value of improvements, and productive value, varying according to locality. Details respecting basis adopted in each particular district cannot be disclosed as such disclosure would not be in best interests of the Agricultural Bank.

## QUESTION—RAILWAYS.

*Free Transport for War Service  
Personnel.*

Hon. H. L. ROCHE asked the Chief Secretary: As free passes over Government railways are being granted in other States to members of the A.I.F. when on leave, will the State Government grant the same privilege to Western Australian members of the A.I.F. in this State? If not, why not?

The CHIEF SECRETARY replied: This matter is the subject of an understanding reached by the Premiers' Conference, and while one or two States have modified their attitude because of circumstances, this has not been done generally. It is estimated that the cost of granting the concession in Western Australia would be more than £150,000, and in these circumstances the matter requires grave consideration.

## QUESTION—BETTING.

*Fines Imposed and Paid.*

Hon. J. CORNELL asked the Chief Secretary: 1, What was the total amount paid in fines by persons (a) conducting illegal betting shops, and by persons assisting therein; (b) street betting, for the financial years 1937, 1938, 1939, and for the months of July and August of the current year? 2, What was the total amount paid in fines during the abovementioned periods by persons (a) owning illegal betting premises; (b) leasing and then subleasing illegal betting premises; (c) within the precincts of illegal betting premises when the police