

Legislative Council,

Tuesday, 12th January, 1915.

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

PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the Colonial Secretary: 1, Annual reports of (a) Gaols Department, (b) Commissioner of Police, (c) Registrar of Friendly Societies. 2, Food and Drug Regulations amendments. 3, Water Supply, Sewerage, and Drainage Department, amendments of by-laws. 4, State Steamship Service, Auditor General's report on accounts. 5, Fisheries Acts 1905-13, exclusive licenses regulations. 6, Exclusive whaling license to Aktieselskabet Australia, draft indenture.

QUESTION—ROADS BOARD RATES, EAST AVON.

Hon. C. F. BAXTER asked the Colonial Secretary: Is it the intention of the Government to introduce a Bill to write off arrears of rates owing by the settlers in the eastern portion of the East Avon Roads District?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY replied: No.

BILL—LICENSING ACT AMENDMENT.

Introduced by Hon. A. G. JENKINS, and read a first time.

BILL—LOCAL OPTION VOTE CONTINUANCE.

Read a third time and transmitted to the Legislative Assembly.

BILL—GRAIN AND FOODSTUFF.

Assembly's Message.

Message from the Assembly received and read notifying that amendments Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6, requested by the Council, had been made, but declining to make amendment No. 4.

ASSENT TO BILL.

Message from the Governor received and read assenting to the City of Perth Bill.

BILL—ESPERANCE NORTHWARDS RAILWAY.

Received from the Legislative Assembly, and read a first time.

Standing Orders Suspension.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central) [4.41]: I move—

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the Esperance Northwards Railway Bill to pass all its stages at the present sitting.

My sole object in asking for the suspension of the Standing Orders is to enable me to make my second reading speech now. It is not my desire that the Bill should go to a division to-day. If any hon. member desires to speak after I have concluded—assuming that the Standing Orders are suspended—I shall be only too pleased; but, as I said before, my only object is to enable me to make my second reading speech this afternoon; after which hon. members, if they so desire, will have an opportunity of adjourning the debate and then criticising my remarks later.

Hon. W. KINGSMILL (Metropolitan) [4.42]: I do not intend to oppose the motion, but I think this would be a fitting opportunity for the leader of the House to give us some idea of what his intentions are for the remainder of the session. The suspension of the Standing Orders invariably presupposes a question of the ut-

most urgency; not a question of ordinary urgency; because, after all, the suspension of the Standing Orders is a thing to be done not lightly, and not for any insufficient cause. I take it, therefore, that the Colonial Secretary has resolved to finish up the immediate business of the Chamber this week, and then to adjourn for some considerable time. Otherwise, I cannot recognise that the matter is one of urgency. I have already said that I have no intention of opposing the motion for the suspension of the Standing Orders, but I should like the hon. gentleman to be elucidatory in connection with the matter.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central—in reply) [4.43]: My intention is as the hon. member has indicated. I wish the business of the House to proceed as quickly as possible; and if there is no further business at the end of the current week I shall be prepared to adjourn for, say, a week. Seeing, however, that we have met here to-day, and that we have practically no business before us, I thought that my idea in this respect would conform with the opinion of hon. members, and that they would agree to the suspension of the Standing Orders so that the House might get to work.

Question put and passed.

The PRESIDENT: I declare that the motion has been carried by an absolute majority of the whole of the Council.

Second Reading.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. J. M. Drew—Central) [4.44] in moving the second reading said: This is the fourth occasion on which a Bill has been introduced into this Chamber for the purpose of providing railway facilities for the settlers in the Esperance district. On two occasions the measure provided for a line through to Norseman. Last year the proposal was to build a railway from Esperance 60 miles northward, and a similar proposition is now submitted for the consideration of the House. On every occasion hitherto the measure has been rejected, but the

adverse majority has grown less at each presentation. Last year the Bill was lost by only two votes; and in view of the advent of the Country party, whose members possess a special knowledge of agricultural matters and special abilities for dealing with questions of this character, I feel that the submission of the proposal on the present occasion will meet with that success which the Government desire. Last session the Government were able to prove the case for the railway up to the hilt. All the old objections were demolished. We had been told that there was no good land in the Esperance district. The accumulated reports of Government officers disposed of that contention. Next, we were told that the rainfall in the Esperance district was insufficient; but the presentation to the House of the records of rainfall extending over 15 years conclusively proved that there was nothing in that contention either. It was then said that the soil was porous, and useless for dam making. The fact that the Government and the roads boards of the district have constructed dams which hold water has, I think, conclusively shattered that bogey once and for ever. The opponents of the Bill had only one argument last year, that of the financial stringency; yet nine days afterwards no fewer than eight Bills for the surveys of railways were submitted to the House and passed into law without any objection. The only weak spot on paper in connection with this project in the past has been the official returns of the average wheat yield, but this would be easily understood by members if they were fully acquainted with the circumstances. The returns show a total of 4,198 acres under cultivation this year. Does anyone believe that the whole of that area was put under proper cultivation and that the land was given a fair show? As a matter of fact it was not. The settlers know how to farm, but they have not the means to carry out proper methods. When I was down in the district I made full inquiry. I found that the mallee is rolled down, but the roots, which are wide-spreading, remain in the earth and live for a long time,

souring the soil. The land is run over with a spring tooth cultivator and the crop is sown without fertiliser, for the reason that the settlers could not afford to pay the cost of carriage of fertiliser, which to Grass Patch is £7 a ton and to Seaddan, 30 miles from Esperance, something like £5 a ton. It will be readily realised, therefore, that it is beyond the financial means of the settlers to use fertilisers. Small patches cleared three years ago, and which got the benefit of fertilisers, have shown excellent crops; the balance, on which primitive methods were adopted, has manifested a poor growth indeed. The settlers include the whole of the land—that which is properly cultivated and that which is not cultivated at all, but simply scratched—in their crop returns, with the result that the average is small indeed. In this year of drought, when only 3½ inches of rain fell during the growing season, they have secured an excess of 6,000 bushels over local requirements, and the estimated average yield is six bushels to the acre, while from 2,403 acres they expect to harvest 968 tons of hay. These returns compare very favourably indeed with some of the older districts. In the Northampton district, for instance, the average wheat yield last year was 3.2 bushels; in the Victoria Plains, 1 bushel; in Katanning, 4.9; in York, 3.6, and in Northam 1.2, whereas the yield for Esperance is approximately six bushels, in spite of the fact that there is very little genuine farming going on in the district. Even these figures I have quoted in regard to Esperance give no reliable indication of the virtues of the district from an agricultural standpoint, because the land has never yet had a proper show.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: You do not believe in Esperance yourself, do you?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Opponents of the Esperance railway are taking advantage of the defects of human memory to diligently create and circulate the impression that the only individual who has reported favourably on the Esperance railway is myself. I have no wish to monopolise the credit which

some day will go to those who have advocated this project. Indeed, my share in the tribute is a very poor one indeed.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: You will be very thankful for that in the future.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: What I propose to do is to go over the whole of the ground anew, and quote from all manner of reports to show that unless there has been and is a deep laid conspiracy to deceive Parliament, a conspiracy into which trusted officials of the Government have entered, the case for the railway is unchallengeable. The line it is proposed to construct will extend over 60 miles, in accordance with the recommendation of the members of the Advisory Board, which was appointed by a previous Government. The estimated cost of construction is £114,000. I will now deal with the question from the stage when its agricultural phase was more clearly recognised and will give the opinions of men far more competent to judge than I. In regard to water conservation, we were told that the country would not hold water. Mr. O'Brien, of the Mines Water Supply Branch, who is well known to hon. members, has said—

Various reports and statements have been published to the effect that the mallee country is porous, that no watercourses exist and that great difficulties would be met in providing settlers with water, and so on. A few words on the above will show how a half truth given out in all innocence may leave a bad impression. The mallee "surface soils," and to some extent the subsoils are porous, and it is fortunate for the State that they are. The soils on the mallee belt can easily absorb all the rain which falls and hold it for a considerable time before the sun's heat pulls it out. The sandy loams which prevail over the surface assist the retention of moisture in the soil below, and require less cultivation in fallow than heavier and stiffer clay soils. Condensing the above, we have: surface soils and subsoils absorb rain, and lose it again by evaporation, less the quantity used by scrub and trees. Taking this in conjunction with the

character of the rain (slow soaking falls) and the easy grade of the country, the absence of watercourses is explained.

His report continues—

After an examination extending over six months and carried out in a systematic way, I see no serious difficulties in providing a reliable, economical and clean water supply all over the area of $1\frac{1}{2}$ million acres, including railway requirements.

That was in the early stages, before the country had been put to a practical test from the dam-making point of view. Mr. Sutton says—

The country in its natural state is badly watered, only an occasional soak being met with. Until recently the main water supply was obtained from condensers. This tended to create the impression that water could not be conserved in excavated tanks. During the last two years this impression has been shown to have been unfounded, as under the scheme of assistance rendered the settlers by this department 26 tanks ranging from 411 to 2,000 cubic yards have been excavated, or a total capacity of 20,585 cubic yards. Most, if not all, have had water in them and have been reported on by our inspector, Mr. White, to have satisfactory catchment areas and to be of good water-holding character.

As hon. members are aware, I visited this district and travelled over the whole of the route of the proposed railway in July, last year. I paid particular attention to this question of water conservation, and from what I saw I am at a loss to understand how the water-holding capacity of the country could ever have been doubted. I inspected 15 dams, some of them 12ft. deep, and all clay throughout, and in every case the dam was holding water. In only one case in the history of water conservation in that district has there been anything in the nature of failure. One dam at Grass Patch, on an unsuitable site, did not give good results, but the trouble was the fault of the country. When this was discovered another dam was sunk, only

a few chains away, and proved eminently satisfactory. On that one partial failure the whole of the district has been condemned by some as unsuitable for water conservation. Mr. Surveyor Watkins, who was commissioned to carry out certain investigations in the district wrote—

The clay underlying the loam has been tested to a depth of from nine to fifteen feet and found to be retentive, good holding ground for water conservation.

In regard to the character and extent of the agricultural land, Dr. Harrison, formerly a resident magistrate at Esperance, wrote in 1905—

It is a fair-sized province lying idle and crying aloud for settlement. It is a great deal better than much of the land being taken up along the Great Southern railway.

The report of Mr. Johnston and Mr. Muir reads as follows:—

From the 30-mile stage and thence on to 75 miles from Esperance, the proposed line would run continuously through the mallee belt. This belt of country comprises approximately an area 45 miles north and south by 65 miles east and west, or nearly 3,000 square miles, making a total area of 1,872,000 acres, two-thirds of which the land classifiers, Messrs. May and Hewby, estimate to be good for wheat growing, namely, 1,248,000 acres. We may state that this large extent of wheat-growing country, some $1\frac{1}{4}$ million acres, is the greatest area of wheat land, as far as we know, in the State in possession of the Crown with so good a rainfall.

The report continues—

We would draw your attention to the fact that as an agricultural railways advisory board we have confined our remarks solely to the agricultural prospects of the proposed railway.

They then go on—

The total area inspected from the 28-mile to the 65-mile and easterly and westerly from 40 to 50 miles, would

be about one million acres. Of this area 980,000 acres is suitable for cereals, and with approved methods of cultivation should give a yield of 20 bushels per acre. About 20,000 acres would consist of salt lakes, flats, sampire and tussock flats, sandy ridges and plains, which would not yield a similar return, but parts would probably be cultivated and used for grazing purposes. This large area of splendid agricultural country of uniform quality, with good loam and clay subsoil, is eminently suited for cereals.

The country they refer to will be served by this line, that is, except east and west. They said that with proper methods of cultivation the land should give a yield of 20 bushels. Mr. T. C. Henchman, the late Government Land Guide, says—

Experienced farmers from the mallee country in South Australia and Victoria at once recognise that the land is good and capable, without incurring any heavy expenditure, of producing splendid crops.

These reports were written long before there was any great agitation for the construction of a railway for purposes of agricultural settlement. We have heard much about the Advisory Board minority report. A good deal of capital has been made by the opponents of the railway out of the fact that the minority report was submitted by Mr. Paterson, one of the members of the Advisory Board. When the matter was investigated, however, it became apparent that Mr. Paterson did not oppose the finding contained in the majority report, but merely expressed a sort of natural caution one might expect from a man whose official position is that of the managing trustee of the Agricultural Bank. After all, Mr. Paterson merely withheld judgment until such time as he could be satisfied upon two points, namely, the holding capacity of the land, which has been abundantly proved, and its suitability for wheat growing. I submit that since the minority report was

presented, both these points have been demonstrated, and the objections raised upon these questions have been completely routed. If one took the average wheat yield one would condemn the proposal straightaway. But when hon. members remember that probably not more than one-fifth of the land is cultivated as it should be, they must come to the conclusion that the yield is a very fair one indeed. Only the other day I was looking at some reports in regard to the Northampton district. In the year 1902, which was when they commenced using fertilisers in that area, farming had been carried on in that district for many years in small allotments. Do hon. members know what the wheat yield in Northampton was in 1902? I will tell them. It was eight bushels to the acre.

Hon. W. Patrick: They have cultivated there continuously for 20 years.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: It was thoroughly well cultivated, but no fertiliser was used. At Esperance it is not cultivated at all except probably about ten acres out of 100 or 200 acres. Northampton was always well cultivated, but they used no fertiliser, and the yield for that year, 1902, was only eight bushels to the acre. I shall probably be able to give further figures in this connection later on. With regard to the question of rainfall, doubts have been expressed on this point. Extending over a period of 15 years, the average figures in connection with the rainfall are as follows:—At Scaddan, which is 30 miles from Esperance, the average rainfall was 18 inches. At Grass Patch—and many hon. members think that the term Grass Patch expresses simply a small farm, a sort of oasis in the desert, but it is nothing of the kind, because the very land which is cultivated on the Grass Patch farm is similar to the land which exists for miles around—which is 46 miles from Esperance and will be served by the railway, the average is 15 inches. At the 80 Mile. the average is 12 inches; at Gilmore's, which will not be served by the line, it is 11 inches. It is more risky at Gilmore's I will admit, although when I was there on the 5th July I saw wheat

two feet high. It is 92 miles from Esperance. I will now give a comparison with some of the other districts in the State. At Merredin the average is 11.9, at Kellerberrin it is 12.3, at Mangowine 11.7, and at Mullewa 12.3. It is very interesting to note how the bulk of the rain falls. I have figures dealing with the question. The records show that between May and September, the growing months for cereals, 68 per cent. of the total rainfall in the Esperance district fell at Grass Patch. At Seaddan, 63 per cent. fell, and at Swan Lagoon it was 60 per cent. In reference to the monetary value of this wheat land, I may say that it has been valued by Mr. Middleton. Hon. members may wish to know what Mr. Middleton's qualifications are. He had four years under the Surveyor General of Western Australia in classifying, valuing, and surveying, and as to water tanks he had two years in the Goldfields Water Supply Department as Engineering Surveyor, having been in charge of a party first sent out to locate tank sites on the goldfields. In connection with the monetary value of the wheat lands, Mr. Middleton says—

The conclusion I have arrived at is wheat lands within 15 miles of proposed railway, from the 80-mile post (the limit of safe rainfall as accepted at present) to about the 25-mile post, the southern edge of the mallee, 922,000 acres, at 10s., £461,000. Sand plain, south of mallee country to the coast (includes patches of rich swamps), 412,000 acres at 4s. 6d., £92,700.

We had here on view about six weeks ago some splendid oats grown by Mr. Bowe on the sandplain country in the vicinity of Esperance. Mostly it is not very seriously taken into consideration by advocates of the railway. Mr. Middleton proceeds—

It is not sandplain, it is better than sandplain.

That is a fact. It is not sandplain, it is a sort of scrubby country with water very close to the surface. Mr. Middleton goes on—

It is not first class land.

I agree with him there, it is not first class land. He goes on—

In the above estimate, only the country immediately served by the proposed railway has been considered.

That is, by this railway. He continues—

As a matter of fact there is a very large area of agricultural land within the mallee belt (which runs east and west and is about 50 miles wide north and south) exceeding a million acres, which, although requiring its own spur line of railway development, will then directly benefit the Esperance railway and its port.

It is quite correct. I have had a look at the classification map. I find a very extensive country exists east and west which is labelled first class. Mr. Middleton continues—

For a distance of 46 miles east of Grass Patch this mallee country has been penetrated, as shown on plans; and a further exploration probably north from Israelite Bay, will be the subject of a supplementary report.

I propose to give further reports in support of the quality of the land. Hon. members will know Mr. W. Canning. He is an official of high repute, and although he may be mistaken in his views he certainly is not dishonest, and he says what he thinks and truly believes.

Hon. A. Sanderson: What is the date of that report?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: This is dated, to be precise, the 15th November, 1913. Mr. W. Canning, the district surveyor, who knows every inch of the country—he was in the district for some considerable time—has furnished a report to the Government. That report was not available when the Bill was before the House on the last occasion. Mr. Canning's report reads—

Mr. Brown, one of the surveyors, has been over the greater portion of the country within the last two years, prior to January last, and knows it well. He states there is a very large area of land of excellent quality in the mallee country. Mr. Brown is convinced, however, as I am, that in ordinary seasons, and

with the advent of railway facilities the Crown has in the Esperance district one of the largest belts of uniformly good wheat lands existing in the State.

The report continues—

Which with reasonable facilities would be very readily applied for and utilised, thus adding to the general productiveness of the State.

This gentleman is well qualified to speak. He has had very extensive experience in connection with land inspection and land classification, and he is a gentleman whose word should be taken. Mr. Canning proceeds—

I may mention that it was thought advisable to temporarily reserve a large part of this area, so as not to encourage prospective settlers until facilities for transport were provided. This area has been closed for some time, and during that period hundreds of applications have been refused.

I know that is a fact of my own knowledge.

Thus showing that there was a good deal of anxiety to select the land and risk the possibility of transport facilities being provided at some future time.

That statement shows that there is a fairly large number of people who are anxious to settle in this part of the country. There are men there who are remaining in the district when they should be in a state of despair if not provided with the means of getting their produce to the market or of cultivating their lands. Mr. Sutton, whose reports I will next deal with, reported to the Government on the 8th July, 1914, only a few months ago. He says—

My association with the Esperance wheat area extends over a period of about three years—since September, 1911. As the result of several visits I have made there during that period, I find that though the soil is variable in character, there is a considerable area suitable for the production of payable wheat crops with such rainfall as I am informed the district receives in normal seasons. Railway facilities, however, are essential to enable the wheat to be marketed.

The cost of clearing is an important element in connection with agricultural operations, and I intend to give the House some information in that respect. I will quote from estimates prepared by Mr. Middleton. I may say that Mr. Middleton was sent down there by the Government with Mr. O'Brien to make an exhaustive investigation. Mr. Middleton says that the rolling of the scrubby sort of land, the light mallee land, is estimated to cost 2s. 6d. an acre, and the subsequent picking up and burning off costs another 2s. 6d., making 5s. per acre altogether. In the heavy mallee country he estimates the cost of rolling at 10s. per acre, and the picking up on the land, he says, can be done for 1s., making 11s. altogether. Taking the two classes of land, we have an average of 8s. per acre. I went into that matter during the course of my visit to the district, and though I found, upon consulting the selectors that the cost was somewhat higher than indicated by Mr. Middleton, it was only higher to a very small extent. Mr. Middleton says—

In no other part of the State can wheat land be so cheaply and so easily prepared for the plough.

And I believe it. It is admitted that the soil is deficient in nitrogen and phosphorous, but that can be largely overcome by superphosphates and by fallowing. The fact is that the same argument would apply to the various other portions of the State where agricultural operations have been successfully carried on. Hon. members will ask why the land has not been developed. Mr. Middleton at the outset of his report gives very good reasons why the land has not been developed without a railway. He says—

Apart from the matter of water conservation, my investigation has convinced me that this country is not suitable for successful agricultural development without reasonable railway facilities. In other parts of the wheat belt in this State patches of good rich agricultural land alternate with stretches of generally poor sand plain, and a settler at starting may, without the use of fertiliser, obtain

a generous yield of wheat or hay from a patch of strong land which will enable him to wait, though perhaps impatiently, the advent of the railway. With the Esperance land, however, the conditions are different. The land is not patchy, but is very even in character.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: How many settlers are there?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I shall tell the hon. member later on. The report goes on—

The conditions within the area under examination are totally different; for generally speaking, neither the areas of good strong agricultural land nor the stretches of poor sandplain are met with, but land of fair average quality, strikingly consistent throughout the mallee belt. While, therefore, I consider that one million acres or more of this mallee country is equal in value for the growth of cereals to the same area anywhere else in the State, the necessity for the early application of fertilisers and the probable absence of the strikingly high "first yields" generally obtained in the rich country of other parts of the State referred to above, will render the low freights both of fertilisers and the resultant crops, essential at a very early stage to the successful development of the country.

Mr. Conway, the Assistant Under Secretary for Lands, supplies the following information in regard to settlement, and the area to be served by the railway. He says—

The chief centre of agricultural operations in the locality is what is known as the mallee belt, which runs across the line for an indefinite distance east and west, and for a width—that is along the course of the line—of 33 miles. Operations in this belt for a distance of about 12 miles on each side of the line are being carried out under the supervision of the Department of Agriculture, and from a return furnished to me I find that there are in this area 62 active settlers with holdings aggregating 63,316 acres.

Hon. J. Duffell: What is the date of the report?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: It has been written within the last six months.

Hon. J. Kirwan: A large number of applications were refused.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: The report goes on—

Practically all these holders have had crops in during the year and, although the growing season was the driest known for years, they have been in a position to produce, in addition to all requirements, for seeding for the coming harvest, an excess of about 6,000 bushels of wheat, as well as sufficient hay for all the coming season's requirements.

This is a very recent report, and it indicates that the district is improving owing to the probability of better farming methods being adopted. The settlers there thoroughly understand what they ought to do, but they are not in a position to do it. Still they are making fairly good progress. They have an excess of 6,000 bushels of wheat over and above their own requirements, and it is the only district in the State which has such a surplus this year. To show hon. members that the Esperance lands are popular I will read further from the report of Mr. Canning. The report is dated 15th July, 1914, and is as follows—

Since November, 1913, there have been 50 applications for an area of 10,151 acres. These applications, of course, are, generally speaking, for lands in the vicinity of Esperance, the land further northward being temporarily reserved from selection.

That is what I have already said. The land between Esperance and the 20 mile is not reserved, and, as Mr. Middleton has stated, it is not exactly sand plain, but is fairly good land, though not first class. It is open for selection, and the result is that since November, 1913, there have been 50 applications for an area of 10,151 acres, and all in spite of the fact that time after time the Legislative Council has refused to pass a Bill for

the construction of the railway. This officer goes on to say—

Judging by the report of Mr. White, and the numerous inquiries for land in the reserved area—which could not be satisfied, owing to such reservation—I am confident that even under existing conditions, if the railway Bill were passed, settlement in the country affected by the said railway would be rapid and considerable.

Those are the remarks of Mr. Canning. He declares that if the land is thrown open, and the railway built, settlement would, in his opinion, not only be rapid but considerable. It is now within the power of this House to enable that settlement to become both rapid and considerable. On the 9th July, 1914, Mr. D. C. White, a Government surveyor, reported to the District Surveyor of Perth as follows—

Within the last twelve months settlement has slightly increased and none have left the district. The improvements on most of the alienations in this locality have recently been reported on in detail by me. Taking into consideration the many disabilities under which the settlers generally have been carrying out their improvements, these should be considered well advanced. Several more tanks have been excavated, and increased areas of rolling, clearing, fallowing, and cultivation have been effected. There is a larger area under crop this year than on any previous occasion.

He concludes the report by stating that with adequate railway communication a populous and thriving settlement should be assured. Mr. White is a Government surveyor in whom the District Surveyor, I am told, has every confidence. Mr. Sutton, our wheat expert, at one stage advocated the erection of a flour mill in the Esperance district. He advised that, instead of buying wheat at a certain point, the Government should erect a flour mill at Esperance. I emphasise this to show that an expert like Mr. Sutton, in advising the Government to erect a flour mill there, must have been sure that the land was suitable for grow-

ing wheat in sufficient quantity, and of the requisite quality to keep a mill going. I will read an extract from a report by Mr. Sutton, dated 25th March, 1914. Mr. Sutton states—

As the Railway Bill has not gone through, there is practically no demand for this wheat, except for milling purposes, which will necessitate it being carried to Esperance, the nearest market. As we have undertaken to purchase this wheat on the basis of railway carriage from the agricultural area to Esperance, the difference between what would be the railway freight and the actual cost of vehicular carriage is a loss to the department. As the cost of vehicular carriage from Scaddan to Grass Patch (46 and 31 miles) is £5 10s. and £4 10s. per ton respectively, being 3s. and 2s. 5d. per bushel, or an average of 2s. 8½d. per bushel, and the average cost of railway carriage for the same distance in the wheat area would be less than 2¾d. per bushel, it would be impossible for the selectors to successfully carry on farming operations for any length of time.

How can they grow wheat profitably, if they have to pay from 2s. 5d. to 3s. a bushel for its carriage to the port of Esperance? Members ask "Why is there not more settlement there"? There are 62 settlers now, and there were 55 when the Bill was last before Parliament, but how can we expect people to go down there and pay so much for the conveyance of their wheat to the port of Esperance, and expect them also to pay their £5 to £7 per ton for the conveyance of fertilisers from Esperance to Scaddan and Grass Patch. With regard to harbour facilities at Esperance I notice that while this Bill was being discussed in another place a certain hon. member made a statement that the country had it, on the authority of the Colonial Secretary that the necessary harbour improvements at Esperance, if the railway were constructed, would involve an outlay of one million pounds. That gentleman had an opportunity of hearing and reading everything mentioned by me in connection with this phase of the ques-

tion, and I think, when I submitted my figures to this chamber, they were very much lower than the amount that gentleman quoted.

Hon. D. G. Gawler: You said half a million.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I said nothing of the kind.

Hon. D. G. Gawler: Yes, you did.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I will give the figures I quoted last year, and the figures were obtained from Mr. Middleton's report. In view of what has been said the extract will bear repetition. Mr. Middleton had three years' experience as engineering surveyor during the period of the construction of the Fremantle harbour works, under the late Engineer-in-Chief. This is what he said and what I repeated—

The proposed railway line terminates at the existing jetty, the greatest depth at the sea end of which is 18 feet below low-water mark. A minimum depth of 26ft. will be required to accommodate most vessels of the "tramp" class, or of coastal traders large enough to deal with traffic. Though Esperance Bay is practically land-locked, its entrance being dotted with the bold and rugged islands of the Recherche Archipelago, the jetty is not placed in the most sheltered position possible—it is directly facing, as a matter of fact, the "Causeway Channel," and it is, therefore, somewhat exposed to heavy weather from the South. It is consequently inadvisable to spend money in dredges, and in extending the present jetty to obtain, say, 26 feet of water when a more protected position can now be obtained for the berthing of ships.

Mr. Middleton showed the Admiralty soundings and gave a rough estimate of the cost of harbour improvements. He estimated the latter, so as to give a depth of 26 feet of water, at £44,000.

Hon. D. G. Gawler: In all kinds of weather?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: There would be a breakwater.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Behind Dempster's Head?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: Yes, and it should serve in all weathers. The estimated cost of improvements to the harbour to give the depth I have stated was £44,000, while, if the breakwater were found necessary—and in the opinion of old residents, including Captain Douglas, it was not necessary—that would involve an expenditure of a further £34,000. It seems to me that ultimately the breakwater will be needed. I have had an opportunity of forming a judgment upon this land, as the result of personal observation. I do not claim to be an expert, but I have eyes, and I have had some experience in the world, and I think I can tell good soil from bad. I may not be a good judge of soil which may be charged with salt, but if I see land which appears to be good, and which is growing wheat luxuriantly, I can only come to one conclusion. In travelling from Norseman to Esperance I examined the country, I interviewed settlers, and saw the growing crops. I am firmly convinced it is destined to be a great wheat producing country. I made the journey, as I have already stated, during the early part of July, and I will briefly state what I saw between Norseman and Esperance. The journey to Esperance occupied two days and all the land was inspected by daylight. Although we passed many farms en route we called at certain places only, and they were not oases in the desert, but were in consonance with the rest. We saw a farm here and vacant land there. The vacant land was exactly the same as the country under cultivation which was producing a good crop, although probably the extent under cultivation was not more than 10 acres. Mr. R. B. Johns, 118 miles from Esperance, had 225 acres under wheat. The crop had been sown on fallowed land in the middle of April, and 35 pounds of superphosphates had been used to the acre, while the implements used to put in the crop comprised a spring tooth cultivator and a seed drill. That crop was the richest I had ever seen. It was outside the region of safe rainfall, but I had never seen 200 acres of land growing wheat so luxuriantly as that. It was 2ft. 6in. high on the 5th

July. However, that is a matter which should not be taken into consideration in connection with this project. After that we called at Mr. Gilmore's homestead at 92 miles. This settler had only 12 acres under crop, but one could judge of the fertility of the soil from the luxuriant growth of his crop; it was then 2ft. high. The rainfall in this locality was about 11 inches, and I considered this portion of the district too uncertain for wheat growing. The land was ploughed in January and the crop was sown on the 5th April with a seed drill, 50lbs. of superphosphate being used to the acre. Light rain fell in April and a dry spell then set in. The last rain had fallen on the 25th June, a fortnight previous to my visit when 75 points were recorded. I regarded Mr. Lewis' selection at 68 miles from Esperance as being within the area of the safe rainfall, the average being 13.75. Mr. Lewis had 70 acres under crop, and showed me an excellent sample of the preceding year's chaff. I inspected a large dam half full of water, and in going over his farm noticed that he possessed every implement necessary for agricultural operations. He had spent £600 in this direction, and every penny of it had been taken out of his farm; he had no other means of raising the money. Mr. Lewis had 1,000 acres of land, three-fourths of which was fenced, and 200 sheep were running on it. Mr. Lewis's holding would be served by this railway. Mr. Ottery, who was 53 miles from Esperance and had been in the district two years, had 70 acres under crop, and was satisfied with the prospects, provided a railway was built. The average rainfall there was 14.80. Then there were Dr. Richardson and his son. We saw the doctor's holding. Dr. Richardson resides on the goldfields, but is conducting a farm, which his son manages. They had 3,000 acres, which they took up three years previous to my visit, and the place had been worked systematically during the previous 18 months. Four hundred acres had been cleared, and Mr. Richardson informed me that the cost of clearing was 15s. an acre; this being slightly higher than Mr. Middleton's estimate. He had 120 acres under fallow, and

280 acres altogether was being cropped. The wheat was growing splendidly because proper methods had been adopted, but a little further on where similar methods had not been adopted, the crops were of a very sickly growth. I do not think there would be any result at all from those crops, whereas the farms of Dr. Richardson and his son were far ahead of anything in my own district, and I had been through it a week before. In fact, on my return from Esperance there was nothing in my district to approach them. There was a large dam on the property holding water, and at almost every homestead I visited I saw a dam holding water perfectly. I saw the roads board tank which was full of water, and in no quarter could I discover any complaint in regard to the holding capacity of the land. On Dr. Richardson's property there was a comfortable dwelling house, and all the necessary agricultural machinery for the carrying on of the farm. The average rainfall in this locality was 15in. At Grass Patch we saw Mr. Thompson's land which was acquired from an English company many years ago and where cultivation was carried on intensely during the time when the Dundas goldfields were in active operation, and when the teams were on the track. Practically everything required for consumption, with the exception of tea and sugar, was produced on the farm. The products included wheat, honey, cream, fresh butter, cheese, poultry, meat, vegetables, and bread, there being a mill on the spot. At every place visited during my trip I got fresh butter. This is an indication of the enterprise of the people, and the value of the district. One might go through many of our agricultural districts during the winter season and not be able to get either butter or cream, but right through my trip from 30 miles from Norseman to Esperance, we could rely on getting fresh butter and cream. Mr. Thompson's area comprised 3,720 acres, and the farming methods were up to date. They had a steam-driven milling plant for grinding the wheat into flour, and the bacon for home consumption was

cured with honey from hives on the spot. On this farm 70 acres were under cultivation at the time and the growth looked exceptionally well. Twenty head of cattle were running on the property, which has a rainfall of 15in. I next called on Mr. Bretag, one of the settlers who took up land at the 30 Mile, known as Scaddan. We were met by a fairly large crowd of selectors at this point, and they expressed themselves satisfied with their lot, but hoped that a railway would be provided. The selections looked well wherever care had been exercised, and proper methods of cultivation adopted, and the settlers, so far as their means permitted, had endeavoured to cultivate their holdings properly. The number of settlers at Scaddan at the time was 28, and they had 5,000 acres cleared and a half of that area under wheat—that is nominally under wheat, because, so far as I could see, not one-tenth of it had been properly cultivated. Mr. Bretag explained how he cropped his land for the first time. He merely rolled the mallee down, burnt it off and put in the harrows. By this process he sowed 28 acres, and of that total 17 acres yielded 21 cwt. of hay to the acre, and the crop on the balance of the area yielded only 10 cwt. I need not refer to my visit to the township, except to say that I saw some splendid gardening land there. On my return from Norseman I inspected the sand plain country referred to by Mr. Middleton. A gentleman there, Mr. Bowe, of Coolgardie, had just previously sown some oats and I am given to understand that it produced a splendid crop. This year too, he had a crop which would do credit to any part of the State. His selection is 20 miles from Esperance. It is not sand plain country; it is between sand plain and second-class land. The water is close to the surface and here and there are paper bark valleys containing very rich soil which, if properly cultivated, I am sure would be very suitable for vegetable growing. In addition to the ordinary class of settlement which would be introduced by the provision of railway facilities, the Government would be enabled to carry out a

scheme which they have had in mind for a very long time past. After a few years' work on the goldfields miners become afflicted with ill health and a change of occupation is imperative. It is the desire of the Ministry to place such people on the land, and we have come to the conclusion that the Esperance country is the most suitable for the purpose. A majority of the settlers there now have come from the Eastern goldfields, and no other part of the State is so well adapted for the settlement of these unfortunate people who have contracted disease on the goldfields, though perhaps in only a slight form. The Government have already reserved 60,000 acres at the 30-Mile in furtherance of this scheme.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Who is going to run this scheme?

Hon. J. Duffell: The Government.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: This is something new.

Hon. J. Duffell: It is the crux of the whole thing.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: Is this to be a State enterprise?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I can see nothing objectionable about the scheme. Something must be done, and the Government have decided to settle such people on the land. If they do not do so these people must be kept in Government institutions, and their families must be maintained.

Hon. W. Kingsmill: I wish you would keep the Government out of some of these things.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: By placing such people on the land and giving them assistance similar to that given to other settlers, it is possible they may recover their health. I am surprised indeed to hear the slightest objection to a proposal of this character. In my opinion in the Esperance district there are about 60 miles of good wheat growing country with a rainfall which varies from satisfactory over one-third to excellent over two-thirds; country which has a clayey subsoil from 6 to 10 inches from the surface. I made several tests—I took a spade with me and during my trip I tested the land here and there

and this clayey subsoil enables the moisture which falls, to be retained.

Hon. J. Duffell: What about salt?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: That question has been fully investigated and it does not matter what quantity of salt there is in the soil if it grows wheat, and it does grow wheat. There is no indication of the crops failing through the salt in the soil. I shall be able to give abundant information on that point, but I never thought that the question would be raised at this stage; it was raised three years ago, but has since been dropped. Whether the soil contains salt or sugar it grows wheat and that ought to be quite satisfactory.

Hon. J. Duffell: The wheat may grow for one or two years.

Hon. J. W. Kirwan. Where does the hon. member get his information?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: There are according to my judgment 30 miles of second class and third class land from Esperance to Scaddan, fed by a heavy rainfall and on some of this land Mr. Bowe grew a rich crop of oats this year. I do not ask members to be influenced by my opinion, I am not as I have said an agricultural expert although I have spent most of my life—nearly all my life—in a district which has proved to be one of the greatest wheat producing districts in Western Australia, that is, from an average yield standpoint. Members need not take my view of the situation at all. I have already given them abundant information, reports of trusted Government officials, men of experience, and surely as I have already stated unless there is some unholy conspiracy in which all the Government officials have entered and the Government themselves for some reason or other, unless, I say, there is some unholy conspiracy, members must come to the conclusion that there is good wheat growing country in the Esperance district. Of all those Government officials who have reported on the land, there has only been one exception, the reports have all been in one strain. That one exception is a conditional exception, that is the report of Mr. Paterson. He has

said that he is doubtful if the country is good for dam making, that he would like to see it tested. Of all the reports that have been made there is not one which is condemnatory of the land. The Government have been told from time to time that it would be better if we followed the advice of our experts and that if we did so we would go right. This Bill embodies the advice of experts. One by one the grounds of opposition to this railway have been broken down; it has been a very tedious process, the enemy has been tenacious, and in some cases irreconcilable. In a matter of this kind, great care must be exercised as hon. members have not had an opportunity of personally investigating this district. It is so far removed from other settled centres of the State, therefore in a matter of this kind involving an expenditure of a fairly large amount of money—

Hon. A. Sanderson: How much?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: A sum of £114,000.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: A quarter of that amount would have kept Broome going.

Hon. J. W. Kirwan: Every member who has seen this land has voted for the line.

Hon. A. G. Jenkins: How many have seen it?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I think every person who has visited the district and knows it, will support the Bill. I am only saying that there was a good deal of justification for members objecting to such a large expenditure of money on a railway to be constructed so far away and when it was impossible for members to personally see the country to be served. There was never such a case put up for an agricultural railway as has been furnished by the reports I have read to the House. I hope members will give the matter a great deal of consideration and cast their votes in favour of the Bill. It comes here with the strong support of another place, the unanimous support of two parties, with the assistance of a third party. It is said that we should wait until other lands have been settled, but why should

we wait. If we have this large tract of country, 1½ million acres in the Esperance district awaiting settlement, why not proceed to settle it as soon as possible? Even if the Bill is passed the settlers may have to wait a considerable time before the line is constructed. The settlers have claims to consideration and the passing of the Bill will give them heart and confidence. At the present time they ought to be in a state of despair, but they are not, they feel that the time will come when Parliament will recognise their claim. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

On motion by Hon. J. F. Cullen, debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 5.55 p.m.

Legislative Assembly.

Tuesday 12th January, 1915.

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

PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the Minister for Mines: 1, By-laws under the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage, and Drainage Act. 2, Notes

on the statements of Mr. Mephan Ferguson re pipes purchased in Germany. 3, By-laws under the Water Boards Act for the Derby area.

By the Minister for Works: Balance sheets of the Boya Quarry for the years ended June 30, 1913, and June 30, 1914, together with various departmental reports.

By the Premier: Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the State Steamship Service.

By Hon. R. H. Underwood (Honorary Minister): 1, Gaols Department Annual Report, 1913. 2, Fisheries Act—(a) Exclusive License Regulations, (b) Draft indenture of exclusive whaling license to Aktieselskabet Australia. 3, Health Act, Food and Drug regulations. 4, Commissioner of Police, report for the year ended June 30, 1914. 5, Report of Proceedings of Registrar of Friendly Societies.

ASSENT TO BILL.

Message from the Governor received and read assenting to City of Perth Bill.

QUESTION—FERTILISERS FOR ESPERANCE SETTLERS.

Hon. J. MITCHELL asked the Minister for Lands: 1, Is it not a fact that fertilisers were supplied by the Government to the settlers on the land north of Esperance? 2, If so, what quantity and upon what terms? 3, The number of settlers so supplied? 4, Acreage under cultivation this season (1914)?

The MINISTER FOR LANDS replied: 1, Yes. 2, Quantity—April, 1912: 43 tons 15cwt.; April, 1913: 59 tons 13 cwt. 1qr. 12lbs.; April, 1914: 59 tons 8 cwt. 1qr. 9lbs; total: 162 tons 16cwt. 2qrs. 21lbs.; Terms—Advances for seed and fertiliser to be repaid out of the proceeds of the first year's crop. 3, 44. 4, Area of land under wheat, oats, and barley in the Esperance Statistical District as given at the forecast for the season 1914-15:—Wheat, 3,954 acres; oats, 361 acres; barley, 23 acres; total, 4,338 acres.