

ders on one farm, we shall see what can be done on experimental plots in several districts.

Item, Veterinary science scholarship, £40:

Mr. O'LOGHLEN: What does the Minister propose to do in regard to the case put up by the member for York? Every member on this side is desirous of assisting the member for York in securing some slight amendment of the Veterinary Act, which will be of service to the farmers, without involving pecuniary loss on the individual. Mr. Lander is an instance in point, and there are others doing the work to-day without receiving any recognition. I think the Government might go out of their way to assist those men. An item could be put on the Estimates, which would afford some recognition of the services of the few men already doing good work among the settlers and their dumb animals.

The PREMIER: I have in view one gentleman who certainly deserves special consideration, although perhaps not by way of an item on the Estimates. I think it would be right to so amend the Act as to admit the gentleman I have in mind. Had he not been a member of this House at the time, he would have been practising and would have been admitted.

Mr. O'Loghlen: Will you do it this session?

The PREMIER: If possible, yes. Of course we cannot break down the Veterinary Act. This gentleman was not admitted simply because, for the moment, he was not charging fees.

Vote put and passed.

This completed the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture.

[The Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 11.27 p.m.

Legislative Council,

Tuesday, 4th November, 1919.

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

ASSENT TO BILLS.

Messages from the Governor received notifying assent to the following Bills:—

- 1, Mental Treatment Act Amendment.
- 2, Anzac Day.
- 3, General Loan and Inscribed Stock Act Amendment.
- 4, Justices Act Amendment.

SELECT COMMITTEE—FRUIT CASES BILL.

Extension of Time.

On motion by Hon. A. Sanderson the time for bringing up the select committee's report was extended by one week.

BILL—DROVING ACT AMENDMENT.

Select Committee's report presented.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM (North) [4.35]: The date for presenting the report of the select committee on the Droving Act Amendment Bill is not until this day week, but the report is ready, and, with the permission of the House, I move—

That the report be now received and read.

Question put and passed.

Report received and read, and ordered to be printed and to be taken into consideration during the Committee stage of the Bill.

BILLS (2)—THIRD READING.

- 1, Merchant Shipping Act Application Act Amendment.
 - 2, Midland Railway.
- Passed.

BILL—SUPPLY, £975,000.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION (Hon. H. P. Colebatch—East) [4.41] in moving the second reading said: It will be remembered that early in the session Parliament granted the Government supplies to carry them on till the end of October. The necessity for further supply arises from the fact that the Appropriation Bill has not yet been passed, and of course cannot be passed until the Estimates have been agreed to. Those Estimates are at present under consideration in another place, and I trust that in the course of a week or two, or three weeks at the very outside, they will be passed and the Appropriation Bill presented to the Council. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Hon. J. F. Allen in the Chair; the Minister for Education in charge of the Bill.

Clause 1—Issue and application of £975,000:

Hon. A. SANDERSON: Can the Minister state how much there is now to the credit of the General Loan Fund?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: I am not in a position to answer that question immediately. If the hon. member desires the information, I can get it for him.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 2—agreed to.

Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment, and the report adopted.

BILL—WHEAT MARKETING.

In Committee.

Resumed from the 29th October; Hon. J. F. Allen in the Chair; the Honorary Minister in charge of the Bill.

Clause 2—Extension of Acts to wheat harvested in 1919-1920:

Hon. J. Cornell had moved an amendment—“That the following proviso be added:—‘Provided also that, on the expiration of any existing agreement, no one other than the Wheat Marketing Advisory Board shall be authorised to dispose of wheat either of milling quality or inferior quality.’”

Hon. J. CORNELL: The Minister has had time to think over the amendment but apparently he desires the existing practice to continue. In the cavalier fashion characteristic of him, he tried to brush aside the need for alteration. The reasons advanced by him are characteristic, inasmuch as they are autocratic. He said users of inferior wheat, such as poultry farmers and hog raisers, had little to complain of as they had been hav-

ing the time of their lives. Assuming that this is so, and I contend it is not, someone is paying for it. If prices are unduly high, the consumers are the victims. The Minister has yet to make out a case that any portion of the difference in the price paid to Dalgety, and the price paid by the consumer, goes into the pool. The slogan of the Government is produce, produce; yet, owing to the faulty administration of the Minister and his system of distributing inferior wheat, many genuine poultry farmers are being forced out of the business. The Minister, by his acts, is forcing men out of a legitimate industry which his leader says is one of the essential industries and must be encouraged. The Minister should give good and valid reasons why Ockerby and other millers are able to get f.a.q. wheat at 5s. 6d. a bushel, whereas poultry farmers have to pay 6s. and 6s. 6d. a bushel for inferior wheat.

Hon. Sir E. H. Witteoom: Why do they buy it?

Hon. J. CORNELL: Because they cannot get f.a.q. wheat.

Hon. J. Duffell: And there is a very limited supply at that.

Hon. J. CORNELL: My amendment would achieve the object sought by Mr. Duffell in the motion of which he has given notice.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member is not in order in discussing another motion on the Notice Paper.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I hope the Minister will explain the disparity I have mentioned.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: I shall support the amendment and I hope the hon. member will force it to a division. The object of the amendment is to throw the responsibility for the distribution and disposal of inferior wheat directly on the Government. That would be a good thing. At present the whole of this wheat business is in the hands of the Government. They are the masters of the situation. They have to treat every section of the public as fairly as they can. I admit their difficulty, but I charge the present Government with looking after the interests of one section of the community only. In all my remarks, I am dealing wholly and solely with the Government, not with the Minister. The policy of the Government in regard to the distribution of damaged wheat is to consult the interest of the wheatgrower only. I am anxious that the consumer should be protected. I warn the Government that, if matters continue as at present, we shall see in the wheat business what has happened in the dried-fruit business—the total prohibition of export in order to protect the consumer. Members have probably read the cable messages in Friday's and Saturday's papers. The Minister says that, in order to protect the consumer, he will not permit dried fruit to be exported. Sooner or later the public will insist on some Government coming to the assistance of the consumer and prohibiting the export of wheat, unless the consumer of damaged wheat is given some consideration. We have heard from Sydney

and Fremantle threats by the men to refuse to handle damaged wheat until the consumer has been fairly treated. The Government, however, are standing fast, and are nakedly and unashamedly protecting one section of the community only.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: The discussion on this amendment would be almost parallel to the one suggested by the motion of which notice has been given by Mr. Duffell, except that the latter seeks by statute to name the price at which wheat shall be sold, whereas this leaves the price to the discretion of the advisory board. If we have an advisory board the least we can do is to trust to their discretion without tying them down to a price which might be inconvenient and inconsistent.

Hon. J. Cornell: And not capable of operation.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: We have conflicting interests and I can sympathise with Mr. Cornell and Mr. Duffell in bringing this matter forward in the interests of their constituents who use damaged wheat for poultry and pigs, but we must always remember that the advisory board and the pool were appointed to look after the interests of the producer. The complaint now is that the board are getting as good a price for bad as for good wheat. On a business basis that sounds to me a wrong state of affairs, but at the same time it is very hard on consumers who have poultry and pigs and who require cheap grain. I have been making inquiries since we last discussed this matter and I find that the system adopted is that there is a cleaning arrangement carried on at the sheds at Fremantle, where a great deal of this damaged wheat comes in. The wheat is divided into three classes. The first is sold as good second quality milling wheat and it is readily disposed of. The next is a quality that is for pigs and fowls, and the third is a kind of sweepings. The supply as it is required is sent in at certain periods and when it comes in it is submitted to the representatives of the firm who undertook the business, Dalgety & Co., and the manager of that firm and Mr. Keys settle the prices. The two prices I understand are 4s. 6d. and 5s. Dalgety & Co. dispose of the wheat and take the risk of payment and del credere business as well. Very few good firms would be found to undertake the work.

Hon. J. Duffell: It is for cash.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I understand the system which I have mentioned is that which is adopted. The position is how are we to get the damaged wheat cheaply enough to satisfy the consumers. I do not think either of the amendments will be of much value because so long as we have an advisory board and that board is working in the interests of the producer, they naturally will get the best price they can for the producer. It seems to me that the fly in the ointment is that there is not sufficient of this damaged wheat to go round and also that the people are willing to buy at these prices.

Hon. J. Cornell: But not willingly.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I was in the hills a few days ago and I happened to see a man feeding his poultry. I said, "Where did you get your wheat? Is this some of the damaged wheat that we have heard so much about?" I took a handful out of the dish, and I can assure hon. members I would not give 1s. a bushel for what I saw. It was perforated with weevil and I had half a handful of dust as well as wheat. Whether it got into that state after it reached the consumer or whether it was bought like that I cannot say. At any rate I would not think very much of the man who would pay 5s. a bushel for wheat of that description.

Hon. J. Nicholson: How did the fowls look?

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: First rate. They certainly looked very succulent. There is not a great quantity of this damaged wheat and it is scarce in the other States. The only solution to the question is to get the British Government to sell us a few thousand bags of wheat and then we can dispose of them.

The Honorary Minister: There is any amount of wheat unsold.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: Then that simplifies the matter. Sell the pig and poultry raisers good wheat. It would pay a man to give 7s. or 8s. for good wheat rather than 5s. for the rubbish which I saw. However, before I give my vote I intend to await for further enlightenment.

Hon. A. J. H. SAW: The House is indebted to Mr. Cornell for bringing forward the amendment in the interests of the small consumer. All members will have the interests of the consumer at heart. I am quite concerned as to the position that has been revealed with reference to the poultry farmer and pig breeder. It does not seem to me that Mr. Cornell has shown in what way his amendment will reduce the price or give the poultry farmer any better wheat than he is at present getting. But Sir Edward Wittenoom has pointed out the means by which the object may be achieved. He stated that the price of the inferior wheat was fixed by Mr. Keys, representing the advisory board and by the manager of Dalgety & Co. It seems to me that this is a bad arrangement. There should be another party to represent the consumer, and if that were done the consumer might get a better deal. I am reminded of a very similar matter which occurred 100 years ago. Marie Antoinette, when she was told that the people could not get bread and were eating grass, said, "Why do they not have cakes." I hope I may be excused for making such an analogy, but the position is no less difficult to-day. It is shameful that the price of wheat which is only worth 1s. a bushel should be fixed by Mr. Keys and by Dalgety & Co.'s representative at 4s. 6d.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: On Wednesday last I called attention to the almost calamitous state of affairs existing at the present time between the Honorary Minister and the

Wheat Board, and I believe the Honorary Minister took my remarks with a very bad grace.

The Honorary Minister: Not at all.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: The fact remains we have sufficient information to convince us that everything is not as it should be in regard to this commodity. We have an advisory board, it is true, but from the remarks made by Sir Edward Wittenoom, there appears to be a conspiracy between Mr. Keys, the manager of the board, and the auctioneer acting on behalf of Dalgety's, in regard to fixing the price for wheat which is not fit for milling purposes. That verifies the statement which I made and further indicates that there is collusion going on which is not in the interests of the poultry and pig raisers in this State. There is an under current which has not been brought to light and which we as members of the Legislative Council are beginning to realise exists. I am convinced that people who are engaged in certain industries in Western Australia are not getting the fair deal they are entitled to. We have heard something of supply and demand controlling prices. Here we have an illustration. By arrangement only a limited quantity is brought to the Perth markets for sale. Sir Edward Wittenoom would have us believe that there is only a limited quantity available. But I say a tremendous quantity of wheat is being treated for weevil and sold as second quality milling wheat. Moreover a great quantity of bread consumed in this State is not fit to eat as compared with the bread consumed in other States. Much of the chemical properties of the wheat is eaten away by the weevil and, although the weevil itself is extracted in the cleaning process, the chemical properties are not put back into the wheat. We in Western Australia are paying as much for bread made from such stuff as people in other States have to pay for first-class bread. Moreover, the pig industry has sunk to so low a level that we have to pay 1s. 8d. per lb. for bacon in rashers.

Hon. H. Stewart: The increase in pigs was greater last year than in the previous year.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: The increase was quite abnormal. The price of feed is skinning the industry. True, we get a good price, because so many previously in the industry have gone out of it.

The Honorary Minister: It is on account of the shortage of meat.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: It is an unhealthy state of affairs that we should have to pay 1s. 8d. for bacon in rashers when we should be getting it at not more than 10d.

The Honorary Minister: If wheat were 1s. a bushel it would make no difference.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: I should like to hear from the Minister how many pigs he is raising to-day. Farmers are not raising as many as in the past, because it pays them to sit back and get the high prices procured for them by the people cornering bacon in the city. I am not proceeding with my

motion to-day simply because I am still gathering information to place before members. I once bought a parcel of wheat at 3s. 6d. Before I saw it I paid cash for it in consequence of a letter I received from Dalgety & Co. to the effect that, as they were working on a commission basis, spot cash was necessary. However, although I bought the wheat from Dalgety & Co. it came to me from another firm, and when I opened it I found it had no resemblance whatever to wheat. It is an illustration of what the people have to suffer when they endeavour to increase production. Production cannot be increased, because there is a conspiracy governing the feed. I will support the amendment.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: I cannot support the amendment. It seems to me the Committee is aiming at the impossible. The object of the pool is to ensure that the wheat-grower shall get the last fraction of value for his wheat. How, then, can we ensure cheap wheat to the fowl producer? The Federal powers have authority to sell the best wheat in any market at any price, while the State authorities have power to deal with inferior wheat. In these circumstances, the State advisory board have done the only thing possible. They have said "We shall appoint an agent at a nominal commission to deal with this, and we shall have some say in the fixing of the price." If the amendment is carried, no one will be permitted to retail wheat, for the advisory board cannot go around selling it in small parcels.

Hon. J. CUNNINGHAM: I support the amendment, not so much in respect of its fixing the price of damaged wheat, as for the purpose of cutting out the middleman. That is all the amendment means. Damaged wheat that is now marketed seems to consist only of dust and wheat skins. People who are prepared to pay from 4s. 6d. to 5s. a bushel for that class of wheat when good wheat can be had for 5s. 6d. do not know their business. I support the amendment because the mover sets out to accomplish a definite object, that is to cut out the middleman between the consumer and the purchaser.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I do not know that an agent receiving two per cent. commission can be regarded as a middleman, because the middleman is one who generally purchases goods and sells them again at a profit. The present arrangement facilitates the work of the Wheat Board which must have an organisation at command in different parts of the State for dealing with the wheat.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Mr. Cornell is desirous of cheapening this quality of wheat to the consumer. I do not agree that the amendment would cut out the middleman. If we relegated to the Advisory Board the power of distributing this wheat, the result would be serious to the consumer. If they are to be the only sellers of wheat they would require to establish retail shops. As

Mr. Cornell's amendment stands, the Wheat Marketing Advisory Board would simply dispose of this wheat to a certain merchant at a certain price, and that merchant would subsequently farm it out to the different consumers and make his profit out of it, which is not intended by the mover. Perhaps the leader of the House will be willing to report progress, so that an amendment may be drafted.

The Minister for Education: What, again!

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Something could be done perhaps to fix the price of this particular quality of wheat so that it might be sold at a price which would not endanger the particular industries affected.

The HONORARY MINISTER: This measure has been before the House for several days. Last week it almost reached finality, when another member who had not been in the House for a fortnight, moved to report progress. The Bill was thus held over until to-day but that particular hon. member is not present. Already the delay which has ensued is doing harm. We have power to handle the wheat under the Scheme. I will put the matter which has been brought up, before the Advisory Board and see whether it is at all practicable for the Scheme to handle this particular class of wheat. I do not think we can attain the object desired by the mover of this amendment unless we retail the wheat in small parcels. We have only paid £2,200 for the last two years to the firm which is now handling this quality of wheat. Can we establish a scheme under the Government to do the work at that price? I may say that the price of this wheat is fixed at its milling value.

Hon. J. Cunningham: It is not fit to mill.

The HONORARY MINISTER: That does not affect the matter. If the value of the flour is in the wheat, the value is there for the feeding of pigs and poultry. Whilst we had inferior wheat on hand, we did not sell f.a.q. wheat, but if we happened to run short, then we supplied it.

Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom: At what price f.a.q.?

The HONORARY MINISTER: At 5s 6d. a bushel. There is no country in the world which has had such cheap bread during the war as we have had in Australia.

Hon. J. Duffell: No other country has been in a position to have such cheap bread.

Hon. A. H. Panton: The wheat is rotten.

The HONORARY MINISTER: There has not been a larger percentage of rotten wheat under the present system than there was before it came into existence. Hon. members have stated that the reason why poultry and eggs are dear is that the price of wheat has been high. If wheat had been sold at 1s. a bushel it would not have affected the price of these commodities.

Hon. members interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: If hon. members do not obey the ruling the Chair, I shall have to report the matter to the President.

Hon. J. Duffell: We want the truth.

The HONORARY MINISTER: All the statements I have made here I can substantiate.

Hon. J. Nicholson: How much is second quality wheat?

The HONORARY MINISTER: That varies according to its value. Mr. Cornell wants to know why Ockerby & Co. can get wheat at 5s. 6d. and the poultrymen and pig raisers have to pay above that price for inferior wheat. Ockerby & Co. are supplied from the Scheme at 5s. 6d. f.a.q. The amendment does not provide the remedy desired. I am quite prepared, if an amendment is brought forward that will remedy the difficulty and can be shown to be a business proposition, to accept it. If the Scheme handles this wheat, it will go on selling it in the same manner as Dalgety & Co. are selling it to-day, and it will still go through the same hands. The remedy lies with the people who want the inferior wheat. Let them go to the sale yards and buy a truck-load. If one buyer does not require a whole truck-load, let him co-operate with others to buy. I do not intend to deal with Mr. Duffell's grave charge of conspiracy, which he has not in any way substantiated. I consider the charge utterly unreasonable.

Hon. J. Duffell: There are good grounds for it.

The HONORARY MINISTER: Mr. Keys is a very competent officer, who is most jealous that the farmers should receive a fair deal. As to the quality of bread in Western Australia, at no stage of the history of the scheme has other than good quality flour been sold to the bakers of this State. The second quality wheat is ground into second grade flour for export overseas. With regard to pig raising, our farmers have raised more pigs this year than ever. The trouble is that we have so few bacon factories. The scheme now allows the sale of wheat for feeding pigs and poultry from the grower to the poultry farmer and pig raiser. I trust the Committee will not hamper the Wheat Marketing Advisory Board by passing the amendment. If it is carried, the Government will be forced to establish a huge dépôt for the disposal of inferior wheat. The cheaper course would be to let the inferior wheat simply rot. Certainly, no private organisation could be established to sell inferior wheat throughout this widely scattered population.

Hon. G. J. G. W. MILES: I regret I cannot support Mr. Cornell's amendment, since I am opposed to the Government's handling anything at all. If the Government continue to handle the wheat business, let them call public tenders in this connection, and not select the nine or ten firms whom they consider most capable. Why are not poultry farmers and pig raisers allowed to buy f.a.q. wheat just as millers are? The man raising pigs and poultry is entitled to fair quality wheat at a reasonable price just as much as any other man in the community. The Wheat Scheme appears to me as in the nature of

restraint of trade. Possibly, if the Prices Regulation Bill passes, the Commission under that measure may be able to fix a fair price for inferior wheat. The debate on the Wheat Marketing Bill should be regarded by the Government and the Wheat Marketing Advisory Board as an instruction to run the business properly in future.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: I desire to refer to only one point in the Honorary Minister's remarks. Mr. Baxter said that there would be no difference in the price of pork or bacon if wheat were sold at 1s. per bushel. Had the Honorary Minister travelled with me yesterday, he would have realised the total incorrectness of his statement. The area I have in view would to-day be carrying 5,000 pigs, instead of 500, if the pig raisers could purchase wheat at 1s. per bushel. Moreover, there is the fact that a considerable amount of money has been expended in establishing, within a few miles of the Perth town hall, the bacon curing industry.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: There is one argument which requires an answer, and that is on the question of the organisation of this business as indicated by the Honorary Minister. Assume that we pass this amendment. Then, the Honorary Minister says, the difficulty of arranging the matter with the Wheat Marketing Advisory Board would be very great, if not insuperable. That argument, apparently, has appealed to Mr. Miles. The best answer to it is that the carrying of the amendment would unquestionably throw on the board the responsibility of fixing the price of inferior wheat, and the responsibility of its distribution. The amendment is very carefully worded, and the great advantage of it would be that the individual consumer would apply to the Honorary Minister for whatever quantity of damaged wheat he needed. Individual members of the public have already written to the Honorary Minister from places so far apart as Greenough and Albany, asking for trucks of damaged wheat. What was the answer given them? "I refer you to Messrs. Dalgety & Co." Dalgety & Co., who were simply acting as agents of the Government for the sale of damaged wheat, said, "There is the price; take the wheat or leave it." We want the direct inquiry to be made to the board and the board could reply, "Mr. X is our agent, the cost will be so much and the commission so much." This would place the responsibility on the Government.

Hon. J. Nicholson: What would be the cost?

Hon. A. SANDERSON: One man and five clerks at the maximum.

Hon. J. Nicholson: What would you pay them?

Hon. A. SANDERSON: That inquiry does not bear on the question.

Hon. H. Stewart: How would you deliver the wheat?

Hon. A. SANDERSON: Through the Government agent. The responsibility should be on the Minister so that consumers will be protected. On the 17th October, 1918, a

deputation waited on the Minister and the answer of the Minister was—

It had been found that through competition in the selling of inferior wheat, the scheme and through the scheme the farmer had suffered. The appointment of a sole agent had the effect of materially increasing the price realised for inferior wheat.

Hon. J. Duffell: Shame!

Hon. A. SANDERSON: I consider it a shame, and I hope the Committee will mark their sense of disapproval by passing the amendment.

Hon. Sir. E. H. WITTENOOM: I cannot see how this argument can be carried on with any logic. The Advisory Board, with Mr. Keys as manager, have to do their best for the farmers and the pool. The price is fixed at 4s. 6d. to 5s. and the wheat is readily taken at the price. What earthly justification would Mr. Keys or anyone else have for refusing the price? It is his business to get the best price possible. Supposing he was able to get that price and sold it for 1s., many members of this House would be among the first to turn round on him. Whilst I am quite sympathetic with members who want their friends to get wheat as cheaply as possible, I cannot see any justification to induce the representative of the Advisory Board to take less for the wheat than he can readily obtain.

Hon. J. MILLS: It is only since this Bill came down—it has been discussed at two and a half sittings—that I have had any idea there was such a great number of farmers in St. George's-terrace. I am not convinced that the Government are not entitled to their Bill and I intend to support it. However, I would like the Minister to make a statement as to the possibility of anyone requiring f.a.q. wheat unsold, of which there is plenty, to obtain it. If a man chooses to feed his poultry on f.a.q. wheat, he should be able to purchase it.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Mr. Mills overlooks the fact that the Wheat Pool is a close corporation, in fact a restraint of trade by the Government. If the Government sold f.a.q. wheat to the poultry farmer at current prices, there would be no hope of selling the inferior wheat, which would be left on the hands of the Government. Mr. Keys is handling the wheat to get the best price for the farmer and, if the metropolitan-suburban area wants cheaper wheat, for that is what it amounts to, some member should move an amendment to that effect, but we should not continue this debate any longer.

Hon. J. E. DODD: I am inclined to support the amendment. I have had a good deal of experience with wheat, but I have learned more here. The question is, are poultry farmers getting value for what they are paying. The Minister states that the price is fixed on the value of the damaged wheat. There seems to be something wrong if wheat such as Sir Edward Wittenoom has described is sold. It has been stated that bread is inferior owing to the present handling of the wheat. I have known one of the

biggest firms in the wheat buying and selling line to sell stone-gristed flour in bags marked "roller mill flour." That is what we got under private enterprise. As far as the handling of the wheat is concerned, I am with the Government. The consumer should have some say in this matter. If consumers are being supplied with weevils and dust at 4s. 6d. and 5s. a bushel, there is something wrong. It is not fair that Dalgety & Co. should have the fixing of the price. While the farmer is entitled to the full price, the country is carrying the responsibility, and the consumer should be protected.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I am not wedded to the precise wording of the amendment. The only substantial point of objection is that regarding retail distribution. The farmer is protected and the Government should extend some consideration to the consumer. The Government should be responsible for the wholesale distribution. They do not part with that right in the matter of f.a.q. wheat that goes overseas. If the Government cannot carry out the retail delivery, let the ordinary channels of trade distribute the wheat, but the Advisory Board should fix the price according to the locality and conditions.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: At the present price, the demand is greater than the supply.

Hon. J. CORNELL: There is nothing to prevent the hon. member moving any amendment he wishes. This is the only State where private members have not the assistance of the Parliamentary draftsman to frame amendments. If we had the assistance of such advice, we would soon be able to evolve an amendment which would meet the wishes of the Committee.

Sitting suspended from 6.15 to 7.30 p.m.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: The Committee have lost sight of the fact that the State guaranteed the pool, and the object of the amendment appears to be to bring the sale of this refuse wheat within the purview of political influence. What is the object of getting the Minister to control the sale of this refuse wheat? Presumably because it is that somebody else might squeeze the Minister that this wheat may be sold at the best price. If the supply were greater than the demand I could understand the arguments advanced, but the demand is greater than the supply. Taking into consideration the fact that the State is guaranteeing the wheat in the pool and that we have an expert manager to see that the State gets the best value, the only conclusion I can come to is to leave the expert manager to get the best price. To show the absurdity of the matter, we have for three days discussed the price of weevil wheat and whilst I was out of the House this afternoon, members passed a Supply Bill for nearly a million of money. If the object is to put the Minister where he can be squeezed, I will not be a party to it.

Hon. J. CORNELL: As I intimated before tea, I intend to ask leave to withdraw

the amendment with a view to substituting another which I think will commend itself to hon. members more than this one. The object of the amendment I intend to move will be to bring the disposal of this particular wheat under the control of the board. I ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I move an amendment—

That the following proviso be added to the clause:—"Provided also that on the expiration of the existing agreement with Dalgety & Co., Ltd., relating to the disposal of damaged wheat, no further agreement on similar lines shall be entered into thereafter. The wheat marketing advisory board shall dispose of inferior quality wheat wholesale to purchasers on the terms that they shall retail the same at prices not exceeding those fixed by the board at the time of sale.

Mr. Holmes stated that the object I had in view was to bring this matter within the purview of political influence. That is not my intention. Politically I stand in a rather curious position, and it is that the two contending parties would not scruple to put me out of politics. But while I am in Parliament I am going to express my opinion for the benefit of the community, irrespective of what the result may be. All I desire is this: to-day the wheat board has control of all wheat that comes into its hands. It says where the fair average quality wheat shall go and it controls it to its destination. After the grading process and after the f.a.q. wheat is separated from wheat that is not f.a.q., they then proceed to regrade it and then they get what is known as second class milling wheat. They also fix the price of that and guide it to its destination. What is left is the inferior wheat. All I desire now is that the board shall control this damaged wheat to its destination.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Would you sell damaged wheat at one price?

Hon. J. CORNELL: There is no question of price. This Parliament would not put the price in the Bill. The board do that. I have done my share in bringing this matter forward. I can join with hon. members in saying that we have had just about enough of it. There are only two parties in this matter, and if the arrangement I propose is entered into it will not in any way conflict with the machinery of the existing pool. If the Committee think things ought to go on, well and good.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: The amendment is absurd. I assume that there are half a dozen different qualities in, and prices of, fowl wheat. What is there to prevent a merchant who is dealing in fowl wheat from buying 50 bags at 3s. a bushel, 10 bags at 5s. a bushel, mixing the lot together and selling it all at 5s. 6d. a bushel? How can the public be protected against such practices?

Hon. J. CORNELL: We are considering only honest traders.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: I am exceedingly disappointed with the amendment. If the previous amendment was not carefully thought out, at any rate it was a brilliant inspiration. The present amendment is useless to carry out our ideas. I deeply regret that it is impossible for me to support the amendment. What could have induced the hon. member to change the previous one?

Hon. J. Cornell: Despair.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: There was no need to despair. I believe we could have carried it. I regret the change.

The HONORARY MINISTER: Mr. Holmes dealt with one important point. There are others. Does the hon. member expect the scheme to go into whole of the costs of trading in and handling this wheat, and to fix a retail price on it? Inferior wheat ranges from 3s. 3d. to 5s. per bushel, according to its value. It is essentially a matter for a price-fixing board rather than for a department. There will be very little need for any agreement after this year. Moreover, we shall not have the inferior wheat on hand. The Government are concerned about the wheat as such, but to a far greater extent are they concerned about the assets of the farmer.

Hon. J. CORNELL: I ask Mr. Holmes to use the same argument when the Price Fixing Bill comes down as he has used on this occasion. If the board cannot do what I ask them to do, I think the excellent tribute paid to the manager to-night can be discounted. The Minister says this is a question of price-fixing and that the Government are out to protect the primary producer. So am I. But if we guarantee the primary producer, and if there is a shortage, who is going to meet it? The great mass of the consumers. Yet they are as much entitled to consideration as is any other section of the community. The Honorary Minister said we should not have any damaged wheat next year. I do not think he is in any better position to forecast a mouse plague or the absence of such plague than was Pharoah at the time of Joseph. We know what happened in New South Wales, and we know what might happen in this State.

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

Ayes	4
Noes	13

Majority against	..	9
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AYES.

Hon. J. Cornell	Hon. A. H. Panton
Hon. J. Duffell	Hon. R. G. Ardagh
	(Teller.)

NOES.

Hon. C. F. Baxter	Hon. J. Mills
Hon. E. M. Clarke	Hon. J. Nicholson
Hon. H. P. Colebatch	Hon. A. Sanderson
Hon. J. A. Greig	Hon. H. Stewart
Hon. J. J. Holmes	Hon. Sir E. H. Wittenoom
Hon. C. McKenzie	Hon. H. Carson
Hon. G. W. Miles	(Teller.)

Amendment thus negatived.

Clause put and passed.

[The President resumed the Chair.]

Bill again reported without further amendment.

BILL—PERTH MINT ACT AMENDMENT.

Received from the Legislative Assembly and read a first time.

BILL—LAND TAX AND INCOME TAX.

Received from the Legislative Assembly and read a first time.

BILL—PRICES REGULATION.

Second Reading.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION (Hon. H. P. Colebatch—East) [8.2] in moving the second reading said: This Bill is one of the most important that the Government have to submit to members during the present session. I propose to anticipate some of the criticism to which I must expect to be subjected because of the attitude I took up in regard to a similar measure some four years ago. I do not intend to delay the House over this aspect of the question, or to waste time in personal explanation, though I trust that my explanation will be quite simple and readily understood by hon. members. When war broke out the Government then in power introduced a Bill for the purpose of regulating prices, a Bill on lines somewhat similar to that now before this House. There was no member in the Chamber who supported that Bill more heartily than I did, not only the principle but the provisions of the Bill. Whilst the Bill was attacked and criticised by other hon. members, I did all I could to assist the Government in having that Bill passed into law. The operation of the Bill was limited to a certain period. Whilst in operation, the Act, according to my judgment, was improperly applied. It was improperly used to the detriment of a certain section of the community.

Hon. A. H. Panton: The farmers!

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: I would take up exactly the same attitude if an Act were used improperly to the detriment of any section of the community. It was used improperly to the detriment of the agricultural community in a way which could have no other effect than to discourage the agricultural industry and inflict injury upon the State as a whole. It was for that reason that when the Bill came forward for re-enactment—I think towards the end of 1915—I opposed it, and I gave in full and complete detail my reasons for that attitude. I am also free to confess that at different times I have spoken against the principle of price

fixing. I have taken up the attitude that price fixing was an artificial means of arriving at a desired end, and a means likely to defeat the end at which it aimed. The theory, and I think it is a perfectly sound one, is that high prices have, on the one hand, a tendency to encourage production and, on the other hand, a tendency to cause economy in consumption. That being so, these two factors, the encouragement of production and the decrease of consumption, brought about by high prices, operate together to restore a normal level of credit and prices. That is the theory and it is a sound one. On the other hand, it is quite capable of argument that when prices are artificially restricted on an article that is short in supply, such restriction has the effect of discouraging people from seeking to produce more, and it also has the effect of removing the necessity for economy on the part of the consumers, and, consequently, its general tendency is to keep prices high. We put out of office this law of supply and demand, which, in normal circumstances, corrects those conditions that lead up to extreme prices from lack of supply.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Will not this Bill have that effect?

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: I do not think so. I think this Bill can be justified. I do not ask the hon. member to support it unless he is satisfied that it is justified. I have not altered my views one bit in regard to the general principle—the general principle that when the laws of supply and demand are free to operate, and are not interfered with, then any artificial restriction of prices will have a detrimental effect, because they will have the effect of discouraging that increase of production and also of removing the incentive to economy in consumption, which, operating together, have been effective in adjusting prices to a normal level. But I cannot be blind to the abnormal conditions under which we live. I do not see how anyone can be blind to the great changes in industrial and commercial methods which have taken place in the last few years, changes which were coming into operation for years before the war started, but which have been brought to their complete fulfilment by the war in a much shorter time than would otherwise have been the case. If that is so, and it can be shown that certain alterations in trading methods have arisen, which have to some extent destroyed the old method of restoring balances in trade, it is surely due to us that we should consider whether these new methods require any particular regulation or not. One point which was discussed at great length during the debates on price-fixing in the early days of the war was the supposed impracticableness of fixing a minimum price. It was agreed that one could fix a maximum price, but it was pointed out both in this House and publicly that a great difficulty would be found in fixing a minimum price, that we would be doing an injury to the community by fixing a maximum price only.

We have got over that difficulty. The argument was raised chiefly in the interests of the wheatgrower—the maximum price could be fixed and when there was a shortage legislation might compel the grower to sell his wheat at less than the open market price, but he would be quite powerless when he had too much wheat to enable him to secure a minimum price. That difficulty has been overcome. Notwithstanding the shortage of shipping, and the fact that had it been left to its own resources, the farmers' wheat would have been a drug on the market and would not have realised more than about 2s. a bushel, means have been devised by legislation, and by pledging the credit of the community, by which a reasonable price has been secured to the farmers for their wheat. It has been pointed out that there is very little reason to believe that the community will be called upon to pay anything under this guarantee, but the fact remains that the guarantee had to be given, that it was the giving of the guarantee that secured to the farmer a reasonable price for his wheat in circumstances under which, without this guarantee, his wheat would have realised certainly not half as much as it has done. Having overcome the difficulty, which I for one did not see any means of overcoming four or five years ago, namely, the difficulty of securing a minimum price to the producer, even when his commodity was produced in such quantities as to become a drug in the market, because of the lack of shipping, it does not seem to me at all unreasonable for the consumer to say, "If, in abnormal circumstances, you can by legislation secure to the producer a minimum price for his product, am I, as a consumer, not entitled to ask that in abnormal circumstances you should endeavour to secure to me a maximum price for the goods I have to buy?"

Hon. J. J. Holmes: The position you say has been created by the Wheat Pool has only been created by the restriction of trade. This, in itself, will—

THE PRESIDENT: I cannot allow interjections. These are disorderly. When they occupy minutes they cannot be tolerated.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: The Minister cannot answer that.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: I do not see the application of the interjection. The fact remains that by legislation, whether in the restraint of trade or not, and by placing the credit of the community in the form of a guarantee behind it, the minimum price has been secured to the producer for the article he grows. Leaving out the question of whether it is done by the restraint of trade or not, it has been done by legislation, and with the credit of the community behind it as a guarantee. That being the case, it is not unreasonable for the consuming community to say, "If by legislation in these abnormal circumstances you can secure the producer a minimum price for what he grows, are we not entitled to ask of Parliament that it shall endeavour

to find a means by legislation also of combating the abnormal circumstances in the interests of the consumer, and securing to him a maximum price for the article he purchases?" So far as the giving of this guarantee for the farmers' wheat is concerned, I have already said that I do not think any loss will be involved because of that. I will go further and say that had it not been given the loss to this State would have been beyond our possibility of calculation. I have no hesitation in saying that the lack of that guarantee would have brought widespread disaster to Western Australia, because it would have practically meant that our wheat lands would have been forced out of cultivation. I do not propose to enter upon any academic discussion of the law of supply and demand, but I think it may be taken for granted that what is known as the competitive system is the method by which the law of supply and demand operates. The competitive system is built up on the theory that when demand is in excess of supply, capital will be attracted to that particular industry and additional goods will be produced, or consumption will be restricted because of the high prices. Either of those things will have the effect of bringing supply and demand into closer touch with each other, and of regulating prices. On the contrary, when supply is in excess of demand, capital is discouraged from entering into that particular industry and the result is decrease of production; and again the two things come into contact and prices are regulated. The assumption that the competitive system will in this way have the effect of correcting any abnormal prices, whether they are abnormally high or abnormally low, does suggest that the best thing in these matters is to let them alone and then they will right themselves. But that forces upon us an inquiry into the question, is the competitive system in operation at the present time?

Hon. J. Cornell: No.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: That is the question we have to consider very seriously before we lightly dismiss a Prices Regulation Bill in the belief that the law of supply and demand operating through the competitive system will result in prices being brought to the right level after a reasonable space of time. Personally I do not hesitate to say that in my opinion the competitive system is not in operation at the present time; that is to say, it is not in unrestricted operation. In fact there are at the present time so many restrictions upon it that it has, one might almost say, been put out of office. The report of the Select Committee on Trusts recently appointed by the Ministry of Reconstruction in England instances four forms of combination that are in full working order in practically every civilised country in the world, and each one of which is a direct attack upon the competitive system. I am not saying that these forms of combination are wrong. I have no doubt it can be easily

demonstrated that they have in many cases the effect of eliminating waste. I have no doubt that a great deal is to be said in favour of them. But that they do attack the competitive system I think there can be little doubt. The four forms of combination referred to by the Select Committee on Trusts were these: first, the honourable understanding; second, the trade association; third, the combine; fourth, the consolidation. The select committee made reference in their report to minor forms of combination—banking, amalgamations, shipping rings, the multiple stores system, the tied house system in the liquor trade, and the control exercised over tobacco, meat, and other commodities. Any one who reflects on the wide ramifications of all these agencies must, I think, find it rather difficult to come to the conclusion that the old competitive system stands just where it stood years ago. I cannot come to that conclusion myself, and therefore I say that if this old competitive system by which the law of supply and demand operated in the past has in fact to a large extent been put out of office, it is fitting that Parliament should consider whether or not some method is required of regulating the new mode of trading that has taken its place. One point I should like hon. members to bear in mind is this: In practically every country in the British Empire, price-fixing legislation has recently been enacted. It has been enacted in the mother of Parliaments; it has been enacted in I think almost every country in the British Empire, and in many other countries as well. The conditions vary in each of these countries, but everywhere it is recognised that the conditions are abnormal. Everywhere it is recognised that the old method of trading has varied to such an extent that something in the way of prices regulation is necessary in the interests of the community as a whole. In most of these countries, it may be argued, this measure has been adopted merely to suit abnormal circumstances. But we in Western Australia are in just the same abnormal circumstances. We have still the difficulty of obtaining the things we want by shipping; and not only are we subject to those difficulties peculiar to us, but we share in the abnormal circumstances that exist all the world over; and if in other countries these price-fixing laws have been found necessary, it seems to me that we shall have to discover some really strong fundamental difference between our conditions and theirs before we can argue that some legislation of this kind is not necessary here. These laws have been adopted for the purpose of preventing people from using abnormal conditions in order to exploit the public for their own benefit.

Hon. J. Duffell: How do you propose to fix prices.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: That is set out in the Bill, and I shall explain it fully when I come to the different clauses of the measure. As I have already said, this Bill is not necessarily an attack

on the new method of trading, or an attack on trusts and combinations and that sort of thing, because it can be readily demonstrated that in a good many industries these combinations have had the effect of wiping out waste, increasing wages to the employees, and producing an article at a much cheaper cost than it could be produced at before. But, that point having been reached, the consumer of the article is entitled to step in and say "I should get some benefit." If by these means the cost of production can be reduced, it is not a reasonable thing that the whole of the profit should go to the persons forming the combine. The people are entitled to be protected in circumstances of that kind. If by combination competition is wiped out, and thereby the cost of production decreased, the consumer is entitled to say "Having wiped out this competition, some other means must be provided so that I shall get the article at a fair margin of profit, so that the combine shall not be entitled to put up whatever price they like merely because they have swept other competitors out of the way." I am not one of those who expect that this Price Fixing Bill is going to effect a large and immediate reduction in the cost of living. I do not think it will do that. I do not think that by price fixing we can remove any increase in cost that is due to natural causes. If a high price is due to actual shortage of supply, then all the price fixing in the world will not avail. The high price must continue so long as there is a shortage of supply. But what price fixing can do, what it is the intention of the Government to do, is to prevent illegitimate increase of prices to prevent anyone using the present abnormal circumstances to enable him to exploit the public and obtain illegitimate profits. That, I say, price fixing can do; and I say price fixing should do it. Consequently a price fixing measure is the proper thing to have in operation in any State where the conditions are abnormal as they are in this State at the present time. The causes of the present high prices are many and varied. I do not intend to go into them at any length. I suppose the chief cause is shortage of supplies—I am speaking in a world wide sense—due to the employment in work of destruction of millions of men who would otherwise have been employed in the work of production. The next greatest cause is the inflation of credit. Undoubtedly the enormous inflation of credit all the world over has had the effect of raising prices. The answer to the old question "What is a sovereign worth?" still applies to-day. The old answer was that a sovereign is worth exactly what it costs to get it. That is a variation of the old phrase, that that which is easily gained is lightly valued. And so when money is turned out in paper in the way it has been turned out all the world over during the last few years, it cannot be expected that those paper notes will have

anything like the same value as the earned sovereign. A sovereign to-day and at all times is worth just exactly what it cost to get it and no price fixing regulation can overcome those two causes of high prices—scarcity of the commodity and inflation of credit. Those two things can only be overcome gradually by increased production, and by steady decrease of the superfluous money in the world until we get back to something like the gold standard that prevailed before the war. It will probably take a long time to do that, but until it is done we cannot get back to the prices which obtained before the war. All that the Bill claims to do is that it will prevent people from obtaining illegitimate profits, that it will prevent people from exploiting the consumer whilst existing abnormal circumstances give them a chance to do it. A few days ago it was published in the "West Australian" that Sir Auckland Geddes, president of the British Board of Trade, in giving evidence before the Profiteering Committee of the House of Commons, had said that the profiteering Act in England had already caused prices to be reduced by 25 per cent. That statement, I think, is a very complete answer to anyone who maintains that legislation of this kind cannot have any effect. That was the deliberate statement of the President of the Board of Trade, that the Profiteering Act, which was only introduced on the 7th August of this year and therefore can only have been in operation a very short time—

Hon. A. H. Panton: But the British Government were regulating prices in England all through the war.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: That is so, but this profiteering measure was introduced in August of the present year, and was passed some time during the month of August. It had been in operation only two months when the President of the Board of Trade told the committee that it had already caused prices to be reduced by 25 per cent.

Hon. J. Cornell: Under that Bill did they fix prices?

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: Yes; it limited profits, which is practically the same thing as fixing prices. The advocates of legislation of this kind have always claimed, and I think rightly, that publicity does more to achieve the end aimed at than the legislation does. We invest commissioners with certain powers. They make their reports. These reports, as I shall explain later will be laid on the Table of Parliament. We shall let the light in. The experience everywhere has been that publicity is the chief factor in preventing profiteering and in preventing unduly high prices. The ways in which publicity is beneficial are threefold. First of all, by making public the profits obtained in different industries, it has the tendency, if those profits are high, to induce capital to go into that particular industry and,

consequently, to increase production. That obviously must ultimately have the effect of reducing prices. If, under this publicity, we can show that a certain business is good enough for someone else to go into, obviously we shall get not only increased production but competition, and those two factors will have the effect of bringing about a reduction in prices. Secondly, publicity brings the operation and effects of combination to light, and that has the very good result that it removes a lot of false impressions from the public mind. It removes a lot of suspicion and ungrounded suspicion, and has a tendency to do away with that unrest which is bound to be in the public mind if it thinks it is being exploited by these combinations. Consequently, when we show that a combination is making too much money or that it is not, the effect of publicity is good. The third effect it has is that people, knowing there is a probability of publicity, are less likely to attempt to do anything unfair or indulge in exploitation than they otherwise would be. Another very old theory is that light is the sovereign antiseptic and the best of all policemen, and I think that, if Acts of this kind served no other than these three objects which are achieved by publicity, they would be beneficial.

Hon. J. Cornell: The Bill proposes to apply the light too late.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: The Bill provides for the appointment of commissioners who are armed with powers to investigate, to report, and to recommend. In the work of investigation, they may summon and examine witnesses, and may enter upon premises and inspect and, if necessary, temporarily impound books, documents and papers. The Minister, on the recommendation of the commissioners, may require reports to be furnished and the Governor-in-Council, on the recommendations of the commissioners, may fix maximum prices and determine conditions of sale. This is practically what the Bill does. It appoints three commissioners and gives them power to inquire and investigate and report. It empowers the Minister, on their recommendation, to call for reports, and finally it empowers the Governor-in-Council to fix prices and conditions of sale on the recommendation of the commissioners.

Hon. J. Duffell interjected.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: I did not catch the interjection, but I do not know what the war profits tax has to do with this Bill.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: It is just what you stated the Minister could not do on the wheat marketing proposition.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: If members have not yet had enough of the Wheat Marketing Bill, there would be nothing to stand in the way of the Commissioners recommending the Minister a certain maximum price for wheat sold, or for damaged wheat for fowl food, in any pro-

claimed district in the State. Under the Bill it would be quite competent for the Governor-in-Council to fix such prices.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Could he fix less than 5s. next year?

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: Whatever the maximum price recommended by the Commissioners, it will be competent for the Governor-in-Council to fix it. The first clause is the short title. The second clause deals with definitions, and the responsibility of declaring what are foodstuffs and necessary commodities rests with the Governor-in-Council. A notice will be published in the "Government Gazette" as a result of an order by the Governor-in-Council. I do not know that the definitions require any further explanation. Clause 3 provides for the appointment of three commissioners, one of whom shall be chairman. The voting power of each commissioner will be equal, whilst two commissioners may form a quorum. Should there be any disagreement at a meeting at which only two commissioners are present, the matter must be postponed until the whole of the commissioners are available.

Hon. J. Duffell: What are these commissioners to cost the country?

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: Whatever the Governor-in-Council considers a fair remuneration. Clause 3 provides for the remuneration of the commissioners. It sets out that each commissioner may be paid such remuneration by way of salary and allowances as the Governor determines. The clause also empowers them to inquire, and make reports and recommendations to the Minister.

Hon. G. J. G. W. Miles: Which Minister will control the Act?

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: Under the definition clause, the Minister means the Minister of the Crown to whom the administration of this Act is for the time being committed by the Governor, and includes any member of the Executive Council for the time being discharging the duties of the office of the Minister. It is also provided that the reports and recommendations of the commission shall be presented to both Houses of Parliament if Parliament is in session, or within 14 days of the commencement of the ensuing session. When in Committee, I propose to ask members to remedy an omission from the Bill by making provision for the appointment of an acting commissioner in the event of illness, absence, or incapacity preventing one of the commissioners from sitting on the board for any extended period. The powers of the commissioners are set down in Clause 4 and are such as are necessary to enable them to obtain complete information on which to furnish their reports and recommendations. Clause 5 makes it an offence for any person summoned as a witness to fail to appear without lawful excuse, or to refuse to answer questions lawfully put to him. Clause 6 makes it an offence for any person to pre-

vent or attempt to prevent the commissioners from entering premises and inspecting documents or impounding documents, if necessary. Clause 7 makes provision by which two assessors may from time to time be appointed by the Minister to assist the commissioners, the idea being that, in regard to certain foodstuffs and necessary commodities, it may be desirable that the commissioners should have the assistance of experts in the particular calling. Clause 8 gives the Minister power, on the recommendation of the commissioners, to call for certain returns of stocks of foodstuffs or necessary commodities. Clause 9 provides for the proclaiming of specified portions of the State as an area within which prices fixed shall apply. Clause 10 empowers the Governor-in-Council, on the recommendation of the commissioners, to determine maximum prices and conditions of sale for foodstuffs or necessary commodities. Clause 11 makes it an offence to contravene any determined maximum price or condition of sale prescribed in Clause 10. Clause 12 makes it an offence to offer, whether by premium or otherwise, a higher price than the maximum price fixed under the Act. Clause 13 makes the prices fixed apply to goods sold under contract. Clause 14 imposes an obligation on any person having in his custody or under his control foodstuffs or necessary commodities to sell the same on demand and tender of payment, while Subclauses 2 and 3 of the same clause offer adequate protection to such person who has reasonable cause for refusing to sell. Clause 15 is intended to prevent the imposition of conditions of sale which, being in restraint of trade, are calculated to interfere with competition and consequently maintain the selling prices of goods at an unduly high level. Clause 16 provides for the exhibition, in a conspicuous place, of the prices of such foodstuffs and necessary commodities as are dealt with on those particular premises. Clause 17 empowers the commissioners to ascertain the percentage of profit made during any specified period by any trader in any business to which the report relates, and to include the result of such investigation in a report upon which their recommendations for the fixing of price for any article is based. When recommending to the Minister that the Governor shall fix a certain maximum price, the commissioners may, in their report, set out the profits that have been made during any specified period in that particular line. Clause 18 is intended to protect the public against increases of prices pending the fixing of a maximum price as already provided for. Clause 19 provides for a declaration of secrecy, in the form of the schedule, by every person to be employed for the purposes of the Act. Clause 20 makes provision for penalties for offences against the Act. I do not think these penalties are unreasonable.

Hon. J. Cornell: They are not severe enough.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: The penalties are much less severe than those im-

posed under the English Act. I do not think those provided for in the Bill are unduly heavy. Any person guilty of an offence against this Act shall on conviction be liable, if a corporation, to a fine not exceeding £500, and if any other person, to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a period not exceeding one year, or to a fine not exceeding £200, or both. It cannot be contended that the penalties are not substantial. I think they are sufficient. At the same time, when it is remembered they represent the maximum penalties, I do not think it will be contended they are too severe. Clause 21 provides for the making of regulations, whilst the final clause provides that the Act shall continue in force until the 31st December, 1920, and no longer. The limitation of the operation of this Act is an entirely proper course to take, because it must be admitted that the chief causes for the Act are the abnormal conditions under which we are living, and any Act of Parliament passed for the purpose of meeting abnormal conditions may very properly contain a time limit to the period of its operation. During the 12 months or more that this Act will be in operation, we shall have an opportunity to see to what extent abnormal conditions are modified and how the Act operates, and Parliament next session will have an opportunity to say whether this Act shall be renewed for a further period or indefinitely, or whether it shall be amended or discarded altogether. I think it will be agreed on all sides that the time limitation is a proper one. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Hon. A. SANDERSON (Metropolitan-Suburban) [8.44]: I do not know whether it is the wish of the House or of other members to continue the discussion on this Bill to-night.

Hon. H. Stewart: No.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: I am prepared to sit on and I ask the Minister whether he wants to continue the debate.

The Minister for Education: Please yourself.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: I can only hope that other members of the House are also prepared to discuss what is an important matter. We have been told that we are to sit here on Friday. If we are to finish up the business of the House within a month, it is obvious that we have to get on with the work. This is one of the policy measures of the Government mentioned in His Excellency's Speech at the commencement of the session, and therefore, so far as I am concerned, having carefully considered this matter, I am prepared to take the responsibility of speaking on it to-night. It would be much easier to speak later on and on some points, of course, one could consult authorities and bring a mass of material to bear on the subject. We have all listened with interest and pleasure to the Minister's statement in introducing the Bill, and so far

as his exposition was concerned, as is usual, it was a most fascinating oration, even though it was a volte face. So far as I am concerned with regard to a change of opinion on legislative enactments during the war, I would not criticise any member or any party who during the course of that terrible conflict advocated or supported legislation, because we certainly found ourselves in a difficult position. It seems to me that what we have now to decide is whether we are going back to what we used to consider sound principles or completely change our opinion with regard to the conduct of public affairs. It was noticeable that the Minister quoted extensively from English experience. I follow Imperial politics as closely as it is possible to do from this distance, and my reading of the position of British affairs is that the great conflict between the parties, was not decided on what may be known as the khaki election last year, but will be decided at the next elections, and any legislation introduced by the present Government does not represent the considered and deliberate opinion of the British nation. With regard to the war legislation, whether Imperial or local, I for one will never criticise it severely. I make this admission too that this is a complex question, but I propose to make it as simple as I can by confining it to Western Australia under present conditions. I am not going to follow the hon. member very far in his references to Imperial affairs, because I cannot check the statement that this legislation has been introduced for peace and not for war purposes. I was astonished to hear the statement that this legislation had been introduced for peace times.

The Minister for Education: I did not say that.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: Then I misunderstood the hon. member. It seems to me that it is a sort of soothing syrup to the public, but I do not think the public want it. If the public are treated fairly, they do not want this kind of thing made up into a sort of pill. This Bill seems to me to be unsound in theory and it will be obnoxious in practice and against the best interests—I do not think I exaggerate when I say this—of all sections of the community. Therefore, I propose to vote against the second reading. Let us take the position of Western Australia and deal with foodstuffs and necessary commodities. Could we have anything more striking than that wheat measure that we have been wrestling with for some days, and what we have done with that we propose now to do with the Bill before us. I cannot understand the introduction of this measure. I can, however, understand the attitude of a party Minister or a Government saying that we are out to protect the farmers to the best of our advantage, and I think we must admit that they have done that. With regard to the Bill before us now I question whether any hon. member could have put it before us in a more clear

and masterly manner than the leader of the House did. I do not blame him; I blame ourselves for permitting him to put this legislation through. Let us refer to some of the foodstuffs and commodities. Take the question of the price of sugar. I ask hon. members how can the State Government deal with that question in Western Australia? I am not going to elaborate that argument; it must be obvious to all members. Then take the question of the price of tea and let us ask how are we going to deal with that. Suppose we say that tea has to be sold in Western Australia at such and such a price. What will be the effect of that? I see nothing but complications in addition to those already existing with shipping and exchange. If there is a tea ring in this country, the Government would be better advised to import, say, 50 tons of tea from Ceylon and form themselves into a co-operative society and say tea will be supplied in two or three grades to anybody who requires it who will send a post-office order for 1s. 6d. or 2s. 6d., as the case may be.

Hon. A. H. PANTON: Will you support the nationalisation of tea?

Hon. A. SANDERSON: I do not think that question ought to be asked me. I stand here rightly or wrongly for freedom—how long it is going on I do not know, because like the leader of the House I may change my opinions—and so far as the general public are concerned history is against the principle of this Bill. We may begin with the Plantagenets and come to the present day and we will find that history is against it. For the past five years we have nothing else but Government interference and it has failed to control prices. Yet we are seeking by the Bill now to pursue that further. Reference has been made to an academic discussion. I have heard that expression sometimes used in connection with my own name. I have attempted to put what I consider the sound guiding principles in these commercial affairs into practice and I will stand by that attitude wherever they will take me. I have referred to tea and sugar. I shall now refer briefly to the price of vegetables. We have been told that power will be given to fix the price of vegetables, but enough has already been done through Government interference during the past 20 years, principally by the Agricultural Department. I have been personally interested in potatoes, and have made certain sales and certain purchases in a small way. I am not going to pursue that and give details in regard to vegetables in this country, but if we try by regulations or by Acts of Parliament to reduce or control the price of vegetables I maintain that we shall make speculation more difficult but at the same time more profitable. If we impose fines for trying to corner potatoes what will be the result? The potato man will say that he has no potatoes here at all. Potatoes have largely through Government interference run up to £40 a ton. It is a perfect disgrace, and the chief

disgrace rests upon the operation of Acts of Parliament and regulations, through which we have refused to permit the potato grower to do what he wants to do, and that is to grow the best potato at the cheapest possible price and get the best price for it. Now comes the question of a necessary commodity, namely, clothes. This is a matter of which a great deal has been said and written. I am speaking of Western Australia only. How are we to reduce the cost of articles in this State? How can we control the prices of a commodity largely imported either from England or from the Eastern States? The criticism I will make is that, whatever England and the Federal Parliament have done, they at any rate have had sovereign power in their hands.

Hon. A. H. Panton: And have not used it.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: The British Government during the war, and the Commonwealth Government under the War Precautions Act, did use the power, which can be legitimately and effectually used during war for a specific purpose. But our powers have been fished from us, we have not the power which the Imperial and the Commonwealth Government had during the war. Therefore, whatever power we give to the State Government will for all practical purposes be useless. I am aware that a great deal more could be said on this subject. The two things that interest me personally are the welfare of Western Australia and the influence any remarks of mine may have on a division on the Bill. Although it is sometimes advisable, and even necessary, to repeat an argument in a different form, I am quite satisfied that we are not likely to get our way in this matter. Whether we are going to get our way or not is not our business, but it is our business to let members see that there is in this State a party totally opposed to this kind of thing, and not afraid to get up in this Chamber, or on the public platform, and announce that opposition. Once the opportunity has been taken for putting views clearly before hon. members, it is of no use saying it again and again for the purpose of attempting to block the Bill. If it is the wish of hon. members to pass the Bill, it will be passed. But do not let us make any attack on the Government in connection with the Bill. Let us say that we have considered it and are not going to pass it; because what can we expect from the present Government except legislation of this kind? They are in a totally false position; and as for talking about theories and academic attitudes, they have a different theory every day of the week. In this Bill they are making an attempt to protect the consumer. I think they had much better go back to the wheat growers and protect them, because certainly they have succeeded in bolstering up that industry.

On motion by Hon. A. H. Panton, debate adjourned.

BILL—VERMIN ACT AMENDMENT.

Second Reading.

The HONORARY MINISTER (Hon. C. F. Baxter—East) [9.5] in moving the second reading said: The object of the Bill is to make certain amendments and additional provisions which the past year's experience of the existing Act has shown to be necessary to provide adequate measures for the suppression of pests. The existing Act has proved a very useful measure, but we have difficulty in securing a sufficiently stringent administration of the Act by the vermin boards. The Act is new to most of those bodies, and it is hoped they will take more stringent action in the future. There is still a great deal of ignorance amongst land owners in regard to the law on this question. Land owners are very prone to rely on vermin boards and on the Government to take measures which the law requires the land owners to take of their own initiative. It is regrettable that only by the enforcement of legal measures which the Act requires shall be taken by the vermin boards can the land owners be brought to realise their responsibilities. Unfortunately, although perhaps naturally, the vermin boards show a strong reluctance to prosecuting land owners for the non-observance of the law relating to rabbit eradication. This neglect on the part of land owners, combined with the lack of sufficiently energetic action on the part of the vermin boards, has given rise to a most lamentable state of affairs, whereas the Government, by a special crusade initiated last session, operated on the worst breeding grounds with 64 poison carts to such purpose that the rabbit pest was reduced to what it had been five or six years previously.

Hon. J. Mills: The past summer helped them a good deal.

The HONORARY MINISTER: The season we had and the energetic manner in which the land owners at first took up the eradication of the pest, helped materially to reduce the pest. But, unfortunately, both the vermin boards and the land owners have since rested on their oars. If a pest of this kind is once restricted to limited numbers it can very easily be kept in check, but since reducing the pest the land owners and vermin boards have neglected their duties. At present the best efforts of the department are directed towards awakening the vermin boards to a sense of danger and a realisation of their responsibilities. The department has circularised the vermin boards, pointing out cases of neglect by land owners to eradicate the pest, and the consequence of that neglect. Failing any action being taken by the vermin boards, it will be necessary for the Government to step in and carry out the provisions of the existing Act at the expense of the vermin boards. It is to be hoped the vermin boards will not force the department to any such action, since it is far more economical for the ver-

min boards to carry out the work in their several districts than for the department to send all the way from Perth to do it. There is a strong tendency on the part of both vermin boards and land owners to lean on the Government in this matter and also to blame the Government for inaction. The Government of this State have taken the lead of the Commonwealth in the matter of rabbit eradication.

Hon. H. Stewart: Under the compulsion of the Act.

The HONORARY MINISTER: It was a Government measure in the first place. Under the Act the Government propose to deal with breeding grounds, as indeed they have done. They have provided capital to deal with rabbits on Crown lands where the worst breeding places are found to exist. No other State in the Commonwealth has made any attempt in that direction. Last year the Government went to the expense of putting on 64 poison carts, thus showing how seriously they regarded the question. Had this been followed up we should not have been faced with the present position, which arises from the fact that in certain districts the rabbits have not been dealt with and, in consequence, are becoming serious pests.

Hon. J. Mills: Why not put them to some commercial use?

The HONORARY MINISTER: That question has been debated in the House almost as much as has the Wheat Marketing Bill. The question is, are we going to farm rabbits or sheep? All over the Commonwealth the cry has gone up that the commercialising of rabbits should be stopped. I want it to be understood that I am not in any way condemning the whole of the vermin boards or the landowners. Some of the vermin boards and some of the landowners have done good work, but the large majority of both sections have not taken this work in their hands as they should have done. There is a state of inactivity in this matter which is not easy to understand, when we remember that we have such a serious pest in our midst. It is not reasonable to expect that the Government will continue the huge expenditure which was incurred last year.

Hon. J. Mills: In fencing in water holes.

The HONORARY MINISTER: One of the best things the Government have done in the destruction of rabbits has been the fencing in of water holes. In addition to dealing with the pest on breeding grounds we had a patrol sent along the fences, which in themselves act as a buffer for the protection of the settlers. We also had a cordon of poison carts stretched across No. 1 and No. 2 fences, travelling to and fro checking the onrush of the rabbits from the North. There was a fair amount of money expended last year which the Government cannot be expected to continue to spend.

Hon. G. J. G. W. Miles: I always thought it was said that rabbits travelled north.

The HONORARY MINISTER: The Government after doing all they could to de-

crease the pest have placed the matter in the hands of the local vermin boards under the new Act, so that they may play their part in keeping the rabbits in check. We have some amendments in this Bill which will assist in that direction. Landowners should recognise that it is to their interests that they should do all they can to eradicate the pest. It has been shown that during the whole of last season if only the settlers would continue to use their poison carts, even whilst there is good green feed about, the rabbits can still be kept down. There is no better way of checking them than by poison. The difficulties concerning the vermin boards have been accentuated by the weaknesses which have crept into the Act, and by certain deficiencies which the experience of the past 12 months have brought to light. The work of the present measure is to remove as far as possible the disabilities in this respect and make the Act more workable and effective. Amongst the amendments provided is one to Section 94 of the Act. It is a very important one. It provides for the insertion of the word "all" after the word "destroy." Without the insertion of this word the Act is to a large extent an anomaly. The position is that the landowner can now destroy one rabbit and do all that he need do to fulfil the law. That was never intended by the Act. The Acts in the Eastern States have been recently amended and this word added. The latest Vermin Act to be passed is the Federal Act, which also has that word "all" in it. Landowners must destroy all vermin. Some hon. members may think this will bear rather harshly on landowners, but the law in this respect would never be followed out to its logical conclusion. Although the Government will have this power it is never likely to be fully enforced. With that word in no one who may desire to shirk his responsibility will be able to do so. The amendment to Section 104 is shown on the Notice Paper. It has been put in the Bill to meet the express desire of a number of the vermin boards. The section at present limits the issuing of certificates as to rabbit-proof fences or vermin-proof fences to the chief inspector. This amendment extends the power to the vermin board. Clause 2 of the Bill is an amendment to Section 45 of the Act. It is proposed to strike out the words "situated within the South-West division of the State" and also in paragraph 2 of this section. Section 2 of the Act describes the portion of the State to which the Act shall apply—

This Act shall apply to all the south-west portion of the State situated west of the No. 1 rabbit-proof fence and south of the rabbit-proof fence running from Gum Creek Well westward to Bluff Point, but shall not apply to any other part of the State.

The words "South-West division of the State" do not embrace the whole of that portion of the State specified in Section 2 of the principal Act. This amendment pro-

vides for the deletion of the words "situated within the South-West division of the State." Part of this is north of the rabbit-proof fence, and on the other hand part of the country included within the rabbit-proof fence is not included in the South-West division. There was therefore an error in the drafting. There is also an amendment to Section 45. This simplifies the procedure in the case of the boundaries of road board districts. Where these are altered the amendment provides that the boundaries of vermin districts automatically coincide with those of the road board districts. Section 50 is proposed to be amended by extending the power of the Governor to abolish boards. This formerly only applied to elective bodies, but the power will be to a great extent applied to boards which are not elective. There is also an amendment to Section 59, which proposes to make the minimum vermin rate 2s. 6d. That will then agree with the local road board rates. If land is to be rated at all one can hardly make a lower rate than 2s. 6d., otherwise it would not pay for the trouble of collecting. Section 78 is being amended to extend the definition of "Government fence," in respect to which the owners of contiguous lands are required to contribute. This is necessary to include persons who are now able to get the benefit of these fences without contribution. Section 94 is being amended by the abolition of the words "Minister or board" and the substitution of the words—"inspector or authorised person to whom the Minister or board has for the time being assigned, by either special or general authority, the duty of inspecting such holding." As the Act stands at present it means that either the chief inspector or the board will have to take over the whole of the duties. This cannot be done. There are already instances in which the vermin board found it impossible to take this work in hand, and they can hardly be expected to do it. It can be seen that if there were a prosecution taken against such people it would fail. Section 114 is amended in order to remove an anomaly. At present the provision there absolutely defeats the main section, while the amendment itself constitutes what was really the intention of the original measure. The proposed amendment provides that any person can trap rabbits eastward of the barrier or No. 1 fence without a license and offer them for sale anywhere in the State. In the Act as it is at present it reads that they can trap rabbits and sell them south of No. 1 fence. It is obvious that this is an error in drafting and that is why it is sought to rectify it by the amendment. I move—

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM (North) [9.25]: The address by the Honorary Minister has been highly interesting. I could almost have anticipated what he said about many of the farmers and settlers not taking as much trouble as they might have been

expected to take to assist in keeping down the rabbit pest but that they would rather leave that to the Government. Had they adopted the suggestion I made when the present Act was before the House and sent people round to instruct them as to how to carry out these operations they would have had more effect. There are many farmers who are reluctant to take on this work because they have never seen it done. For my part I have never seen a rabbit poisoned or a bait laid. I suggest that if an inspector went round and showed the farmers how to do this work, any people who at present fail to do so would take the trouble to get rid of these rabbits. This Bill is not very consequential. If it is of any assistance to hon. members I am glad to inform them that I have been through the whole of the Bill and compared it with the Act. I think I am right in saying that the amendments to the Act contained in this Bill are innocuous, while several of them are very necessary. In the circumstances I have pleasure in supporting the second reading of this Bill.

Hon. H. STEWART (South-East) [9.27]: I do not agree with the Honorary Minister when he says that these local authorities have done nothing to combat the rabbit menace.

The Honorary Minister: I did not say that.

Hon. H. STEWART: The hon. member said that in most instances they had done very little. It is due to the people in the agricultural areas that members should know that the work of these vermin boards had in many instances been most effective.

The Honorary Minister: I rise to make a personal explanation. I stated distinctly that last season, although the land owners and the vermin board had done very good work in assisting to reduce the rabbit pest, since that time they had rested on their oars and had not taken the matter seriously.

Hon. H. STEWART: I accept the Honorary Minister's correction. At the same time members of the vermin boards in whose districts the pest had been particularly bad complain of the attitude of the Chief Inspector of Rabbits, and say that his contention that they are doing nothing is not correct, and are prepared to prove that they are right. I have previously pointed out that the Chief Inspector of Rabbits for years was supposed to be administering an Act which was designed to combat the menace. The Act, however, was ineffective and yet he was the responsible man at the head of the department.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: They gave him no money.

Hon. H. STEWART: No. He was content to sit at the head of his department instead of taking such measures as would let the people in general know that the State was being menaced by the rabbits and that the various Governments of the day had refused

to combat the pest. The Honorary Minister to a large extent is the official mouthpiece of the Rabbit Department and is putting this side of the question to hon. members. I only want to put before hon. members that the position is not nearly so black as it has been painted from the official standpoint. It is contended that not very long ago the Chief Inspector of Rabbits went through one of the badly infested districts and over abandoned farms and Crown lands where the department had been operating. He is reported to have said that he had not seen a single rabbit, and this was intended to point to the effective working of the department. At the same time the residents of the district say that there are plenty of rabbits on those lands. The contention of the vermin boards now is that the rabbits are propagating on the abandoned farms and Crown lands. The boards have from time to time suggested to the Chief Inspector of Rabbits that the poison carts could be more effectively employed in certain districts, but the boards have not been able to bring about departmental co-operation. I do not think the official view is fair to the vermin boards. Table B on page 37 of the annual report of the Department of Agriculture gives a list of some 30 names of vermin boards, and in not one instance does the inspector say that effective action has been taken. Such a table almost defeats the Chief Inspector's objective, which seems to be to get as much control as possible into the hands of the department and build up a very large department. I was pleased to hear the Honorary Minister deprecate the increase in the size of the department, for his words on that subject show he realises that the taking over of the work from the vermin boards by the department will mean additional expenses to the land owners and probably to the State as well. I hope my remarks may lead the Honorary Minister to take a less pronouncedly official view. I support the second reading of the Bill.

On motion by Hon. V. Hamersley debate adjourned.

BILL—TRAFFIC.

In Committee.

Resumed from the 30th October; Hon. J. F. Allen in the Chair, the Minister for Education in charge of the Bill.

Clause 12—Apportionment of fees (partly considered):

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I have already pointed out that this clause strikes at the root of local government to such an extent as practically to abrogate the powers of local authorities. The municipality of Perth is vitally interested in this clause, the passing of which will deprive the city of much of its income. Under the clause the Minister is to have power to deal with license fees as he may think proper. The matter is left to the discretion of the in-

dividual Minister, whoever he may be. Against any such proposal I must strongly protest. The municipalities have already been deprived of their subsidies; and, in addition, all the principal Government buildings, which are situated in the city of Perth, escape contributing even one penny piece to the rates of the city. Now the Government attempt to deprive Perth of the license fees justly coming to it. I appeal to members representing the Metropolitan-Suburban Province to support my efforts to prevent the passing of this clause. Failing the deletion of the clause, I have prepared certain amendments designed to preserve the rights of local authorities to collect and retain fees, subject to direction by the Minister as to apportionment. As members of this Council we ought all to remove from our minds any parochial view of this clause, any idea that some particular municipalities will gain at the expense of Perth. We as members should take a wider view and show a natural pride in our capital city. Attached to the control of the affairs of the city are great responsibility and expense which do not fall on other local authorities. In other parts of Australia and all over the world, it is usual for the Governments to foster and assist very substantially the funds and revenues of the municipalities of the capital cities.

The Minister for Education: I do not think that is so. The capital cities are generally best able to look after themselves.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The city of Sydney receives about £100,000 a year from a proportion of the land tax. The city of Melbourne receives a proportion of the hotel licenses and various other license fees, as well as a proportion of the vehicle license fees paid to some of the suburbs. Yet here the Government are seeking to deprive Perth of a few thousand pounds derived from fees at the present time.

Hon. A. H. Panton: Derived at the expense of other local authorities.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Not at all. There is something more important in connection with capital cities than members at first sight are inclined to concede. A great deal of the success of the country depends on a good capital city.

The Honorary Minister: A loadstone the country has to carry.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: No member would feel satisfied if the capital city were not maintained as an ornament and an advertisement to the State, because it is through the capital city that people come to the State.

Hon. G. J. G. W. Miles: And they have to go along the roads of road boards to get to the capital.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Their impressions are often influenced by what they see in the capital.

Hon. J. Cornell: Can the hon. member find a parallel case in the Eastern States?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Melbourne and Adelaide.

The Honorary Minister: Half the population is in the capital which is entirely wrong.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The people in the city are only too anxious to foster and to help the country districts, and the country districts should help the city in return.

The Honorary Minister: If there were no country districts, there would be no city.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: If there were no city there would be no country districts. We have a parallel case in Adelaide. There the whole of the license fees are received by the City Council. If the system has been found to be good there, surely it must be good here. If the city of Perth were empowered to rate the Government for all the Government buildings in Perth, the city would receive a sum of £12,000 per annum. At present, the city receives absolutely nothing from the Government.

Hon. J. Duffell: What do you make out of the Government electric light and power house—getting current at less than ¼d. and doling it out at 6d.?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The hon. member is under a misapprehension. That is a fair and proper contract. The hon. member suggests that some undue advantage accrues to Perth. The Government entered into a valid agreement with Perth to supply current at a certain rate and Perth undertook to pay the price. The Government based their estimate on the price given by the contractors, Merz & McLennan.

Hon. J. Duffell: I mean the selling price of current.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: And the contract was entered into. It was not due to any fault of the city that the Government expended more on the works than they contemplated or that they were misled by the contractors. The city has carried out its contract. There was filched from Perth the rights to the tramways and what are the Government making out of them? What do the city receive from the tramways which were rightly theirs?

The Minister for Education: They get their 3 per cent. still.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: That is not what the city should have received. The tramways were rightly and properly theirs, and the Government filched the tramways from them.

Hon. J. Duffell: Because Perth wanted to over-ride the rights of the municipal councils around.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Nothing of the sort. Perth had certain rights.

Hon. J. Cornell: They were robbed.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: They were entitled to exercise those rights, but the Government went behind them and acquired the tramways. Ever since, they have been earning the profit which was rightly the money of the city, and should have been expended in beautifying and extending the city. Not content with filching these rights, the Gov-

ernment are still trying to filch other rights from the city. If I could obtain the support rightly due to the city, I would move to delete the clause but, judging by the observations and undeserved interjections of members, the best suggestion may be that which I offered on Thursday last. I then pointed out that, in order to give effect to the ideas outlined in this clause, it would be necessary for the Government to establish a staff. As the various local authorities have been doing this work, there is no reason why they should not continue to do it and retain their present staffs. If the Minister thinks a certain amount should be paid by one municipality to another he should issue his warrant accordingly. The amendment I suggest reads—

1, Notwithstanding anything hereinbefore contained, every local authority within the metropolitan area shall immediately after the expiration of one year after the date of this Act being proclaimed as hereinbefore provided and yearly thereafter, render to the Minister an account setting forth the income derived by it up to the end of such year, from such license fees, transfer of license fees, and registration fees as are authorised by this Act. 2, The Minister shall thereupon apportion amongst the local authorities of the districts and sub-districts comprised within the said area, in such shares as he shall in his discretion think fit, the total income shown by all such accounts and, where the income so derived by any such local authority is greater than the share so apportioned to it by the Minister, then such local authority shall pay the difference into the Treasury to the credit of an account to be called the "Metropolitan Traffic Trust Account" and, where the net income derived by any such local authority is less than the share so apportioned to it by the Minister, then there shall be paid to such local authority out of the said "Metropolitan Traffic Trust Account" any difference to which such local authority may be entitled on such apportionment. 3, The warrant of the Minister shall be sufficient authority to the Colonial Treasurer to make any payment provided for by this section. 4, The metropolitan area shall be prescribed by regulation.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: The suggestion that the consideration of the clause should be further postponed is unreasonable. We debated this clause at considerable length on Thursday, and at the request of the hon. member its further consideration was postponed until to-day. Now the hon. member suggests an amendment which I would not dream of accepting, and he suggests, for no other reason than to further delay the matter, that the clause should be again postponed. What we have to consider is what is to be done with the license fees paid in the metropolitan area. The Government say that these fees shall be distributed equitably amongst local governing authorities that have to maintain roads.

I hope the Committee will agree to the clause as it stands.

Hon. J. DUFFELL: The amendment outlined by the hon. member suggests that the amounts paid for licenses should be paid into a trust fund. It is not the wish of the metropolitan municipalities to have anything further to do with these fees. The municipalities are quite satisfied with Clause 12 as it stands. Those of us who have waited on them have their authority for saying that they are satisfied with the clause as it appears in the Bill. Why, then, does Mr. Nicholson suggest something that they do not want? It is our duty, as members representing the metropolitan-suburban area, to further the desires of the bodies interested in this particular connection. Mr. Nicholson said that the city council, by losing these license fees, would suffer materially, in effect that they would not be able to maintain efficiently the roads as they are maintaining them now. We have very little to boast about in the city of Perth so far as the condition of the roads is concerned. We have only to look at the road in front of this building. Times out of number we have asked the council to collect the loose metal, which is a danger to horses and does considerable damage to the tires of motor cars which have to use that thoroughfare. We know that the city council derive enormous revenue from other sources. Therefore I consider the amendment is unnecessary.

The CHAIRMAN: I find that the amendment is not an amendment of the clause, but is practically a new clause. Therefore, it will not be competent for the Committee to discuss it at this stage. If Clause 12 is rejected, the hon. member can then move his amendment as a new clause to stand as Clause 12.

Lion. A. J. H. SAW: As a member representing the Metropolitan-Suburban Province, I would like to ask the House to pass the clause as it stands. The Metropolitan-Suburban Province is partly included in Perth and partly in the municipalities in the environs of Perth. The clause proposes to do an act of justice. The outside authorities have suffered an injustice through not being able to participate in the fees collected by the more prosperous portions of that area and the clause proposes to remedy that injustice.

Hon. H. CARSON: Hon. members recognize that the principle embodied in the clause is just, and I hope the same justice will be meted out to other portions of Western Australia outside the metropolitan area. I am pleased to see that Mr. Mills has drafted a new clause extending this principle to other parts of the State. It was previously in the Bill, but was rejected in another place. I think the local authorities should collect the fees and that the Minister should then apportion them as he thinks fit.

Hon. Sir E. H. WITTENOOM: I am opposed to the principle of taking from the municipality of Perth the power to govern the city. I should be prepared to accept a compromise providing that the fees should be paid to the Minister and he be allowed to distribute them.

Hon. A. SANDERSON: The suburbs and the city of Perth are each part of the whole. The difficulty has arisen over the distribution of the cash between the suburbs and the city of Perth. It is a dispute between the two parties which together make up the city of Perth. It is preposterous to say that there is any infringement of the rights of the city. Under the present arrangement the city gets the bulk of the cash.

Hon. A. H. PANTON: I support the clause as printed. I am not able to subscribe to the suggestion that the municipalities should continue to collect the fees. Perth is not so much concerned about the collection of fees as about the retaining of the fees collected. It is absurd to expect Perth or any other municipality to collect the fees and hand them over to the Minister for distribution, more particularly when it is remembered that the proposal is to give to the outlying local authorities a larger share of the fees. One roads board in my district has but five miles of road to look after, yet each Sunday afternoon from 40 to 50 motor cars from which the board does not collect a single license fee, rush over that road.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: The road boards in my province complain that as soon as they prepare a nice piece of road, all the motor car owners in Perth find it out and immediately set to work to cut it to pieces. In some instances outlying road boards will benefit by the clause. However, it gives that dual control which we are all afraid of.

The Minister for Education: Where is the dual control?

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: Over the licensing of vehicles. The Government have taken over the Perth trams and so do not want any competition with that system. The municipality may some day wish to compete with the Government trams. Under the clause the Minister, being the licensing authority, would refuse to grant licenses to any motor buses likely to run in competition with the Government trams. There is the dual authority. Apart from that I support the clause.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: The point raised by the hon. member is most important. The day is not far distant when, unless the tramway service of Perth is re-modelled, some other means of transport will have to be resorted to. If the clause is passed as printed, no competition will be possible, because the Minister will have power to refuse to license the necessary vehicles.

Hon. A. J. H. SAW: I think the objection raised by Mr. Hamersley will be met by Clause 13.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: On the second reading you, Sir, expressed the fear that the Minister might grant permission to motor buses to enter into competition with the Fremantle trams. Now Mr. Hamersley expresses the opposite fear, that the Minister might refuse to grant licenses to vehicles to work in competition with the Perth trams. The clause makes the Minister the licensing authority, while another clause compels the licensing authority to grant such licenses as are applied for, unless there are already sufficient public vehicles in the locality or unless the reasonable requirements of the public do not justify the granting of additional licenses.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Who is to decide that?

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: The Minister.

Hon. J. J. Holmes: Well, what is the good of that provision?

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The more one sees of this clause the more there is revealed to one the extraordinary powers which are apparently being conferred upon the Minister. We do not know what he may do. He may find that he does not know where his powers begin and where they end. There is provision in the Municipalities Act here inserted to prevent a municipality from actually running motor cars themselves in opposition to the Government, and without their consent. But power is given under the Act to the local authority or municipality to license others to run motor car services. There is, therefore, more in the clause than meets the eye. We should weigh it very carefully. I am not prepared to confer this power upon the Minister indiscriminately. It would be a wise thing to consider this clause in conjunction with Clause 12.

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: The Minister will by the clause be made the licensing authority for the metropolitan district. An objection is raised that in making the Minister the licensing authority it is dangerous, because he may refuse to grant a license for motor buses to compete with the Perth trams. The licensing authority is compelled to grant a license except for certain reasons. The Act provides that the aggrieved party who applies to the Minister for a license and does not get it, shall have his remedy. There shall be an appeal to the court of petty sessions, whose order shall be final in any case where a license or transfer of license under this part of the Act is refused. On the hearing of the appeal the court may order that the license may be granted and dismiss the appeal, and order either party or both to pay such costs as in its discretion the court shall think fit. That clause shall be binding on the Minister as well as on the local authority. It will not be competent for the Minister to refuse a license except on good grounds, based on the provisions of

the Act; and then recourse can be had to the court by the aggrieved party.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: That appeal can be made in the event of the local authority refusing to grant a license, but not in the event of the Minister doing so.

The Minister for Education: The Minister is the local authority for the metropolitan area.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: Perhaps we could insert the word "Minister" instead of "local authority."

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The Minister's argument is ingenious. He must bear in mind that any appeal will be made on the ground stated by the appellant. There are the answers given by the respondent, who is the Minister, and the Minister would simply say that under Section 13 of the Act it is provided that where the reasonable requirements of the public do not justify the granting of a license he is entitled to refuse it.

The Minister for Education: The court decides it.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: The Minister may bring evidence to show that the reasonable requirements, according to his idea, do not justify the application. So long as this power is in the control of the Minister the intended licensing is practically subject to his decision. Any ordinary licensee would hesitate before appealing against the decision of the Minister. It is wrong that he should have this power. I ask the Government to leave in the hands of the local authority the power they have always enjoyed of granting and issuing these licenses. If it is a question of accounting for the fees the amendment I propose will meet the objection. Subclause (1) of Clause 12 provides that the Minister may exercise powers and discretions in respect of certain matters which are limited. Even if Clause 12 were passed as printed, it would be absolutely necessary to insert other powers in addition to those mentioned. There is the reference to discs in Clause 17; there is the issue of identification tablets and number plates in a later clause.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member cannot discuss those other clauses until we come to them.

The Minister for Education: The hon. member knows perfectly well that the words "local authority" cover the Minister.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Under part of Subclause (1) of Clause 12 the Minister is deemed to be the licensing authority and he shall or may have and exercise certain powers concerning the issue and transfer of licenses and the effecting of registration, which powers in other districts or sub-districts are vested in local authorities. In addition to that, however, there should be inserted the issue of discs and tablets and number plates, which are elsewhere provided for. True, under the definition which has been provided, the Minister will be the local authority. But

even under the clause as it stands he must not have his powers limited or shorn as they are here.

The Minister for Education: Nor will he. Wherever the words "local authority" occur in the Bill, they cover the Minister as regards the metropolitan area.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I move an amendment—

That all the words after "contained" in the first line of the clause be struck out and the following be inserted in lieu:—every local authority within the metropolitan area shall immediately after the expiration of one year after the date of this Act being proclaimed as hereinbefore provided, and yearly thereafter, render to the Minister an account setting forth the income derived by it up to the end of such year, from such license fees, transfer of license fees, and registration fees as are authorised by this Act. (2.) The Minister shall thereupon apportion amongst the local authorities of the districts and sub-districts comprised within the said area, in such shares as he shall in his discretion think fit, the total income shown by all such accounts, and where the income so derived by any such local authority is greater than the share so apportioned to it by the Minister, then such local authority shall pay the difference into the Treasury to the credit of an account to be called the Metropolitan Traffic Trust Account, and where the net income derived by any such local authority is less than the share so apportioned to it by the Minister, then there shall be paid to such local authority out of the said Metropolitan Traffic Trust Account any difference to which such local authority may be entitled on such apportionment. (3.) The warrant of the Minister shall be sufficient authority to the Colonial Treasurer to make any payment provided for by this section. (4.) The metropolitan area shall be prescribed by regulation."

[Hon. W. Kingsmill took the Chair.]

Hon. A. SANDERSON: I suggest to the leader of the House that he ask us, either privately or publicly, whether we are prepared to support the clause. We are prepared to discuss it at any reasonable or unreasonable length, and if it is a question of physical vigour to get the matter through I will support the leader of the House in sitting to a very late hour. I admit that the member representing the Metropolitan Province has a heavy duty to perform. The matter is of the greatest interest and importance to all local authorities in Western Australia.

Hon. J. CORNELL: There seems to be a universal anxiety to get at this clause. The leader of the House has side-stepped a good deal, but I do not think he can deny that Clause 12 was dropped into the Bill by pri-

vate members in another place, and that sufficient consideration has not been given to the question how far Clause 12 will conflict with other provisions. There is more in the collecting of the fees than appears at first sight.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: It means a new Government department.

Hon. J. CORNELL: What has been stated concerning the urgency of this provision is not borne out by the fact that a similar clause was negatived six years ago and is now introduced only at the instance of a private member. The local authorities should be called together and required to arrive at a workable scheme amongst themselves, failing which the Government would impose one on them.

Hon. A. H. PANTON: On your statement, they have been warring for six years.

Hon. J. CORNELL: Quite so. I cannot see much difference between the police arresting a man for furious driving, or for assaulting another man. The police are the proper people to control the traffic. The main objection to the clause is the surrendering of this function, which has been the keystone of the arch of municipal government. The outside local authorities are labouring under the delusion that they are not getting a fair deal. If they turn themselves over to the Minister, they may find themselves hoist with their own petard. I suggest that the clause be amended to provide that, unless all these local authorities in the metropolitan area arrive at an agreement within a certain period, the Minister should take this arbitrary power.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. member's proposal could be better discussed if the words proposed to be struck out are struck out.

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

Ayes	5
Noes	10

Majority against .. 5

AYES.

Hon. J. Cornell	Hon. J. Nicholson
Hon. J. A. Greig	Hon. V. Hamersley
Hon. J. J. Holmes	(Teller.)

NOES.

Hon. C. F. Baxter	Hon. G. W. Miles
Hon. H. P. Colebatch	Hon. J. Mills
Hon. J. Cunningham	Hon. A. H. Panton
Hon. J. Duffell	Hon. A. J. H. Saw
Hon. J. W. Hickey	Hon. H. Carson
	(Teller.)

Amendment thus negatived.

Clause put and passed.

Clause 13—Obligation to grant licenses:

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Surely we shall be placing too much power in the hands of the Minister if we allow him to fix a prescribed limit for licenses and to decide whether the

reasonable requirements of the public are being met. If the Minister wished to prohibit justifiable competition with the Perth trams, he would only have to say that the prescribed limit had been reached and that the requirements of the public were being met, and we should then have to continue till doomsday with our over-crowded cars, many of us walking as we have to do today. I move an amendment—

That in paragraph (f) the words "or the number of licenses issued has reached the prescribed limit, or the reasonable requirements of the public do not justify the granting of the license" be struck out.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: I oppose the amendment, particularly in view of Clause 16. These are proper conditions and, if they are abused, the aggrieved person has an appeal to the court. If the reasonable requirements of the public do not justify the granting of further licenses, surely that is good ground for refusing. Then it becomes a question of fact and, if the applicant is dissatisfied with the decision of the local authority, he can go to the court of petty sessions, which will have power to compel the granting of a license if it is justified.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: What would happen if the number of licenses issued had reached the prescribed limit and the limit had been fixed by the Minister?

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: The court could order that the license should be issued, and would order it if the court thought that any of the provisions of Clause 13 had been abused by the local authority.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: I agree with the amendment. The prescribed limit means the limit prescribed under regulations made by the Government and, once that limit was reached, the Minister would be justified in adhering to it. Although an appeal was lodged against his decision, the court would be bound to uphold his decision. It is not right that the matter should be left entirely in the hands of the Minister. If people are courageous enough to take out licenses, they should be able to do so. The Minister said in regard to the price fixing Bill that competition was the finest means to regulate prices.

Hon. J. Cornell: It suited him then but it does not suit him now.

Hon. J. NICHOLSON: Such extraordinary power should not be granted to the Minister. There should be a limitation.

Hon. J. A. GREIG: I support the amendment. There can scarcely be better judges of whether further licenses are required than the men who have to pay the fees. I fail to see any reason why a limit should be prescribed. As long as a man is prepared to pay the fee, he should be permitted to go on the rank. He will find out in a month or so whether he can make a

living there. If he cannot, he will get off the rank.

Hon. V. HAMERSLEY: I, too, shall support the amendment, because there is a tendency in the clause to create a monopoly. Moreover, there are Ministers and Ministers.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: There is a point I should like the Minister to clear up. An individual who is refused a license will have the right to appeal to a court to be created under this measure; but once the limit has been reached can that court get behind the Act, which provides that the Minister shall prescribe a fixed limit? I do not think the court would have jurisdiction in such circumstances.

Hon. J. Nicholson: The court would certainly not.

The MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: I do not wish the Committee to agree to anything without understanding exactly where they are, and I am quite willing to obtain a competent ruling on the point. In my opinion, Clause 16 would give the court absolute power; but I am not a lawyer.

Hon. A. J. H. SAW: I would suggest to Mr. Holmes that he should only move the striking out of the words "or the number of licenses issued has reached the prescribed limit." The question of "reasonable requirements" is another matter.

Hon. J. J. HOLMES: Perhaps the striking out of all the words included in my amendment would be going rather too far. Power should be vested in some authority to decide whether or not the reasonable requirements have been met. It would be a matter for argument before the court. I ask leave to withdraw my amendment.

Amendment by leave withdrawn.

Hon. A. J. H. SAW: I move an amendment—

That in paragraph (f) the words "or the number of licenses issued has reached the prescribed limit" be struck out.

[The President resumed the Chair.]

Progress reported.

House adjourned at 11.24 p.m.