

Little Desert Road Row: Censure Hint

From Our Staff Representative

MELBOURNE, October 5 — The Minister of Lands (Sir William McDonald) seems certain to face strong new criticism in State Parliament this week over the Little Desert project.

It was disclosed yesterday that the new 16½-mile road through the Little Desert ended on a property owned by Sir William McDonald's brother-in-law, Mr. C. A. Koch.

MPs of all parties will meet on Tuesday morning

at regular party meetings, and the Labor Party is thought likely to plan a censure motion against Sir William McDonald in the House of Assembly.

The deputy Leader of the Country Party (Mr. Evans) has already called

for a full independent enquiry into all aspects of the Little Desert scheme.

Mr. Evans said tonight: "An independent enquiry, outside the influence of the Minister, would be fairest to everyone."

Sir William McDonald tonight issued a statement strongly denying any impropriety

The statement read: "The report carries the clear imputation that I have used my position to benefit my relatives. I categorically deny that this is so."

The secretary of the Victorian National Parks Association (Mr. J. R. Garnet), a strong opponent of the development, tonight called for Sir William McDonald's resignation.

"The public can have no confidence in a Minister in this position," he said.

"No Benefit"

Sir William McDonald's brother-in-law, Mr. Koch, said tonight that the new road would end near his woolsheds, about 400 yards from his homestead.

"But it won't benefit me in the slightest," he said.

"There was at no stage any discussion of the direction of the road between myself and Sir William McDonald — none at all," he said.

A group of conservationists has offered to buy part of the Little Desert as a wild-life reserve.

The offer was announced at the inaugural public meeting of the Wild-Life Wardens' Guild in Melbourne last night by the president (Mr. P. C. Fallscheer).

At VICTOR HARBOR, the zone conference of the Association of Apex Clubs announced the launching shortly of a campaign to emphasise the need for protection of Australia's flora and fauna.

It will be directed at schoolchildren in the zone, which covers SA, NSW, Victoria and NT.

BOLTE SAYS LITTLE DESERT SCHEME WILL GO AHEAD

The Victorian Government would continue with a scheme to develop the Little Desert, despite fanatical attacks mounted against it by some conservationists, the Premier, Sir Henry Bolte, said yesterday.

He strongly resented suggestions that the scheme might give private advantage to the family of the Minister for Lands, Sir William McDonald, who lived near the project.

Sir William had been the victim of a campaign to cast a slur on his honesty and integrity, Sir Henry said.

A recent decision by the Victorian Cabinet to open up 50,000 acres of an area of Crown land called the Little Desert, near the South Australian border, has been attacked for months by agriculturists, conservationists and the Press.

On Saturday a story was published in Melbourne saying a road recently built to provide access to the Little Desert would end near the property of Sir William's brother-in-law, Mr Charles August Koch.

"This is a scurrilous slur on the integrity of the minister," Sir Henry said.

'NOT IMPROPER'

The minister had not acted improperly in having the road sited where it was.

"I've never heard so much nonsense talked in my life," Sir Henry said.

"The road has to go next to Mr Koch's property because it is the sensible and correct place to site it to serve the six new blocks."

The Government would call for applications for settlers to take up the six blocks soon.

Sir William yesterday categorically rejected imputations that his brother-in-law's property had influenced the positioning of the road.

He said it had been known for many years the road would be required if the area were opened up for development.

"Its actual siting was decided by surveyors of the Lands Department and engineers from two local shires," Sir William said.

"The fact that this road is near my brother-in-law's property is purely coincidental.

"The site for the road is so obviously the right one that it didn't enter my head that anyone would question me over it.

"In any case a road there is a very questionable advantage to my brother-in-law."

Sir William said applications to take up the six blocks — about 4000 acres each — would be called for within a month.

Both Sir William and Sir Henry were speaking at Stawell, where the Victorian Cabinet is having a country meeting.

