**WOODS AND FORESTS ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1934**

**Legislative Council, 4 October 1934, pages 1393-4**

Second reading

**The Hon. G. RITCHIE (Northern—Minister of Afforestation)—**The Bill is considered necessary by the Woods and Forests Department in view of the disastrous fire which occurred a few months ago in the South-East.m It is introduced to provide protection against fire for the State forests and enacts that for the purpose of preventing fire the Commissioner of Forest Lands may cut down timber and destroy inflammable material on any Road within or adjoining any forest reserve. The Conservator of Forests has reported that in a fire occurring at Mount Burr over 1,000 acres of young pine were lost solely because standing eucalypt timber on an adjoining road was ignited and the fire spread to the forest reserve.

Considerable expense has been incurred by the Government in providing hundreds of firebreaks, a system of telephone and fire towers, power pumps, motor lorries and general Fire-fighting equipment which is considered adequate in normal circumstances. If, however, there is a road through or adjoining a forest reserve these precautions are to some extent nullified if timber, particularly string- bark, is left on the road. Stringybark is highly inflammable, its bark ignites freely and is then blown with the wind, which causes the fire to spread. The presence of this timber near a forest reserve is therefore always a potential danger. The State has invested large sums of money in the forest reserves and precautions are necessary for their safety. In the past the department has met with considerable difficulty from councils in its attempts to deal properly with the timber on these roads, and this Bill is introduced to give the department authority to act on its own initiative. Last year a fire on the side of a road was carried through the adjoining areas. Last year, or early this year, the Conservator of Forests started to clear trees from the side of that road. I admit that he made a mistake in doing that without obtaining the permission of the district council.

The Hon. R. C. Mowbray—He would not have got permission had he applied for it.

The Hon. G. RITCHIE—He did wrong in not applying. He told me he had experienced difficulty, but not great difficulty, in getting permission. He put the work in hand and then made application to clear the roadside in question. The council, however, was against it and threatened the Government for what the Conservator did. Had the Conservator completed the work it would have acted as a safety break and the fire would not have spread to the other areas.

The Hon. H. Homburg—If the Government in 30 years' time cuts down its trees what is to be done about trees on the roadside which are for ornamentation?

The Hon. G. RITCHIE—I am as eager as Mr. Homburg to save every tree. It is a criminal act to cut one down unless it is absolutely necessary. The Government has approximately £1,000,000 represented in its forests, and it should not take the risk of a road being the means of allowing a fire to spread from one part of a forest to another. The Government has spent a large sum in making firebreaks in its forests.

The Hon. W. G. Duncan—Can a private company cut down trees on the roadside?

The Hon. G. RITCHIE—-Only by permission of a council. We did wrong in cutting down the trees, but do members say that these conditions should continue and become a menace to our forests, or is the Government to have power to cut down trees and save the taxpayers’ money?

The Hon. E. J. Condon—It is our duty to protect Government property.

The Hon. G. RITCHIE—Exactly.

The Hon. H. Homburg—What is the department’s planting policy? it plant right up against the roadway?

The Hon. G. RITCHIE—Yes.

The Hon. H. Homburg—Then it is a wrong policy.

The Hon. G. RITCHIE—I think we have forests planted on both sides of the road in question.

The Hon. J. Cowan—Are the trees planted to within one chain of the road?

The Hon. G. RITCHIE—A one-chain road is not sufficient for a firebreak.

The Hon. H. Tassie—-What is the width of the break in the centre of the forests?

The Hon. G. RITCHIE—I cannot say.

The Hon. J. Cowan—Half a chain.

The Hon. G. RITCHIE—There is not the same risk in our forests on account of the firebreaks, but if a fire starts on a roadside it can easily travel into the forests. I shall he glad to accept any improvements to the Bill. I move the second reading.

The Hon. E. J. CONDON secured the adjournment of the debate.