WILD DOGS ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1938

Legislative Assembly, 27 July 1938, pages 639-42

Second reading

The Hon. T. PLAYFOBD (Gumeracha— Commissioner of Crown Lands)—More is involved in this measure than the actual payment for scalps in connection with the pastoral industry.

Mr. Robinson—Has it not been abused?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—I believe the present Act is open to abuse. The question has an important bearing on the successful settlement of much of our north-west country, because the payment for scalps, and the abuse which has grown up in regard to it, has made money easy to secure by the settlers, and they have not pursued the policy expected of them. It is believed that the tightening up of the provisions concerning the payment for scalps will have a beneficial effect. It is now possible to send down the scalp of an ordinary dog, perhaps only a few days old, for which 7s. 6d. will be paid, and this has led to the establishment of almost an industry. The proposed amendments to the Act are designed purely and simply to deal more effectively with matters raised in this House. The payment for dingo scalps is made with the idea of protecting the pastoral industry. A tax of a Id. a mile is imposed on pastoralists for the purpose. The money is paid into a fund from which payments for scalps are made. Regarding the definition of “wild dog,” I intend to move for the striking out of the words "and also a dog run wild,” which refer to a domestic dog declared to be wild. Unless a policeman is on the scene when such a dog is killed there is no chance of checking up on how wild it was. Many of the scalps that are sent down are scalps of pups, and there is a doubt as to whether they were ever wild. The new definition of "wild dog" covers dingoes or half-bred dingoes, and cuts out other types of dogs.

Mr. Lacey—A dog gone wild does not count?

The Hon. T'. PLAYFORD—No. Whilst we have a subsidy on dingo scalps a dogger will continue to set traps and poison, and if there is such a thing as a dog gone wild, even although there may not be a payment for them, that type of dog will be destroyed. Under the Bill the scalp of a dog with dingo strain in it will be subject to the subsidy. The dogs upon which no subsidy will be payable will be black- fellows’ dogs and mongrels. The scalps have to come to Adelaide and during the last two months I have had a check made to see how many of them were from dingoes and part dingoes, and how many from domestic dogs. I found that a very large number, nearly 50 per cent, in some consignments, were scalps of dogs with no dingo strain in them. I have received reports, some unsolicited, that evasions of the Act are taking place. Clause 4 alters the section which fixes the minimum amount payable for scalps at 5s. At present there is not the same keenness to kill an adult dingo as there is a dingo pup. The scalps of both are subject to a subsidy of 7s. 6d., and it is much easier to discover and kill pups than an adult dingo. It is considered that whilst we have the present bounty system we shall continue to have dingoes in South Australia. It has been suggested that the amount payable for an adult dingo should be increased materially, whilst the amount for a dingo pup should be decreased.

The Hon. R. S. Richards—Will that not have the same effect eventually?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—I have had correspondence with the other States regarding this matter, and the State which appears to have done the best job towards eliminating dingoes is the one where there is a big difference between the bounties for adult dingoes and dingo pups. I refer to Western Australia, which State, according to reports, has been, grappling with the problem better than any other State. The present provision stipulates that the amount payable for a dingo scalp shall not be less than 5s. No allowance is made for the payment of a lesser bounty for a dingo pup, which I think is desirable. The Commonwealth authorities have considered the matter, and they contend that the time has arrived when consideration should be given to a uniform payment for scalps as between States. At present when an adjoining State pays a higher bounty many scalps are sent over the border, and this causes much policing along the border to prevent abuses. Most of the pups are taken by the aborigines, and if they find a nest and can get money easily for them they will not let them go. Besides, natives in the Musgrave Ranges are rather partial to pups as a diet. Experts say that, under the present arrangement the aborigines are getting an easy living by catching the pups, and do not take the trouble to go after anything else.

It is proposed to amend the Act by deleting the provision regarding the payment of the minimum amount and giving the Minister authority to fix different amounts for grown dogs and pups. As far as possible the interests of the industry will be taken into consideration. Other provisions have been inserted in order to ensure better control over the payment for scalps. Under the Act authorised persons are obliged to accept scalps from doggers and obtain a declaration that they were taken in certain places on certain dates. At present the authorised person does not state whether the declaration is true or not, and whether it is founded on fact, but under the Bill he will be required to say whether it is one which can be accepted or disregarded. The Bill also gives power to reject scalps where they have been received under conditions which would lead the authorised person to think there had been an evasion of the law. In regard to cross breeds, the amount of breed in a dog has a considerable bearing on what is a dingo and what is not. It is anticipated, when an authorised person has to submit a report on a declaration, that a closer watch will be kept on the system of taking scalps. I admit that a system of this kind will always be open to a certain amount of evasion. Members will understand that where an authorised person is living 350 miles from the Musgrave Ranges there must be certain abuses of the Act. If all the scalps are sent to Adelaide through an authorised person in whom the department has confidence it will make a great difference. The Hon. G. F. Jenkins, when Commissioner of Crown Lands, and before it was decided that scalps should come to Adelaide, found that thousands which were never taken were being paid for, but now that scalps have to come to Adelaide they can be checked over.

The Hon. J. Mclnnes—Will there be a cheek on the authorised persons under that system?

The Hon. T. PLAYFOED—It will minimise the present abuses considerably and materially reduce the number of scalps the Government is called upon to pay for. In some districts the number of scalps taken is increasing very rapidly. From one district three years ago 800 scalps were sent down. Two years ago the number had increased to 1,200 and in this year still further to 1,800. I went through the particular district and although I was accompanied by experienced men and we looked out for wild dogs we did not hear any nor see a track of one in a fortnight. It seemed impossible that 1,800 legitimate scalps could have come from the district. The purpose of the Bill is to tighten the existing legislation and has the approval of persons engaged in the pastoral industry.

Mr. O ’Halloran—How was that decision arrived at?

The Hon. T. PLAYFOED—I discussed the matter fully with the Stockowners’ Association which submitted the proposals now before the House to a conference of stockowners held at Port Augusta recently.

Mr. O’Halloran—Didn’t that conference reject the proposals?

The Hon. T. PLAYFOED—Amongst the proposals I placed before the association was one that scalps of grown dingoes should be 12s. 6d., an increase of 5s. on the present rate, and that puppy scalps should be reduced to 2s. 6d. When the conference discussed the proposals it accepted everything I proposed except the 12s. 6d. and 2s. 6d. One influential member of the conference expressed the view that it would be impossible for the department to differentiate between grown dogs and pups. He asked, "When will a scalp be from a pup and when will it be from a grown dog?” It was largely on that ground that the 12s. 6d. and 2s. 6d. proposal was rejected, but I have been informed that in Western Australia the question of what is a pup and what is a grown dog is one of the easiest things to decide. There it is held that when an animal has fluffy wool it is a pup, but as soon as the coarser hair appears it is a dog.

The Hon. J. Mclnnes—It would be about three or four months old then.

The Hon. T. PLAYFOED—It coincides fairly accurately with the time when the nest is broken up and the animal proceeds to fend for itself. It is a good distinction between a pup and a dog. Under the Act the department can, if it is deemed necessary at any time, still pay the same for puppy scalps as for dog scalps. At present there is a penny per mile rate on all pastoral land, and we are spending approximately three times as much money in payment for scalps as is being collected from the rate. Instead of scalps being reduced in numbers they are increasing, and unless conditions are tightened pastoralists will find the fund depleted and will be called upon to increase the Id. rate to 3d., which they do not desire. They want to preserve the present fund and experiment with the tightening up of payment of the bounty on what is regarded as a wild dog scalp and what is not. The Stockowners’ Association raises no objection to the Bill.

Mr. Smith—Does the association believe that the number of dogs is increasing?

The Hon. T. PLAYFOED—We have kept accurate records as to where the scalps are coming from. In some districts the numbers are increasing very rapidly.

Mr. Smith—Do the pastoralists believe that dingoes are increasing?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—No, the number of dingo scalps is not on the increase. Those that are coming down, represent a good sample of the blackfellow’s mongrel dog.

Mr. O’Halloran—What is the percentage of real dingo scalps as compared with the ordinary mongrel dog?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—Checks have only been taken over the past two months; but I think it can be said that more than 40 per cent, of the scalps coming down are positively not dingo scalps.

Mr. Lacey—Are they half bred?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—They are not associated in any way with wild dogs, but are what would be considered normal domestic dogs.

Mr. Lacey—Is it easy to distinguish half bred dingo scalps from the scalps of domestic dogs?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—Certain discretion is always necessary. In some cases the determination of whether it was a dingo scalp or not would depend upon the company kept by the scalp. For instance, if in a parcel of, say, 50 scalps one was doubtful I do not think that the department would reject it. On the other hand, if a parcel contained, as one did recently 42 scalps everyone obviously that of a domestic puppy, I think that one doubtful scalp would share the fate of the rest. It would depend very much also on whether the declaration was supported by the authorised person for the district. If he refused to endorse the declaration I have no doubt that the department would refuse payment. In matters of this sort a certain amount of evasion will always take place, but the Bill I have submitted will minimise it as far as possible and the measure is desirable for the proper development of the areas in the north-west and the Musgrave Ranges. I move the second reading.

Mr. LACEY secured the adjournment of the debate.