**CROWN LANDS ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 1911**

**House of Assembly, 4 October 1911, pages 651-3**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS,** in moving the second reading, said the Bill embodied principles for which members of his party had fought for many years, and contained provisions which had been found to be necessary if South Australia was to retain her rural population and attract others from outside. Under present conditions, a man with small means, yet possessing plenty of grit and energy, and, possibly, experience, was seriously handicapped in his desire to go on the soil through lack of funds. It was not the desire of the Government to play into the hands of any one section of the people, but they asked that there should be “a fair field and no favors” in respect to land allotment. Men who were prepared to go on the land should have the chance of taking up allotments, of founding homes, and of be­coming industrious settlers. There had been many disappointments among men of the character he had mentioned, because the land board had not granted their applications. In doing so the board had taken into consideration the question of the financial strength of each applicant. The Government knew from experience the great difficulties that occurred in that connection, and they were therefore desirous of making the terms of their land settlement policy as easy as they could. The Bill was necessary, because of the conditions which had obtained in regard to opening up the mallee land in the State. There was a time not many years ago when it was thought they had come to the end of their territory, but every new expedition into the wilds of Pinnaroo or the back blocks of the West Coast found another half a million or more acres of new land. Only last week the Commission of which the Hon. L. O'Loughlin was chairman, returned from the Pinnaroo country to advertise an area of country almost equal in extent to the Pinnaroo district. It was land not much inferior in quality to that at Pinnaroo, and was, on the average, like that between Lameroo and Tailem Bend. (Mr. Burgoyne—‘‘There is no doubt about the soil; it only wants the rainfall”) The rainfall was certain, and water could be obtained anywhere. All that new land must be opened up on terms and under conditions most favorable to the men who were anxious to go there to settle. (Mr. Ritchie—“Adopt the Victorian method of water supply.”) He was not altogether enamored of the methods adopted across the border. At the present time the system of providing water in Victoria was not satisfactory, and it was the intention of the Victorian Government to appoint an officer whose duty it would be to see that bores were put down. He did not consider it would be satisfactory to adopt the Victorian idea of putting a bore and mill at the corner of every four blocks. (Mr. Ritchie—“Victorian settlers say it is satisfactory.”) It would be better to supply each settler with the means with which to put a bore and mill on his own land. The question of the allotment of the land called for revision. They had extended the area of the South Australian wheat country by millions of acres, and it was obviously impossible for a body of men such as constituted the Land Board personally to visit the various parts of the country opened up, and successfully allot the lands with which they had to deal. They were trebling the work by having three members on one board, instead of having the country divided into three districts, each being under one land allotment commissioner. The proposal under the Bill was that each land commissioner should take the lull responsibility of allotting the land in his particular district, and undertake most of the other duties which now devolved upon the Land Board. The first of the two main subjects dealt with in the Bill was that relating to land tenure. It was proposed, in accordance with the policy of their platform, to substitute perpetual leasing for the existing system of tenure. That would apply to repurchased as well as to other lands. The Crown repurchased the land, and why should they sell it again? If they had no Federal land tax there was no question about it that eventually the selling of repurchased lands would result in large estates again existing. All land should be fully utilised. The Bill dealt with two main subjects, (1) the substitution of perpetual leasing for the absolute alienation of Crown lands, and (2) the substitution of a new body for the Land Board as the authority for allotting Crown lands to applicants, and also with various matters of less importance. The principal provision as to the degree and mode of alienation of Crown lands was clause 5, which forbade, for the future, the sales and grants in fee-simple of Crown lands and agreements or leases containing a right of purchase. For these methods of disposition a perpetual lease was substituted. The following clauses of Part II. were consequent on clause 5, or dealt with kindred subjects. Clause 6 provided for alternative methods of dealing with the lands mentioned in section 190 of the prin­cipal Act, namely, ‘'special blocks,” Crown lands within hundreds which have not been taken up within two years of being offered, town lands, and suburban lands not dealt with by the Land Board. The two alternatives were (1) by advertisement, application, and allotment, and (2) by auction. Clause 7 proposed to allow the holder of a miscellaneous lease of town lands to surrender it for a perpetual lease. The leasee referred to under the principal Act were for terms not exceeding 21 years. That applied principally to leases granted in the Tumby Bay district and some other parts of Eyre Peninsula where it was found by the Hon. L. O’Loughlin to be necessary to let land on miscellaneous lease, because one holder threatened to buy up the whole lot if the land, was offered at auction. It particularly applied to township lands. They had on the West Coast a vast province awaiting development. Decres Bay, for instance, must eventually become a sort of Liverpool of the West Coast, and the land values there must rise enormously; but under the present system the Government would be compelled to let it on miscellaneous lease, which would prevent the building of substantial improvements, or else have to part with an inheritance of the people which would be of great value in time to come. Similar provision was proposed in favor of holders of leases under the Agricultural College Endowment Act, 1886. These leases were for terms not exceeding 21 years, and the rents went to the maintenance and enlargement of the Agricultural College. That was specially for the people of Renmark, where certain lands were held under the Agricultural College Endowment Act, and where the holders to-day had practically no lease at all. Clause 9 was intended for the further relief of holders of purchase agreements of closer settlement lands. The Act of last session (No. 1,019, section 7) provided for a reduction of the interest to 2 per cent, for five years, and 3 per cent, for the succeeding five years. That was substituted by Parliament for clause 9 of the present Bill, but did not go far enough. The clause enabled the holders to surrender for a perpetual lease. The rent for the first seven years would not be less than 2 per cent., and afterwards would be subject to revision every seven years, the aggregate for the first 21 years being equal to 4 per cent, for that period on the purchase money. After the 21 years the rent would be 4 per cent, per annum. That was mainly for the benefit of settlers in the South-East on lands purchased at a high price, and which had been very disappointing. Clause 10 was consequential on the substitution of perpetual leases for absolute alienation. By section 152, paragraph VI., of the principal Act the price of a block was not to be less than the amount paid for the land and the cost of accommodation works and the sale. That clause accordingly fixed a minimum rent of 4 per cent, on such amount and cost. The next three clauses dealt with the fixing of rents. Clause 11 dealt with the rents under all future perpetual leases for the first three years as follows:—First year, one-fifth of the normal amount; second year, one-third; and third year, two-thirds; and for the fourth year the rent would be the normal amount. Clause 12 dealt with rents under perpetual leases of closer settlement lands. For each year from the 5th to the 14th the rent was to be one-fifth more than the normal amount, thus recouping the amount of de­ficiency incurred by the easy terms of clause 11. Clause 13 dealt- with the rents of town lands. They were to be subject to revaluation every 21 years. As to the revaluations, the provisions of the principal Act in cases of perpetual leases had been adopted. If the lessee did not wish to continue at the revised rent, his lease would determine, and the value of his improvements would be paid by the incoming tenant (clause 14). The allotment of Crown lands was the subject matter of Part III. It was proposed to divide the State into three districts, and to appoint a land allotment commissioner for each land district. Each commissioner would, within his district, exercise all the powers of the Land Board in respect of the allotting of Crown lands. A commissioner’s appointment was for a year only, but he might be reappointed. The prohibition of the principal Act against the board being interested in transactions was to apply to the commissioners. In addition to the allotment commissioners, it was proposed to constitute a Land Allotment Court, consisting of a stipendiary magistrate, for the purpose of deciding appeals against allotments made by the commissioners (clause 23). The remaining clauses of Part III. contained machinery provisions as to appeals and the grounds for appealing, which need not be described in detail. Of the miscellaneous matters dealt with in Part IV. the following should be specially noticed:— Clause 33 was one of the clauses which was struck out of last year’s Bill. It provided for the purchase money of all Crown lands, except certain lands which were already provided for by Act of Parliament, to be credited to the sinking fund constituted by the Surplus Revenue Act of 1906, instead of being used as revenue. That had practically been the policy since 1905. Clauses 34 to 38 provided for the insertion of a new covenant in leases, and for several amendments of the principal Act necessary for giving effect to such provision. It was proposed that the Land Board, besides deciding upon the area of land to be included in each separate block, should state what area in each block must be cleared and rendered fit for cultivation. This area would be stated in the “Gazette"’ notice calling for applications for the block. During the first two years the lessee would be required to clear and render fit for cultivation at least one-sixth of the area specified as aforesaid, and during each succeeding year must treat at least one-sixth in the same way until the whole had been so treated. These could be called the cultivation clauses, and it had been found necessary to introduce them to prevent land from being held out of occupation. (Mr. Young—“But you should provide railway facilities.”) Yes, railway and water facilities were required, of course. At present, although the conditions might not be fulfilled, the Commissioner had no power to block the completion of the purchase of land held under right of purchase or covenant of purchase. The amendment to section 7 proposed by clause 39 was consequent on clause 5. Clause 40 amended the form of affirmation in section 27 by omitting the words referring to the religious belief of the affirmant. He now had to affirm that the taking of an oath was “according to his religious belief unlawful.” That was useless for people who had no religious belief, also for people who preferred to affirm merely on sanitary and hygienic grounds. The amendment of section 28 by clause 41 was also consequent on clause 5. The last clause (42) proposed to repeal the limits imposed by the principal and amending Acts upon the amount which might be expended in any year on the repurchase of lands for closer settlement. The present limit was £600,000 in two years, and though any number of really first-class estates might be offered to the Government in any one year, if the amount provided by Parliament were expended the Government would be powerless to accept them. The Bill would make for the increase of settlement, and encourage people to go on the land. He moved the second reading.

On the motion of Mr. RITCHIE, the debate was adjourned till the next day.