**WILD DOGS ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1919**

**Legislative Assembly, 7 October 1919, pages 1086-8**

Second reading

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. E. A. Anstey)—This Bill is introduced in consequence of the depleted state of the Wild Dogs Fund, and with the object of providing means for increasing the revenue of the fund. The price for .scalps was increased to 12s. 6d. in August, 1918. The Vermin Districts Association at that time asked that rate should be increased to 15s. a head, and as the fund had then a credit of about £10 000 it appeared that it could safely stand an increase in the amount suggested by the Association. It was, however, considered advisable to keep on the right side, and gradually increase the price, noting the effect of the increase before going further. The decision to increase to only 12s, 6d. was not popular at the time, but fixing the lesser rate was justified by subsequent events. When the rate was increased to 12s. 6d., the average number paid for monthly for the previous three months was 1,166, but in April, 1919, a report was received from the Secretary for Lands pointing out that the number paid for monthly from September, 1918, to March, 1919, had increased to an average of 1,927, and during the immediately preceding three months the average had been 2,071 a month. It was shown that if scalps continued to be presented at that rate the fund would be exhausted by August, 1919, and a reduction to 10s. a scalp was at once made. In a very short time, however, it was necessary for the Government to again review the position, owing to an extraordinary increase in the number of scalps produced during the months of April and May to 3,160 and 4,878 respectively. The latter number was a record for any month since the inception of the fund. The Government were then faced with the position of either having to reduce the price to about 4s. a scalp, or to advance money to the fund. The Government decided that it would be unwise to further reduce the price if it could possibly be avoided. Instructions were accordingly given that the price was to remain at 10s., and to meet the position an advance of £2,000 to the fund was granted under the provisions of section 8 of the Act of 1912, and it was decided to introduce this Bill so as to obtain authority for an additional advance of £5,000, to enable payments to be continued until the rates for 1920 were available. This additional advance is provided for in clause 5, which increases the maximum advance which the Government make under section 8 of the principal from £2,000 to £7,000. The object of the clause is purely temporary, to enable the recent financial difficulties to be met, and consequently its operation is limited to the period of 12 months immediately following the passing of the Bill. In order that the amount borrowed may be repaid, and that future rates may be fixed at a sufficient amount to ensure the continuance of the destruction of the dogs, clause 3 provides for an amendment of section 4 of the principal Act. By that section a rate of 3d. a mile imposed on lands within a vermin fenced area, and a rate not exceeding Is. a mile on other lands. The amount is fixed by this section, and therefore any amendment of the amount of rates necessitates an amendment of the Act itself. Clause 3 empowers the Governor to fix rates in respect of the different classes of land by proclamation, which will allow of greater elasticity, and will enable the Government to increase or decrease the rates according to the demands of circumstances. If the present system, which is favored by a large majority of pastoralists, is to continue, an increase in the rates payable by lessees beyond the present provisions in the Act is inevitable. The Government, recognising this, have approved of the insertion of clause 4, which increases the maximum subsidy provided for in section 7 of the principal Act from £2,100 to £4,000, as it is considered only fair that if the rates payable by the lessees are increased, the Government contribution towards the fund should be likewise augmented. The number of dogs destroyed since the commencement of May, 1913, is as follows:—

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| YEAR | Total | Average per month |
| 1913 (May to Dec)r | 22 832 | 2 854 |
| 1914 | 26 062 | 2 172 |
| 1915 | 21 826 | 1 819 |
| 1916 | 8506 | 709 |
| 1917 | 5926 | 494 |
| 1918 | 15 894 | 1 324 |
| 1919 (Jan to Sept | 22 900 | 2 544 |

Grand total to September 30 1919 - 123 946

Total average per month 1,610 dogs

Under the original Act we cannot advance more than £2,000 beyond the old subsidy, but in the amending Bill we are asking that the Government shall increase their subsidy to £4,000, and that the question of rating shall be left open to be fixed by proclamation.

Mr.Reidy—In certain districts the rates are very heavy, taking the quantity of land.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—1 do not see how we can discriminate. The Act has had good results, in accounting for such a very large number of dogs, and estimating the benefit derived from the Act it must be remembered that if those accounted for had not been destroyed, their numbers would have multiplied by natural increase. The difference in the figures for the various years also shows the difficulty in estimating the amount required from year to year to enable scalps to be paid for at a sufficiently remunerative rate to encourage the doggers to continue operations, and it is for this reason that the Government is asking Parliament to agree to the Governor fixing the rates instead of rigidly fixing a maximum in the Act. The Vermin Districts Association has requested that the rates payable by the lessees should not increase beyond 6d. per mile for land inside vermin districts, and Is. per mile for other lands,

Mr- Reidy—Will the Minister provide in this Bill for authority to proclaim districts benefited outside of existing vermin districts?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—That point is worthy of consideration. The

Government are anxious that the rates should be kept within the limits mentioned, and in order to do so are reluctantly compelled to reduce the price for scalps to 7s. 6d., such reduction to take effect immediately. The reduction is also necessary to enable the Government to keep within the advance of an additional £5,000 provided for in the Bill. When that amount was fixed upon, the estimated number of scalps to be paid for monthly to the-end of the year was 2,100. This average is shown to be correct in July and August, the number for those months being 2,140 and 1,996 respectively. The number of scalps paid for during the month of September rose to 2,961, and if this large number, continues for a month or two, the advance proposed would not be sufficient if the rates for scalps remain at 10s. In justification of the reduction for scalps to 7s. 6d., I will quote figures which are based on an average of 2,000 scalps per month during next year. This number is less than the average for this year, but is above th general average for the whole period over which we are operating. The approximate position on December 31j 1920, with the rates at 6d. and ls. would be as follows. - Amount of rates, £7,007; Government subsidy, £4,000; making the total amount available, £11,007. This would be insufficient to pay for dogs estimated at 2,000 a month if the price remained at 10s. At 7s. 6d. per scalp the amount payable would be £9,000 which would allow a balance of £2,007 to credit against the loan of £7,000. It is essential that this loan should be repaid, and in view of the figures quoted, the Government felt that they had no alternative but to reduce the price for the scalps to 7s. 6d. The position will be re­viewed later, and if the condition of the fund will allow, the price can again be increased. It is impossible to estimate exactly the number of scalps that will have to be paid for, and it is possible that the number produced may fall very considerably next year, as the waves of dogs seem to come in cycles, but after the experience of this year the Government feel that they should keep the fund on the safe side. Clause 6 is introduced to cure an anomaly of the principal Act. Section 9 of the Act enables the Treasurer to pay for dogs killed on lands which are ratable under the Act . By section 1 Crown lands are exempt from rating; hence dogs killed on Crown lands could not strictly be paid for. Accordingly clause 6 amends section 9 so as to make it apply to wild dogs killed on Crown lands, excepting Crown lands situated within a municipality or town, or within any area specified in the first schedule to the Wild Dogs Act, 1912. I move the second reading.

Mr. O’HALLORAN secured the adjournment of the debate until October 9.