**WHEAT HARVEST (1915-16) ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1916**

**Legislative Council, 10 November 1916, pages 2060-1**

Second reading

The COMMISSIONER of PUBLIC WORKS—This is an amendment of last year’s Act to enable the Government to deal with the Wheat not disposed of under that measure. Practically it continues the operations of the Wheat Harvest Act for another year. It is necessary now that the business should be carried on as before, and this will give us an opportunity to market the wheat of the 1915-16 season with the 1916-17 crop.

Mr. ROBINSON—I am sorry that the Commissioner of Crown Lands is not present to introduce this important measure, so that we might obtain some further information. We are very much in the dark as to what is actually taking place under the old Act. I had been hoping that a little more latitude might have been given the farmers in the disposal of inferior grain. The Act has been unduly harsh in that respect. Those who cared to evade it did so, while those who acted honestly by the law were denied the benefits which others gained. I wish to know if the two harvests are to be merged into one account.

The Commissioner of Public Works— This gives us the power to deal with the two crops and merge them into one. That is absolutely necessary.

Mr. ROBINSON—We are in the dark as to the amount of money incurred as the result of the unforeseen expenditure caused by damage to stacks. We should also like more information as to the chartering of freight. I note that clause 3 sets out:—

*. . . wheat shall be deemed to have been delivered to the Government when the same has, with the consent of the Minister, been stored by the owner thereof, to the satisfaction of the Minister, in a barn or other place approved by the Minister.*

Who accepts the responsibility? Is it the Minister or the owner?

 The Commissioner of Public Works - all that the Government will do is to give the man an advance on his wheat stored in his own barn. The Government would say that he must look after the wheat in the same way as an agent is required to deliver it.

Mr. ROBINSON - That is quite understood. I do not know how the Minister gets that interpretation from the clause. Who weighs the wheat, and who will be responsible for delivery?

The Commissioner of Public Works - That will be a matter of arrangements.

Mr. ROBINSON - As long as the Minister is satisfied I have nothing to do but support the measure. We must go on with the Bill, as it is the best thing under the circumstances.

The Hon. Sir RICHARD BUTLER- The conditions under which wheat was handled this year will have to be continued for another 12 months, at any rate. It is quite impossible to make other arrangements, owing to the fact that a large quantity of the wheat grown last year is still in the hands of the Government. I should like to know how the scheme will work out, but that can only be ascertained when the accounts are made up. Owing to the failure of the crop in other parts of the world, it looks as if Australia is going to reap an advantage which America reaped when we had a total failure a few years ago. I do not see much difficulty in clause 3. It is a matter of arrangement between the Minister and the owner of the wheat, and if the grower prefers to keep a certain number of bags on his own farm, and get an advance, I do not suppose the wheat would be weighed until delivery is taken by the Government. I do not see how under clause 6 we can do anything else but consolidate the returns of last year’s harvest and this year’s. It is not likely that the business of this huge transaction can be wound up until the sale of the next harvest has been effected. I am anticipating that there will be such a demand for our wheat that by the end of next June we shall see all of it cleared from Australia. There will not be much difficulty about freights, owing to the fact that wheat will not be available in America for shipment, and consequently the ships will be released for Australia. The possibility is that people of Great Britain will very shortly require Australian wheat, and consequently the Imperial Government will release a large number of ships for the purpose of moving the crop.

Mr. O’CONNOR—Clause 3 is a wise provision. A short time ago I was approached by some farmers, and their great difficulty was that possibly on account of congestion at certain sidings they would not be able to deliver wheat there. The farmers will welcome this provision, especially as an advance is to be made. Personally I hope it will not be necessary to put the clause into operation. In regard to clause 6, although it is not possible to separate the two accounts, I accept the word of the Minister, and will not object to the clause. Farmers who hold certificates, and who are interested in the wheat pool, should know something of the conditions governing the running of the pool. They should also know; the arrangements made with the different departments which have the buying and selling of the wheat. I have never heard what commission is paid to the chartering board in Melbourne and London, or to the selling board in London. The farmers have a perfect right to have this information.

The Hon. L. 0’LOUGHLIN—We all know it is necessary to continue the Wheat Harvest Board for another year, and we are hoping that this year the wheat will be all cleared, so as to get back to the old conditions. It is time that people knew the conditions of chartering. Wheat is now being delivered in my district, and the agents are simply taking delivery because they do not know what price to give for the wheat. I want to impress upon the Government the necessity of announcing as early as possible the amount of the advance.

Mr. ANGUS—Clause 3 is necessary, and will be welcome to farmers. I cannot see the difficulty Mr. Robinson has mentioned. As far as the quality and quantity of wheat being delivered are concerned the farmer will be in the same position as the agent was last year. No provision has been made in this Bill in regard to the use of secondhand bags, but I understand that the Premier of this State has given an assurance to the House that secondhand bags will be taken in by the pool as long as they are sound. I had it on the best of authority to-day that the Board had given instructions in South Australia that no secondhand bags are to be accepted by the Board under the pool. Has any decision been come to?

The Commissioner of Public Works— I think the Commissioner of Crown Lands promised to bring the matter under the notice of the Board.

Mr. ANGUS—The position is a serious one. I know that 600,000 secondhand bags have been sold to the wheat- growers of this State, upon the statement of the Premier that they would be accepted. Consequently, unless some action is taken to compel the Wheat Board to accept these bags the farmers will be in very great difficulty.

The COMMISSIONER of PUBLIC WORKS—As far as paying an advance to farmers who are able to store wheat themselves it is likely to be an advantage to the pool rather than to the individual farmers. It is not necessary to put in a clause of this sort for the benefit of the farmer because if he had means of storing his wheat he need not sell.

Mr. Angus—It is a very great advantage.

The COMMISSIONER of PUBLIC WORKS—I hope the demand for wheat will be so great that there will be no necessity to store it for any length of time. If we had had a provision of that sort last year we would not have lost thousands of pounds through the ravages of mice. I do not know what expense will be incurred in connection with the removal of wheat from country stations. The Commissioner of Crown Lands is in Melbourne at the conference of the Wheat Board determining what shall be done in respect to agents’ charges, the secondhand bags mentioned by Mr. Angus, and other questions brought under his notice by honorable members.

Mr. ANGUS—What will be done if it is decided that they will not accept secondhand bags in view of the statement of the Premier?

The COMMISSIONER of PUBLIC WORKS—I do not know that anything can be done. I think that where secondhand bags are reported to be fairly good they will be accepted. There certainly should be some power to prevent wheat being put into inferior bags.

Mir. Angus—It is suggested that 2d. will be deducted for secondhand bags, which is an obviously unfair charge.

The COMMISSIONER of PUBLIC WORKS—I know nothing at all about that. -I should think that it would be more in the shape of a suggestion than an order. Honorable members have recognised that there is an absolute necessity for the continuation of the principle involved in this Bill

Bill read a second time and passed remaining stages. The Council returned the measure without amendment.