**RIVER MURRAY WATERS ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1948**

**Legislative Assembly, 8 December 1948, page 1783**

Second reading

**The Hon. T. PLAYFORD (Gumeracha—Premier and Treasurer)—**The purpose of this Bill is to ratify an agreement recently made between the Commonwealth and the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia for the variation of the River Murray Waters Agreement. This principal agreement was made in 1914 between the Commonwealth and the three States concerned and has been varied by subsequent agreements made in 1923 and 1934. The agreement was, of course, made for the purpose of providing a means whereby the use of the River Murray waters could be regulated and to authorize the carrying out of the engineering works which eventually resulted in the construction of the Hume Reservoir, the storage at Lake Victoria, and the locks in the river. The agreement constitutes the River Murray Commission, which undertakes the general administration of the legislation and upon which the Commonwealth and the three States are each represented by commissioners.

The main purpose of the amending agreement which is proposed to be ratified by this Bill is to provide for the increase of the capacity of the Hume Reservoir from 1,250,000 acre feet to 2,000,000 acre feet and for the increase of the capacity of the Lake Victoria inlet channel. It is estimated that these works will cost approximately £2,150,000 of which one- quarter, that is, approximately £538,000, will be borne by South Australia.

From the national point of view, there can be no doubt that this work should be carried out. From the point of view of South Australia, the raising of the Hume dam will make available to this State an additional 117,000 acre feet of water or thereabouts, that is, if diverted to this purpose, sufficient to irrigate 50,000additional acres. The enlargement of the inlet to Lake Victoria will directly benefit this State as water released from Lake Victoria can only be used by South Australia and, in accordance with the agreement, a volume of water equivalent to the whole of the added capacity of the Hume Reservoir, namely 750,000 acre feet, would be retained as a reserve for drought years of which at least 200,000 acre feet must be held in Lake Victoria. As regards other amendments made by the agreement, none will impair this State’s interests and many of them will directly benefit the State.

Some of the amendments are of a minor nature which do not require special comment but, apart from the provision for the major works proposed by the agreement, the prin­cipal alterations are as follows:—It is provided that New South Wales and Victoria are to take effective means to protect the catchment from erosion and the commission is given power to take action necessary to secure this purpose. Just before the original talks between the Premiers were instituted, I flew over the catchment area and was surprised to notice what had happened through erosion. Nothing had been done to preserve the catchment area and it had become virtually a no-man’s land. However, it will come under the control of the Commission which has a direct interest in the preservation of the area from a water point of view. The Commission is given power to initiate proposals for the improvement of the conservation of River Murray waters and the regulation of the flow and the contracting Governments are empowered to authorize additional works for this purpose. It is also provided that works on the River Murray or tributaries and carried out by any of the States, so far as flow regulation is concerned, are to be placed under the control of the Commission.

That provision will directly benefit South Australia. In the main, we have placed our irrigation areas in a fairly good position and our distribution is good. There is some seepage, but many of our channels are cement-lined, and we are lining more. If members compare the distribution in this State with that in other States, they will be favourably impressed with the work we have done. The fact that other States do not have to pump the water has meant that they have not been so careful in conserving it and have allowed large quantities to be wasted through the use of earth channels.

Mr. Quirke—-Victoria takes water more than 200 miles in earth channels and only 10 per cent of it is received.

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—It is provided that, in assessing the water available to each State diversions for such as town supply are to be taken into account. A further provision is that the Commission, at the request of South Australia, may vary the monthly quantities to which the State is entitled. The quantities at present sent down are not proportioned in the monthly requirements and as irrigation development expands, a variation from time to time, without affecting the total quantity, will be advantageous to this State. It is also made clear that, as far as South Australia is concerned, this provision is to relate to quantities passed to South Australia at the Lake Victoria outlet. This is of some importance as, under the present provision, it can be interpreted that South Australia’s quota of 1,254,000 acre feet includes losses from Lake Victoria which amount to about 130,000 acre feet per annum.

Provision is also made for the allocation of water during drought periods when the Commission declares a period of restriction. Whilst, therefore, the main purpose of the agreement is to provide for the carrying out of work of national importance, the agreement also contains other provisions which should be of considerable benefit to South Australia. In the matter of an agreement of this nature the Government has naturally taken the utmost care to protect the interests of the State affected by it. We have always regarded the Murray as one of our greatest assets and have done our utmost under the agreement to preserve to the State our rights. The Government has been extremely careful in trying to foresee the re-action to every provision inserted in it, and I submit the agreement to the House believing it is in South Australia’s interests that it should be ratified. I move the second reading.

Mr. O’HALLORAN secured the adjournment of the debate.