**VERMIN ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 1922**

**House of Assembly, 6 December 1922, pages 2019-20**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. G. R. Laffer)—**The Vermin Act, 1914 provides, among other things, for the constitution of vermin-fenced districts. The Act is administered in each district by a board whose duty it is to erect vermin-proof fences, to carry out the work of destruction of vermin within its district, and to see that the provisions of the Act are complied with by landholders in the district. Under Division IX. of Part III. of the Act a board has power to declare rates on the ratable property within its district for the purpose of defraying the expenses of the board in carrying out the provisions of the Act. Section 124 fixes the amount of the rates which may be declared. An annual rate may be declared for any amount up to 5s. for every full quarter of a square mile of ratable property, i.e., £1 per square mile. The sum raised by these rates is all the money a board has with which it can carry out the work of destruction of vermin and the construction of vermin-proof fencing. The amount of the present rates leviable was fixed in 1914. Since that year the price of fencing materials and of labor has increased enormously. In 1914 the Wilcherry Vermin-Fenced District was formed, and at that time the cost of materials etting was- £17 12s. per mile for 42 in. x 1½ in. x 18 in. gauge and £15 12s. per mile for 36 in. x 1½ in. x 18 in. gauge. The prices to-day for similar materials are £43 and £58 respectively . As regards the cost of labour a recent quotation for the erection of a fence under contract was £45 per mile, whereas the Wilcherry fence was erected at a cost of £24 per mile. Thus it is clear that a Vermin Board is at the present time unable to carry out fence construction under the old rate of £1 per mile which was fixed to meet the conditions existing in 1914. This rate was ample for all purposes in 1914, but is inadequate at the present time. Two proposed districts on the West Coast were recently submitted for consideration. Neither could be recommended, as the necessary fences could not be constructed and maintained with the proceeds of a rate of £1 per square mile. This Bill is, therefore, introduced for the purpose of increasing the rating powers of Vermin Boards with respect to ratable property in a vermin-fenced district. Clause 4 amends subsection (2) of section 124 of the principal Act by substituting 7s. 6d. for 5s. The effect of this will be that ratable property will be capable of being rated up to 30s. per square mile instead of £1 as at present. If the present high costs continue, even this increased maximum will not be sufficient to allow of the formation of some new districts or to allow of additional loans being made for the subdivision of some of the districts already constituted, but it will be sufficient in many cases. It is inadvisable to fix a higher maximum as in that event it would probably be impossible for ratepayers in a vermin-fenced district to meet the heavy payments imposed under a higher rate. Clause 3 makes a minor amendment to the principal Act. Sections 9 and 37 make it lawful to place poison on land within a vermin-fenced district or land outside a district which is occupied by some person or body other than the Crown. There is no authority for the laying of poison on unoccupied Crown lands outside vermin-fenced districts or district council districts. Clause 3 gives this power by authorising the Commissioner of Crown Lands to lay poison on any Crown lands outside a vermin-fenced district or district council district or to authorise any person to do this. will give legislative authority to the practice of the Crown Lands Department of distributing poison to Crown tenants which is intended to be placed on unoccupied Crown lands adjoining the holdings of the tenants.

Unoccupied Crown lands tend to become a breeding ground for vermin, and constant vigilance has to be displayed to keep down the pest. That discloses a serious state of affair if our stock country is to be developed and settled it is essential that our vermin-fenced district should be extended. In many parts of the State without a vermin-proof fence stock raising would not be practicable. Because of the great increase in the cost of materials during the last few years requests which have come to the Government for the extension of districts have had to be refused. There are cases in which the vermin rates would have to be somewhere in the neighborhood of £2 to £3 per square mile in order to carry out the necessary fencing. The proposed amendments will make it possible to carry out a certain proportion of the fencing. To show the seriousness of the position, from a State point of view, I mention that the rental may be 2s. 6d. per square mile, and the rate under the Vermin Act £1 per square mile. That proves what a serious charge against the occupation of the country the vermin rate is. If the Wild dogs and other vermin are to be kept down, it is essential that the Government should have the power to lay poison on unoccupied Crown lands outside vermin-fenced districts or district council districts. I move the second reading.

Mr. GUNN secured the adjournment of the debate until December 7.