**WILD DOGS AMENDMENT ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1914**

**House of Assembly, 3 November 1914, pages 1315-9**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS Hon. F. W. Young)—**The Bill I am introducing is necessary in some form or other if we are to continue the legislation introduced about two years ago. The measure improves the legislation previously submitted in some respects, but its chief aim is to remove a clause in the existing Act under which the Bill ceases to operate after the end of this year. The Act was limited to two years operation, in deference to the wishes of certain people, who considered that the payment of scalp money was not the most effective system of getting rid of wild dogs. The two years operation of the Bill was partly as a means of educating those of us who believe in scalp payments that it was a satisfactory system, and it was understood that inquiries would be made with a view of ascertaining the opinions of pastoralists and others as to the efficiency of the system of paying scalp money, and the effect the Bill had upon the dogs. Many pastoralists—the great bulk of them, in fact—and others who took an interest in the subject have frequently expressed their satisfaction at the passing of the Act two years ago, and of the work accomplished as the results of its operations. In quite a number of cases pastoralists have volunteered statements to that effect and that they would be quite prepared to pay even a higher rate in order to ensure the effective working of the Act from a financial standpoint. In order to ascertain the opinion of pastoralists, Mr Peter Allen was appointed to make inquiries in the North, Northeast, and on Eyre’s Peninsula, and as a result of 91 investigations, it is shown almost conclusively that the provisions of the present Act should be continued. We have advertised fully, and invited everyone to give evidence in connection with the matter. Mr. Allen travelled extensively throughout the State, going as far north as Oodnadatta, and in a north-easterly direction on the Broken Hill line, and he also visited different centres on Eyre’s Peninsula, and we may therefore assume that we have the opinions of all those sufficiently interested to come forward and give evidence for or against the measure. Although over 90 persons made statements before Mr. Allen, only four were not in favor of the operations of the Bill being continued, so that those interested are almost unanimously in favor of the continuance of the Act, and we are therefore proposing to repeal section 22 of the Act, which restricted the period of its operations. In respect of the working of the Act, the result as regards dog destruction has been extraordinary, and to some extent meets the objection raised by some pastoralists, who base their objections on past experience, and contend that the payment of scalp money was not effective. In all previous years when scalping was in operation the returns for scalps for a period of twelve months did not exceed a few thousand in any one year. We find, however, that inasmuch as scalping was abandoned many years ago, chiefly on financial grounds in intervening periods, when we had to rely on other methods, there has been an extraordinary increase in the number of wild dogs. Whereas in those years we used to pay for a few thousand scalps, we find that in the present year from January to the end of October we paid for 23,000 scalps, and last year—for portion of the year only—-we paid for 22,832 scalps, so that altogether we paid for 46,000 scalps during a period covering less than 24 months whilst the Act was in operation. It seems to me that such a decrease in the number of wild dogs must have been of considerable importance to the pastoralists in the infested areas. In the preparation of the Bill we have been careful to obviate the errors of the past. We have limited the appointments to troopers of undoubted honesty and to pastoralists or their managers when we were satisfied that they have one interest only to consider, and we have reason to believe as the result of our investigations that the working of the Act has been genuine and bona fide. In the course of the period when the scalp money was paid, the amount available was more than absorbed, and we found it necessary to reduce the price from 5s. to 4 s. per scalp, and a number of people deeply interested in the subject were very critical and said that we would undo all the work we had done. As a matter of fact the dogs have been killed just as fast as when the rate was 5s. per scalp, and we have the satis­faction of knowing that while we have kept within our financial limitations, we have not destroyed the good work previously done by reducing the price. We are anxious to pay 5s. as a minimum. The whole position is governed to some extent by the financial aspect. It is only fair to say that as far as some pastoralists were concerned they were prepared to pay the extra rate although it is not the law to-day. At present there is some opposition regarding scalp money, but this is a matter that will probably never be adjusted to the satisfaction of all. Those who have shown any opposition have gone to considerable expense privately to combat the nuisance, and it may seem hard on them to be called upon to pay some tax to enable wild dogs to be dealt with more effectively where lessees are not so careful. The wholesale destruction of dogs must have some indirect benefit even to the man spending his money privately, as it must minimise to some extent the work he has accomplished. It has been said that we should make every man destroy the dogs on his own property, and that may be all right theoretically, but in practice it is impossible, and I defy any Government to see such instructions carried out through­out the thousands of square miles of country we have in this State. The pastoralist is not only under a moral obligation, but under a legal obligation, to keep down the vermin, and under vermin we class wild dogs. It is impossible however, to administer the affairs in this direction, and to see that this is done. The alternative proposal would be to provide, as we do in the more settled areas where the pastoralist does not kill dogs, that he should pay for that purpose. Such a proposition would be ruinous to the Government, if not to the pastoralist. The best way would be to see that these people who are under the obligation to destroy vermin, and if they do not do it— we admit the difficulty in making them— that we should say that we are going to accomplish our ends by putting on a tax which will be used to pay the scalp money to the people who kill those dogs. I am not going to say that this is going to be an absolute success. In view of the fact that a great majority of the pastoralists who have thought it worthwhile to go in for fencing on their own initiative, it is a more than sufficient reason for us to pursue our endeavors until such a time as we are satisfied that we are making a mistake. We shall then have accomplished the killing of a great number of dogs. There are some people who are prepared to recognise that the outside country should be rated and the dogs dealt with in the same manner by the money raised for that purpose, but they claim it is unfair to tax those people who have put up wire netting fences to the extent of 3d. per square mile. As far as these persons are concerned there is great difficulty in getting the dogs killed in the outside country. The tax on some people is not enough to pay for the loss of one sheep if we allowed the outside country to go on as it is now. Owing to the energies in recent years of our settlers, the number of wild dogs has decreased. A great deal of the trouble in the inner country is that persons in the vermin districts are not paying .sufficient attention to their own interests. They seem to think that the construction of a fence ends the trouble. They forget that after constructing the fence they have to keep it in good condition. The results, however, in some districts are very satisfactory. The Bill as introduced to-day proposes to continue the tax on the inside country to the extent of 3d. per mile, which is a very small rate, and it produces an amount of revenue which is very useful for the purpose of paying for the scalps. In the outer country we are altering the existing law to some extent. We propose to deal with the whole of the country in the northern territory, instead of exempting it as we did in a previous Bill. This will mean that 17,000 square miles of leased country will come in, and we will get 6d. per square mile and a corresponding increase as the country increases. The cattle country we look upon as being under an obligation to pay these rates. They are under a legal obligation to kill the vermin, and because wild dogs do not hurt cattle it does not affect the position from a public point of view. From a public point of view we feel that the vermin must be exterminated. The sheep-raising people have a perfect right to go to the Government and say “ Why don’t you make your lessees kill the wild dogs?” We feel justified in rating this outside country which is being used for cattle raising because of the menace which exists there. The existing law states that the rate shall be 3d. for inside vermin areas and 6d. outside. The prices are fixed by proclamation. As the dogs get scarcer we will have to raise the prices. We are proposing under this Bill not only to bring in this extra area in the far northern boundary, but we propose to give the Government the power to fix a rate on the outside country that is not fenced of Is. per square mile, instead of 6d. as it is to-day. We find it difficult to pay for the scalps as they come in at the rate they are, and the deficiency ought to be made up by the people on the thousands of square miles, rather than that the settlers in the fenced areas should have to contribute. The lessees have already spent thousands of pounds in keeping up their annual instalments, and it does not seem fair that these men who have permanently improved their property more than the men in the outside districts should pay more. We feel that the outside men should pay more for the scalps than the inside men. The number of scalps are diminishing, which is satisfactory from a financial point of view and other respects. During the last six months the number of scalps have .been keeping under 2,000, which is less than they were for the first, second, and third months, and less, generally speaking, than last year. We are providing for an amount of 5s. to be paid by the lessee. That is owing to the fact that a 3d. rating, with a minimum holding of three square miles, brings in only 9d., and it is very dif­ficult to collect that sum. The sum is also difficult to collect if it reaches only 3s. Those sums do not warrant any ex­penditure in collecting, and the consequence is that the money remains outstanding while the persons concerned are enjoying the benefit of the Act, and we feel that it is a proper thing to do to make a minimum of 5s. We feel that the settlers will think this amount worth paying. On the whole, the payments have been good. In the early days of this year we became short of money, owing to the great number of scalps coming in. We circularised the ratepayers, and asked them to pay their rates in advance to enable that good work to be done. I have to acknowledge a magnificent response to the request from the great bulk of the landowners—a request which had no legal force behind it, but was one only in their own interests. They recognised the value of the Act, and we were able to carry on that work with some assistance from the Government without any interruption. The good work of this Act is therefore emphasized by the overwhelming number of pastoralists concerned who paid their rates in advance. This is something unique in the history of taxation, and it impresses upon us the fact that the measure is a necessary one in the interests of the pastoral industry and in getting rid of wild dogs.

## 1318 Wild Dogs Bill. [ASSEMBLY.] Wild Dogs Bill.

Mr. MOSELEY—The Wild Dog Act has been the means of saving the pastoralists during the last few years. Most of the pastoralists who at first objected to the Act being brought in are now amongst its friends. They have found out the good thing it has been in enabling them to get rid of their scourge. The Surveyor-General points out that there has been a deficiency of two and a half million sheep during the. past six years on account of the drought and wild dogs, principally the latter. When the economic value of two and a half million sheep and their increase to the State is considered one realises what a tremendous loss it has been. The increase of wool alone should give to the State over a million a year. That we have lost by wild dogs alone. Since I have been a pastoralist it has always been a constant expense fighting the wild dogs, and we have never been able to finalise it. Every section of the pastoralists have gone to tremendous expense for fencing, costing in some cases up to thousands of pounds a year, to guard against the dogs. Some pastoralists have been dilatory, but this Bill is comprehensive enough to take in all sections, and the indifferent man who will not look after dogs himself will have trappers on his country to reduce them. The expenditure of public money provided for in the Bill is supplemented by the pastoralist virtually pound for pound, so that does away with any fear that there might be any collusion among the trappers to save up wild dogs and sluts for breeding. There is no possibility of that, because the pastoralists who have to provide the funds will look after the expenditure of it. Pastoralists have had to submit to huge losses, and until this Bill came before the House there had never been any scheme that would lead to finality, and these millions of sheep have been destroyed without any check being placed upon the pest. One of the bugbears which the pastoralists have had to face has been the enormous extent of Crown lands upon which the wild dogs have bred, so that no matter how vigilant the pastoralists have been to keep their runs free from the pest the dogs from the outside country have come in, and destroyed the sheep. Since the passing of the Act the Commissioner tells us that 46,000 dogs have been destroyed. Allowing that half of these were sluts, one can realise what the advan­tage has been under present conditions. Years ago, before the rabbits came in, we could get rid of the dogs comfortably, because it was rare for them to have a litter of more than two, but when the rabbits came the dogs secured plenty of food, and now a slut will have a litter of five and perhaps six pups. Taking an average of five, it would mean that with 23,000 sluts destroyed we have been saved 115 000 dogs every year. I believe the passing of this Bill will mean the absolute destruction of wild dogs, and it will be a big fillip to the pastoral industry, and probably lead to the occupation of many hundreds of thousands of acres of Crown lands which otherwise would have remained unoccupied. With the wild dogs out of the way, there is a possibility of this land being taken up. Wool is a better price than it ever has been. Meat is dearer, but no capitalist will invest money this outside country, because of the dogs, and none of this country would have been taken up until a new generation of fools had arisen. This Bill will have a far-reaching and exhaustive effect, and I believe that the whole of the outside country will now be taken up.

Mr. James—How much country is available?

Mr. MOSELEY—There are millions of acres available. The wild dog is the most cruel and vicious of all animals. On a rainy night it will go into a flock and kill and tear all night, so that there will be 200 or 300 lambs dead in the morning. The only remedy is scalping. I have a letter here from Mr. McTaggart, in which he urges me to do everything possible to secure the passing of this Bill. It is wise statesmanship to go to a reasonable expenditure to have this outside country developed. It is a blot on the name of South Australia that we have so much of our country unoccupied. The position of that country is a serious one, and it comes right home to us and to every pastoralist who knowsanything about it. It cannot be developed if the wild dogs are allowed to continue. It is said that the railway to the Northern Territory and the East-West line will open up a lot of country; but it will never be developed so long as the wild dogs are allowed to exist. We have been 10 years trying to eradicate them, and have not succeeded I myself pay £2 for every scalp, and get 5s. back from the Government. I have had camel teams outside my own country destroying the dogs. Other pastoralists have done the same, so that shows that Ave have done our best to destroy the evil.

At 6.30 p.m. the sitting of the House Avas suspended for one hour.

On the House resuming—

Mr. VAUGHAN secured the adjournment of the debate until November 4.