**LOANS FOR FENCING ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1924**

**House of Assembly, 3 December 1924, pages 2104-7**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. T. Butterfield)—-**In moving the second reading of this measure it strikes me that really there should have been only one Bill. The report from the draftsman on the two Bills is contained in the speech I have just made on the Vermin Act Further Amendment Bill. This particular one deals with the increase in the cost from one shilling to two shillings. I may have permitted at this stage, in connection with the Loans for Fencing Act, or the Vermin Act, one or the other, to make a few general remarks upon the pastoral industry and the wool industry, as Mr. Laffer, who was previously Commissioner of Crown Lands, has seen fit say something in that connection, and particularly as on more than one occasion he has sought information from this side of the House as to what we intended to do with regard to the pastoral areas. I am quite at one with him in viewing the wool industry to-day as one of the principal industries of this State, and I feel sure that it will continue to be one of the principal industries for a very long time. I did, as the honorable member stated, take advantage of the trip he had arranged to go into some of the country I had not seen. It is advisable for every Minister and for every member of Parliament to see as much of South Australia as he can. Unless people, know their own State and understand it they are not in a position to legislate wisely or well in the interests of the State. Mr. Laffer had this trip arranged, and the Surveyor-General came to me, as his successor, and asked for my approval of the trip. I said I would like to go if I were well enough. I went, and I am pleased that I did go, as it has given me a greater knowledge the country. I regret very much that the previous Government did not see fit to grant a commission of inquiry into the pastoral industry. It should have been done years ago. It is a pity that it was not done when I first proposed it. I urged upon the Labor Ministry in 1915 the advisability of knowing more about the outside country than we did in connection with the stock industry of this State.

The Hon. G.R. Laffer – That was when you were supporting the Yaughan Government.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS – Yes I urged it then. I have never supported any but a Labor Government. I have been a Labor man always. When the Vaughans and many of their supporters saw fit to leave the Labor movement I stayed in it, I urged then that something should be done to support the pastoral industry. While it may appear exceptional that this interest should come from a Labor man it is a fact nevertheless. I know the map to which Mr. Laffer refers and it is a worry to any man who has the interests of this country at heart to look and find that half of that map is vacant. Something can be done with it. Notwithstanding the fact that there has been no attempt on the part of any other Governmentto develop that country this Government will attempt to do so. As a result of my trip and the knowledge I gained I believe that water can be obtained in very many places at shallowdepths:, but what is the use of knowing it can be obtained. The rich man will not go on to it. He would rather embark in industrial ventures in the city where he has more comfort and while he will not do so the poor man cannot take up the land because it needs capital to exploit it. There is a method which can be adopted for the development of that country and we intend to give it a trial. The advisory board in connection with the Pastoral Industry waited on me and I invited them to come along during show week with any pastoralists interested and give me the benefit of their knowledge in regard to the administration of my office. After a good deal of desultory talk which did not lead to anything I found that if we were to do anything at all it would be necessary for me to put proposals, before them, which I did. I am going to place those proposals before you now for the benefit of Mr. Laffer who has enquired on several occasions, sometimes with a suspicion of sarcasm, as to what we were doing. Capital is required in connection with development of that country. We find that when lessees in the north want boring done for them, there is a firm of boring contractors who have rightly or wrongly, the better, in my opinion, forced the price of boring to such a point that it is impossible to bore deep at a reasonable cost. The method of development of that country which attains at present is for some poor man with or £500 or £1000 to take up a lease, get well sinkers out, which is a most difficult job, and have the well sunk at a cost up to £3 10s. per foot. They have to cart water to the well to sink it, and can only go out when the seasons are good, with the result that there are numerous delays and when the well is sunk the settler is absolutely broke. Most of the wells are anything under 100ft. in depth. During the past month Mr. A. J. McBride, of Wilgena who is one of our best pastoralists, went to Melbourne and bought two boring plants for his stations, and commenced to get boring done at 25s. to 30s. a foot for shallow wells, casing and all. My proposal is to give the Surveyor-General authority to buy a few up-to-date boring plants, call for tenders for boring at per foot, get the most competent borers to tender, and the Government do nothing but bore the holes and test for water. Having got a supply of water we will then advertise the land, stating the capacity of the well or bore in the way of providing stock water, and charge the cost, of the bore over the term of the lease. I propose to call for tenders for 25,000 to 30,000 feet of boring in order to entice men to tender throughout Australia on sites to be indicated by the Government Geologist and the Surveyor-General. We will provide the plant and necessary haulage gear, and equipment and the contractor will be required to pay all expenses in connection with labor and working the borer. That will enable a man to put a mob of sheep or cattle on the block and make a living straight away. I hope to be spared to urge later on the desirability of eliminating cattle and camels altogether from that country which is sheep country pure and simple. I would like honorable members who desire to know anything about that country to see the destruction wrought around every good water there is in the North-West. The overhead scrub is killed for miles around the well and while the absence of water is one of the chief difficulties to be encountered in that country, the striking of a big supply of water is one of the greatest curses to the pastoral industry, it results in the complete destruction of the bush and herbage around the well until the country is simply adrift. Legislation of the future, so far as we are concerned, will follow those lines.

The Hon. G. R. Laffer—You will limit the area?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—There will have to be a limitation. I do not believe anyone makes such a good thing out of the country as the man who lives on it. While we hope to develop the country which is unleased, we will also bore for the present lessees on their properties and spread the cost of the boring over the remaining terms of their leases. If the wool industry in South Australia is to be made the most of, I hope that while we are attempting to do these things in the interests of the country we will have the help of the Opposition in assisting us to compel some of the lessees who are holding vast tracts of country idle and unimproved to bring it under occupation. One of the greatest curses of this State is the low rent charged for pastoral land. Take country which can be leased for 1s. 6d. per square mile. Men take that land up, although they do not want it, they hold it unimproved and unoccupied, and do not give back to the State the equivalent of what the State gives to them. We should get reasonable values for the land while we give the lessees every opportunity to make a living, and should not allow individuals to hold from 30,000 to 40,000 square miles simply because they get it at an unfairly low rate, which enables them to monopolise it to the detriment of people who need land and the State itself. This is the only opportunity I have had to deal with the proposals of the Government which have been put up to the Advisory Board, and to which they agreed. They were of the opinion that the proposals were sound, they promised their support, and I was not subject to any criticism with regard to the proposals. I have the assurance that the lines the Government intend to follow, and which I have outlined to-night, were precisely the same as my predecessor, Mr. Laffer, had decided to put into operation.

The Hon. G. R. Laffer—Absolutely.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS— I am more than ever convinced that I am right and I have the blessing of my predecessor. The methods may be new but I believe they are absolutely necessary in order that that country may be put to its best use. I move the second reading.

Mr. ALLEN—I take it that the object of this Bill is to assist in developing and opening up our great northern country. The Minister is proceeding along the right lines, because if people are to be induced to go there they must be given assistance to enable them to get a start. The Minister not quite right in saying that no attempt was made previously to develop this land because many endeavors have been made privately well as with Government assistance. I do not altogether agree with the Minister in his statement that the land is good sheep country. I know most of it fairly well, and do not think it will carry 40 sheep to the square mile.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—Have you seen Mr. McBride’s report?

Mr. ALLEN—Yes, and he said that there is country there which will carry 40 sheep to the mile.

The Treasurer—He said it would carry thatnumber of sheep to the mile on an average.

Mr. ALLEN—He would not like to stock it at that limit. I do not think it possible to occupy that country unless it be vermin proof fenced and it is a great pity that a vermin proof fence has not been run from the Queensland border north of Oodnadatta to the Western Australian border. That would keep out the vermin from the outside country, which are really the greatest menace to the occupation of our far northern pastoral lands. The land is not a rich man’s country, and a person with small capital would not be likely to be successful owing to the variable climatic conditions. With a little assistance given at the start he might do well, however. Can the Minister tell me whether the Bill applies to the already proclaimed vermin districts, or to new districts?

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—It applies particularly to district council areas.

Mr. ALLEN—That would affect the present districts, because many of the fences require repairing, and in some places replacing. So far as boring is concerned, that is a fairly costly operation. The price of well-sinking is almost prohibitive, as even a rich man cannot afford to put down wells at £3 to £3 10s. a foot. So far as bores are concerned there is the additional cost of the casing.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—You can get boring and casing put down for 30s. a foot in certain localities.

Mr. ALLEN—If that were possible, and water were obtained at 400 feet, it would probably be a good investment. Even if that country is occupied it will carry cattle for a good many years. The trouble is that sheep cannot be kept on it unless the land is fenced before they are taken there, because of the wild dog pest. Cattle thrive and manage to hold their own. Unfortunately in most of the outside northern districts the cattle men are not keen on destroying the wild dogs. They say they do not do them much harm, and keep down the rabbits. That works both ways. The rabbits keep up the dogs, and the dogs thrive on the rabbits until a drought come along and wipes the rabbits and the cattle. The Bill is a move he right direction, and I am sure it will meet with no opposition from this side of the House, Bill read a second time and taken through its remaining stages.