**IRRIGATION AND RECLAIMED LANDS ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 1910**

**House of Assembly, 15 November 1910, pages 1027-9**

Second reading

**The TREASURER**, in moving the second reading, said the subject of irrigation was commanding great attention in Australia, particularly in Victoria, where the expert (Mr. Elwood Mead) and the Minister in charge of the department had visited Eu­rope and America in search of suitable persons to take up land in the vicinity of the Murray. The idea was to settle on that country a population which would do for Victoria by intense culture what farm­ing on a larger scale had done for South Australia. That called attention to the fact that in the past South Australia had not done as much as it ought with the natural advantages possessed along the banks of the Murray. While the State, had been seeking to secure its adequate share of the natural flow of the waters, millions of gallons had been allowed to run to waste that could have made the soil produce abundant wealth. When they saw the results of irrigation at Renmark and Mildura, and realized that from a small area of less than 5 000 acres something like £90,000 a year had been produced, they could not fail to be impressed with, the great inheritance the State had along the Murray. The State would endeavour, by following the example of other Governments, to do more with such land than had been done. There was actually in course of creation a settlement on the river, apart altogether from farming, which when completed would enable the settlement of 1,000 families on the banks. Those people, however, would not be put there under conditions that would not give them an adequate recompense for their labours. The old village settlements which had been looked on as a failure had all been taken up, under different conditions it was true, and were in a satisfactory and flourishing condition. By their aid it had been successfully demonstrated that the land could be worked successfully in the neighbourhood of the Murray, notwithstanding the small rainfall. The Bill desired to make certain amendments in the existing legislation that would enable the Government more effectively to carry on reclamation and irrigation work in the neighbourhood of Renmark and the upper portion of the stream. In the past they had allowed boards to have control of areas, and that work had been very satisfactorily done. The settlements, however, had been anxious to have the Government instal the plant, take the responsibility of its upkeep, and charge interest on the cost in the form of a water rate. First-class engineers like Mr. Whillas and Mr. Loveday would have charge of the plant and of the quantity of water to be supplied to the settlements. He would like to have gone further, and stated the right of the State to the water of the river. That authority would be embraced in a larger Bill to be brought down next session . They should have control of the water used not only by the Government irrigation settlements, but of the water other people took from the stream. It should not be the privilege of any individual to help himself indiscriminately to the water. (Mr. Pflaum—“It is all right so long as there is enough.”) They did not want to see any waste of water. In Victoria, according to the reports of their own commission, there had been a most serious waste of water. It would be advisable in the near future to assert that right, especially in view of locking. The Bill was to further amend the Irrigation and Reclaimed Lands Act, 1908. The first clause calling for comment was clause 3 which amended section 7 of the 1908 Act by striking out certain words relating to interest. Section 7 required that the moneys expended by the Commissioner in reclamation and irrigation works and money advanced to the boards should be repaid to loan fund, with interest thereon. It was not the usual practice to return interest, as well as capital, to loan fund, and that was the reason for the proposed amendment. Clause 4 sought to amend section 20 of the Act of 1908. That section stated the considerations upon which the rents for the blocks in an irrigation area were to be fixed, and provided that the cost of reclamation and the cost of irrigation were to be taken into account. It had, however, been found impracticable to include the cost of irrigation, and it was intended to recover that in the form of water rates, fixed under section 26. It was, therefore, proposed to amend section 20 by taking out the references to irrigation works. Clause 5 proposed to repeal section 22 of the 1908 Act, which provided that no person should hold more than one block. It was found impracticable to enforce that provision, as in many cases the irrigable land could only be cut up into small blocks adjoining the channels, and blocks *oi* other land must in most instances be separate from and at some distance from the irrigable lands, and it was necessary for practicable reasons that lessees should be allowed to hold both classes of land. In other cases settlers held horticultural blocks which would have to be surrendered for perpetual leases under the Act, and they, too, would require blocks of irrigable land and blocks of commonage lands. The Surveyor-General recommended that the limitation be not upon the number of blocks, but as to the total area of reclaimed and irrigable land, and that was the effect of the section which it was proposed to substitute for section 22 of the Act. The result, as regarded the quantity of land which might be held, would be the same as at present, except that it need not all be in one block. A perusal of section 11, subsection (2) of the Act of 1908 would show that that was the case. Clause 6 merely corrected a clerical error in section 28. Clauses 7 and 8 were for the purpose of stating more accurately the financial provisions as to the return of moneys spent on irrigation areas or advanced to boards. As several amendments of subsection (2) of section 31, and also of section 32, were required, it had been considered less confusing to repeal these provisions and insert the provisions of this Bill in their place. As regarded clause 7, it would be seen on reading section 31, subsection (2), that the board was to be liable for the repayment of moneys advanced to it, and all moneys expended by the Commissioner in carrying out the purposes of the Act in the irrigation area before the rents were fixed. That might be regarded as not clearly including moneys spent on the land before it was proclaimed an irrigation area. That point was settled in the proposed new subsection. In the next place, it would be seen that at the end of subsection (2) the expression “the said advances” was defined as meaning the moneys so advanced, and expended, and the interest on the moneys “so advanced,” whereas it should be “interest on the moneys so expended.” That was to provide for at the end of the new subsection (2). Clause 8 was meant to remedy the following defects in the present section 32. The section provided that the said advances (which included moneys expended on the area as well as advances to the board) should be repaid by 20 yearly instalments with interest, the first instalment of the principal being repaid at the expiration of five years from the date of the advance. That made no provision as to when the first payment of interest was to take place, and in so far as the advance consisted of moneys expended (not advanced) it might be difficult to decide when the advance took place. To meet these difficulties the proposed new subsection provided as follows:— “(1) That in so far as ‘the said advances’ consist of moneys expended (not advanced), interest is to be paid at the expiration of the first four years from the proclamation of the board, and thereafter principal and interest are to be paid by 20 annual instalments.” 2. “That in so far as the advance consists of advances properly so called, interest is to be paid at the expiration of each of the first four years from the date of the advance, and thereafter principal with interest is to be repaid by 20 annual instalments.” Clause 9 proposed to amend section 80 by increasing the amount which might be advanced to lessees of land in irrigation areas. At present £125 was the limit, for which the Bill substituted £250. As section 80 required that not more than half of the value of the improvements was to be advanced there could be no risk in increasing the total. Clause 10 was designed to make it quite clear that in the exercise of his general powers in managing an irrigation area before a board was constituted, the Commissioner should have the power to do all things incidental to the exercise of his general powers, including the power to do all things which a board, if constituted, might do. Clause 11 provided that a board shall not be constituted for any irrigation area in which the water for the purpose of irrigation was supplied by means of pumping or other plant erected by the Commissioner. It was considered inadvisable to hand the control of such plant and the irrigation channels and works, which were necessarily of great value and importance, over to the control of boards. It was intended that such areas should remain in the control of the Government. One of the difficulties of the present system was that they were not half generous enough in making provision to enable the smaller men to get on the soil. Western Australia had pointed the example, and the Agricultural Bank there ought to be more freely copied here. Many of the pioneer settlers on the Murray had been men who had gained experience through adversity. They had been dumped down on the land, any kind of machinery had been forced upon them, and so-called experts had soi advised that the plant had largely to be pulled up again. The settlers had shown grit and energy, and they had in Sonth Australia men who were only waiting for an opportunity to become settlers as good as any in the State. Within the borders of the State they had a class of soil not excelled in any parts of the world so far as richness for irrigation was concerned. On the reclaimed swamp lands lower down the river it was known from tests that there was soil that could not be equalled anywhere. It was richer even than the volcanic soil of Mount Gambier for the raising of dairy fodders and the like. In moving the second reading he urged dispatch in dealing with the measure.

On the motion of the Hon. L. O’LOUGHLIN the debate was adjourned until November 16.