**WHEAT PRICE STABILIZATION SCHEME BALLOT ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1954**

**Legislative Assembly, 12 August 1954, pages 376-7**

Second reading

**The Hon. A. W. CHRISTIAN (Minister of Agriculture),** having obtained leave, intro­duced a Bill for an Act to amend the Wheat Price Stabilization Scheme Ballot Act, 1953.

Read a first time.

The Hon. A. W. CHRISTIAN—I move:—

That this Bill be now read a second time.

In doing so I would like to express my great satisfaction at agreement having been reached after a long time of constructive debate on the question of wheat stabilization. I wish to pay a tribute to my predecessor for the very important work that he did to bring about the ultimate agreement. I know that Sir George Jenkins and the New South Wales Minister of Agriculture did practically all the spade work in getting the other States into line on the home consumption price principle and the wheat industry owes them a very great debt. Victoria, the final citadel of resistance, was overwhelmed at the last two Premiers’ conferences. Victoria had held out against the home consumption price that other States had accepted. It was agreed at the Agricultural Council meetings held recently that a ballot on the stabilization schemed should be held not later than October l5, because some State Parliaments will not be in session beyond that time. As all States have to take uniform action on holding ballots and must

subsequently amend the stabilization legislation which provides for an expiry date in 1956, this must be attended to before Parliaments in other States go into recess. I do not want to debate the matter of stabilsation except to point out that the most important

feature of the whole scheme, in my opinion, is the Commonwealth Government’s guarantee in regard to the five year period. That is important because the industry is faring difficulties in marketing the huge surplus have been built up, as well as current crops. To get, as we have, a guarantee from the Commonwealth for five years in respect of 100 000 000 bushels of export wheat each year at cost of production to the growers is a remarkable achievement. If the State Governments had been foolish enough to jeopardize the guarantee by failing to agree they would have done a grave disservice to the wheat industry of Australia. It was just as well that the States were able to compose their differences over the minor matter of the home consumption price.

Mr. O’Halloran—It is a major matter some industries that are suffering today

The Hon. A. W. CHRISTIAN—I hope the honourable member will be patient. I do not think the 14s. a bushel will obtain for the whole five-year period. Anyone watching market trends will see that even today under the International Wheat Agreement the overseas selling price is getting close to the floor price, which in Australian currency is 13s.10d. Recent sales abroad have been made at 14s. 6d. The provisions of the Stabilization Act are that the International Wheat Agreement price shall be the price ruling in Australia as the home consumption price, or 14s., whichever is the lower. The International Wheat Agreement has a term of three years, so for last two years of the five years the stabilisation scheme will be on a different basis. It is provided that for those two years the export parity shall be the home consumption price or 14s., whichever is the lower. That is distinctly set out in the other Act to which I have referred and I have no doubt that before long we shall be down on either the International Wheat Agreement floor price or the export parity price.

Then there is the further provision that if any of the prices I have quoted fall below the cost of production figure that figure shall be the home consumption price. Both the wheat-growers and the consumers are safeguarded in this legislation. I do not think the consumer can reasonably ask or expect the wheat industry to supply wheat to Australian consumers at less than cost of production. It has been suggested that because of the large wheat surpluses throughout the world Australia should take some action in curtailing production, but all States and Commonwealth Governents have resisted such views because we did not think that we were the guilty parties in creating the surpluses. Over a period we have reduced our wheat acreages from 14,000,000 at present, so surely we have done sufficient in this direction. Again, our consistently low internal price, by comparison with overseas internal prices, has resulted in decreasing our wheat acreages by economic methods. On the other hand, the United States and other countries have consistently maintained high internal wheat prices. The United States had a price of 19s. 7d. for some years, and Canada had a high internal price, and that brought about greatly increased production. Therefore, the wheat surpluses with which the world is now burdened were created by other countries. America is now imposing considerable restrictions on her wheatgrowers.

It was provided by the Wheat Price Stabilisation Scheme Ballot Act of last year that if a price stabilization scheme should be agreed to by the Governments of the Commonwealth and of all the Australian States, the Minister of Agriculture was to direct that a poll of wheatgrowers should be held. The object of the poll would be to ascertain whether the growers favoured the scheme. As honourable members know, there has been some delay in securing the necessary agreement of all the Governments to the stabilization proposals, but agreement has now been reached and it is necessary to hold a poll. Since last year’s Act was passed, however, another wheat harvest has been delivered to the Wheat Board and another wheat crop has been sown. This, of course, will bring additional persons into the category of wheatgrowers. Accordingly, it has now been decided that in addition to the wheatgrowers specified in last year’s Act, namely, those who delivered wheat to the board in 1951-52 and 1952-53, any wheatgrower who delivered wheat in 1953-54, or who has planted 50 acres or more to wheat for the 1954-55 season should also be granted the right to vote at the poll. To carry this decision into effect it is necessary to amend last year’s Act, and the present Bill has been introduced for that purpose. We have arrangements for conducting the poll well in hand. The wheatgrowers voting list has been compiled and we hope to be ready as soon as the other States are for taking the poll.

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