VETERINARY SURGEONS ACT AMEND­MENT BILL 1938

Legislative Assembly, 6 July 1938, pages 341-3

Second reading

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD (Gumeracha— Commissioner of Crown Lands)—The Veterinary Surgeons Act, 1935, was passed in order to provide for the registration and control of persons practising as veterinary surgeons . Under this Act, two classes of persons are registered. The first class comprises persons registered as veterinary surgeons. To secure registration as a veterinary surgeon, a person must possess a University degree in veterinary surgery or similar qualifications. In addition, certain persons, who at the commencement of the Act were practising veterinary surgery, were also entitled to be registered as veterinary surgeons although they were lacking in the necessary academic qualifications. The second class comprises persons registered as veterinary practitioners. These persons are those who, at the commencement of the Act, possessed certain qualifications of a lower standard than required for persons registered as veterinary surgeons.

The Act provides that only persons registered under the Act may style or hold themselves out as veterinaries, but no restriction is placed upon the recovery of fees for veterinary services by unregistered persons. The purpose of the Act is, of course, to protect the public by providing that persons holding themselves out as veterinary surgeons should possess proper qualifications. It has been found, however, that the number of persons in this State who are qualified to practice as veterinary surgeons is insufficient for the needs of the State and although scholarships have been established by the Government to enable persons to qualify as veterinary surgeons, it will be some years before there are sufficient qualified veterinary surgeons for the whole State. On December 31, 1937, 23 persons were registered as veterinary surgeons and 31 were registered as veterinary practitioners, and these totals include a number of officers in the Commonwealth and State public services. The Veterinary Surgeons Board has therefore recommended the introduction of this Bill to provide for the giving of statutory recognition to persons possessing elementary knowledge of veterinary work. The Bill is similar to legislation enacted in Western Australia in 1923 where the same problem existed. Clause 2 therefore provides that the Veterinary Surgeons Board may issue a permit to treat animals for disease and injury to any person who the board is satisfied is competent to so treat animals, is 21 years of age, and is of good fame and character.

A permit will be limited in its effect to an area fixed by the board and specified in the permit. A permit or any renewal thereof will not include any area within 25 miles of the residence of a registered veterinary surgeon or practitioner. The permit is intended to give statutory recognition to a person of limited qualifications if the services of a qualified man are not available in the locality in question.

Mr. Lacey—Can the permit be cancelled?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—Yes. It would automatically become cancelled when a quali­fied man resided in the district. As the services of qualified men become available throughout the country the necessity for the issue of permits will disappear. The system put forward in the clause is therefore intended as a temporary expedient to provide for the period until qualified men become available.

Mr. Lacey—You could use a man classed as unqualified, and then, after having used him, cancel his permit.

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—The idea has been to build up a system of qualified veterinary surgeons. This House has frequently limited the qualifications of a man desiring registration. The limitation has proved to be too strict, and at present there is not the slightest doubt that there is a dearth, particularly in some dis­tricts, of people available to do the work.

Mr. Stephens—The provision in the Bill operates the wrong way. You are allowing a man to build up a practice, and then permitting another man to come in and take the practice.

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—The measure does not tighten up the law. Its purpose is to make available the best men procurable in those districts where there are no qualified men.

Mr. Lacey—When the Bill went through last year it was decided that if a person had practised for five years he could be registered as a veterinary surgeon. Under the proposed scheme he might practise for five years, yet the department has the right to cancel his permit.

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—That is a point that members might consider during the Committee stages of the Bill. Permits will be renewed annually and a fee of £1 Is. will be required for every permit or renewal. The registration fee for veterinary surgeons and practitioners is £2 2s. a year. Power is given to the board to cancel or suspend a permit if the board is satisfied, after inquiry, that the holder is not competent to treat animals, or if the holder commits any of the acts which, under section 25, would justify the cancellation or suspension of registration under the Act.

The provisions of section 25, which require proper notice to persons affected and a proper inquiry by the board, will apply to proceedings for cancellation or suspension and there will be a right of appeal to the Supreme Court from any order for cancellation or suspension. Clause 3 makes some consequential amendments to the principal Act. Subclause (2) makes it an offence for the holder of a permit to hold himself out as a veterinary surgeon or a veterinary practitioner or as qualified to practice veterinary surgery. It is obvious that, as the qualifications of a holder of a permit will be less than those of the other persons mentioned, he should, for the protection of the public, be prohibited from claiming greater qualifications than those he actually possesses. Under section 34 of the principal Act, the Governor has power to make regulations with regard to various matters affecting persons registered under the Act. Subclause (3) of clause 3 extends those provisions to holders of permits. I move the second reading.

The Hon. R. S. RICHARDS secured the adjournment of the debate.