**VERMIN ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 1924**

**House of Assembly, 3 December 1924, pages 2102-4**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. T. Butterfield)—**This Bill is introduced for the purpose of making various amendments to the Vermin Acts, 1914 to 1923, which are necessary for the better administration of those Acts. Part VI. of the Vermin Act, 1914, formulates a scheme whereby loans are made by the Government to district councils or vermin boards, who in turn purchase wirenetting to be supplied to occupiers of land in special areas within their districts. Occupiers supplied with wirenetting are required to repay to the council or board the cost of the netting in 20 equal annual instalments, and to pay interest thereon at the fixed rate. In addition, the occupiers must pay to the council or board, as the case may be, an amount calculated at the rate of 10s. per centum per annum upon each annual payment of principal money and interest with a mini­mum of Is. The small payments are the only amounts received by the councils to cover the costs of administration necessarily incurred by them in carrying out the provisions of Part VI. The amount is so small that the 10s per cent on the amounts received by the district councils does not pay them for the work entailed in distributing the wirenetting, the oversight of it, and the general work in connection with the wirenetting loans. In a great many cases the payment is the minimum payment of Is, and the councils contend that it is impossible for them to pay their costs of administration with these amounts only and that the administration costs are, in most cases, paid out of the general rates of the councils concerned. Clause 2, therefore increases the minimum amount to 2s which will be the charge payable by most occupiers supplied with wirenetting under Part VI. of the Vermin Act, 1914. The fees received by the councils are altogether too small for the work which they do, and I do not think the proposal to increase the minimum from Is. to 2s. will meet with opposition Division IV. of Part VI. of the Vermin Act 1914, deals with cases of land outside district council districts and vermin-fenced districts In such a case the Commissioner of Crown Lands may advance to a lessee the cost at the nearest post office or railway station of barbed wire and netting required for vermin-proofing a boundary fence. The advances which are made on the recommendation of the Pastoral Board can only be made for vermin-proofing a boundary fence. In many cases, however the lessee may desire to vermin-proof a part only of his land leaving the boundary or a portion of the boundary not vermin proofed. Members will realise that this applies particularly to northern districts and the outside areas where land is let by the square mile. In the outside districts, notably west of Oodnadatta, many of the smaller squatters have no fencing at all around their holdings, and are forced to shepherd their sheep the whole of the year. Their leases comprise 70, 80, or 100 square miles, and they generally contain one or two wells. The lessees feel that if they were able to fence in portion of the country adjacent to the water, it would be a distinct advantage to them, especially in the lambing season. When ewes are lambing an adequate supply of water for them is particularly valuable, especially if they are shepherded by irresponsible black labor. As these men are not likely to be in a position for many years to boundary fence the whole of their land it is desirable that we should help them by passingthis provision. Clauses 3, 4 and 5, therefore, amend Division IV, and provide that the powers to advance the cost of barbed wire and netting to lessees of land outside district council districts and vermin-feced districts shall apply in the case of all fences, whether boundary fences or not. Section 9 of the Vermin Act Further Amendment Act, 1919, provides that the owner or occupier of land adjoining any land reserved for drainage purposes or vested in the Crown, the Commissioner of Public Works, or the South-Eastern Drainage Assessment Board on which is situated any main or district drain or drainage works within the meaning of the

South-Eastern Drainage Act, 1878, is to destroy the vermin on the drainage lands adjoining his land. In the cases of the district councils of Millicent and Tantanoola the main or district drains or drainage works are by force of section 17 of the South-Eastern Drainage Act 1878and section 67 of the South-Eastern Drainage Act Amendment Act, 1908, vested in the respective district councils, and consequently the obligation to destroy the vermin on these particular drainage lands vests in the district councils concerned. Clause 6 extends the scope of section *9* of the Vermin Act Further Amendment Act, 1919, to these drainage lands, and provides that in future the owners or occupiers of the adjoining lands must destroy the vermin on these drainage lands also. There should be little opposition to this Bill and I commend it to the House. I move the second reading.

The Hon. G. B. LAFFER—I have not had the opportunity of looking into the Bill, but I am perfectly familiar with its provisions, because for four years I administered the Act. I know the department frequently received complaints that although the Act placed an obligation on the local governing bodies to distribute the wire netting they were forced to do the work at a loss. Considerable work is entailed in keeping the accounts, and the remuneration of 10s. per centum allowed by the Act is not sufficient to recompense the councils. I do not think that members on this side will object to the amendment. The Minister is wise in asking for the amendment to Division IV. of Part VI. of the Vermin Act| 1914. We cannot get away from the fact that wool is the greatest asset that Australia possesses, and we should do all we possibly can to assist in its production. We must be impressed with the fact that in South Australia we have a large area of land that should be occupied. Wire-netting is a vital need in the taking up of that country. It is wire-netting first, wire-netting second, and wire-netting all the time.

Mr. McHugh—And water.

The Hon. G. B. LAFFER—Water is essential, I know, but if the wild dog pest could be coped with there would be a greater incentive for men to take up this land. It is a question whether the State should not take a full share in assisting men to occupy that country. The Minister will remember that during the last Parliament, the Government introduced legislation to assist in the discovery of water in that unoccupied land. When I left the Lands Office I think that 10 or 11 leases had been taken up under the provisions of that Act.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—It was not successful.

The Hon. G. R. LAFFER—I know that a number of leases were taken up and that the men went out to search for water. It was an inducement.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—Many men took up leases and searched King William Street for money with which to speculate.

The Hon. G. R. LAFFER—I know nothing about that. The Minister mentioned the men who were shepherding west of Oodnadatta. I presume he refers to the country in the vicinity of the Musgrave Ranges. Before I relinquished office I had arranged to visit that part of the state but the elections altered things.

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things. It was represented to me how men were occupying that country, even without wire netting, that a number of wells of good water had been put down and that it was good stock country capable of carrying many sheep, if properly handled. This amending legislation is a step in the right direction because advances will not be limited to boundary fences. It will allow a man to occupy the country according to his own judgment and there is no doubt that the man on the spot has a better knowledge of what to do than the person in King William Street. The man on the spot, if he goes into the outside country, does not go there for fun, but to make a living, and he should be encouraged in every possible way. The Minister is doing the right thing in dispensing with steps are being taken to see that the limitations of the Act under which he was working, and allowing these people to use their own judgement, and to fence in a mile or two miles of country as the case may be in which they can safeguard their stock from the wild dog pest. Anyone who has been in the Lands Office for a while will realise what a tremendous curse wild dogs are in that country. It is our bounden duty to do everything we can to assist those who go into that outside country and take up land. No doubt that portion of the state would carry a great quantity of stock if it were in compact vermin fenced districts.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—I am told that it would carry forty sheep to the square mile.

The Hon. G. E. LAFFER—I was particularly keen when in office to do something to assist in the settlement of that country. I used to look at the map and ask why we could not do something to utilise the tremendous area extending to the Western Australian border.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—The Pastoral Commission which I wanted would have helped you a great deal.

The Hon. G. R. LAFFER—If the right men had been appointed to it no doubt it would have been able to throw a good deal of light on the industry. We have not had a pastoral inquiry for about 20 years, which is a long period in a country like South Australia where the conditions have altered a good deal. The other provision in this Bill simply deals with the proper destruction of vermin along the drains in the South-East, and brings the drainage area into conformity with what pertains to ordinary settled areas. It is quite a fair proposition. Land abutting on the drains is really more valuable because of the drains being there, and consequently the obligation thrown on adjacent land owners to destroy vermin there is not only in the interests of the district but in the interests of the men themselves. I believe the people of the State do not realise the enormous amount of damage which is done in allowing rabbits to propagate and spread. In the Bill we passed last year we tightened up the provisions with respect to the destruction of vermin in every possible way, and I am glad to learn from the Minister that steps are being taken to see that the Act is carried out. I will support the Bill.

Bill read a second time and taken through the remaining stages