**DROUGHT RELIEF BILL 1914**

**Legislative Assembly, 6 October 1914, pages 794-811**

Second reading

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. F. W. Young)—There is no Bill which I could introduce to this House with greater regret than the measure I am now submitting. It must occur to all of us who have a genuine desire for the country to progress that the present moment in South Australia is one requiring the most careful consideration of Parliament with a view to mitigating the difficulties which are encompassing that section of the community upon which we most depend— the people on the land. It is almost a worn-out expression that the farmer is the backbone of the country, but it is true, and never in any previous moment has the community been so well seized with the truth of that well-worn saying, because every section of it is feeling the direct results of the unfortunate position.

Mr. Chesson—The. farmers are not the only factor.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—They are the first factor, but that statement is not made to depreciate the value of other factors. I do not. think we can make too much of the value of the farming community to the State. The difficulties of the settlers have been very great this season. Unfortunately in considerable areas of the State their misfortunes have not been limited to this season. But their misfortunes have reached a crisis this year, after two or three bad seasons, in which they have not earned a living wage. The portions of the State I refer to particularly are the Northern Areas and certain parts of Eyre’s Peninsula. The settlers in those localities have been struggling against adverse conditions for two or three years, and we have to admit that their life is heroic from every point of view. The Murray Flats, also, is a portion of the State which is invariably in trouble when the other districts I have mentioned are suffering from drought. The settlers in all those areas have not during the last two or three years earned a minimum wage which would have given them an opportunity of accumulating means to enable them to contend against the specially adverse circumstances of the present moment. In many parts the settlers have, during recent years, been working for results sometimes not equal to the actual outlay, and in other respects for a wage which would be absolutely despised by many sections of the community. At this moment those people are in the position that their homes and practically all their ambitions are lost for the moment, unless some effort can be made to save them. Circumstances, of course, may be such that it is impossible for any Parliament and any Government to save all of those people, even those who are most deserving, owing to the very depth of the misfortunes which surround them. They are not people who have had easy times. They have met difficulties not for the first occasion in their lives. Some of the people in those localities have met drought experiences before.—not necessarily as bad as the conditions at the moment— and have undergone all the misfortunes of that experience, have remained at the post, and have been prepared with the turn of the seasons to make once more every effort to add to the production of our State. The fact that they have repeatedly undergone those experiences is a tribute to their perseverance, their industry, and their independence. The assistance which we can give them is dictated to some extent by humanitarian principles, but in any assistance we give them we are guided to a large extent by the matter as a business proposition from the community’s point of view. The fact of our submitting a Bill for giving relief has been the occasion for some cheap cynicism, and the statement that the Government are at last reduced to uphold Socialism. Such a remark conveys the idea that the intelligence of the people, is not very high, or, at least, the people who make that cynical remark do not know what Socialism is. It has never been considered outside the scope of Parliament or of the Government to help those who are in distress, particularly a Parliament in this State. That was done before the word Socialism was known in the world of practical politics. On many previous occasions this State has not hesitated to help people in distress. The very fact that we have such an institution as the Destitute Asylum is an indication that help to people in great difficulties is looked upon as an ordinary function of government. But. in this case it is not only a question of helping people in distress for the sake of those people alone; it comes to a clean, business-like proposition on the part of the community, who depend on this section of the people, to do their utmost to keep them going. And in taking this step to relieve distressed farmers, I have no desire to weaken or destroy their independence to any extent. We look upon their independence and their self-reliance as great virtues to be upheld, as the very virtues which have maintained the settlement of this country through previous years. I am bound to say that the people to whom we are seeking to give legislative assistance just now have fought the drought with an independent spirit equal to anything we have been able to observe in the past. They have held on to their farms to the last moment, without rushing to the Government for assistance. I am speaking, of course, of the farming community generally. There are exceptions. But speaking of them as a body, I am quite justified in making that statement. It would be a very great pity if anything were done to weaken the spirit that lies behind the independence of the people. One of the factors which has kept the settlers in those parts I have mentioned going has been the great spirit of hope which is in the breast of all humanity. Those people until quite recently have been buoyed up with the hope that better times would come, and that rain would fall. That induced them to adopt the course which they probably now regret they did adopt. It has been sug­gested that it is a great pity that all the stock, horses, and cattle, were not removed in the early part of the year. But the farmers were buoyed up in the hope that a change in the season would come, and they were anxious to have their stock at hand to take up at once their occupation as farmers—getting on with their seeding in the early part of the year, and fallowing in the middle part of the year. So they held on to their stock, believing that the season would change, and they would be able to prosecute their work. So early as March of this year, realising that last year had been droughty, and that in some parts there was a great, absence of feed and it was becoming costly to feed stock, the Government took action with a view of inducing the farmers in the Northern Areas to consider the advisableness of stocking feed for their horses in those parts of the State where feed was then obtainable. We sent a gentleman to meet the people in various localities; we notified them directly and by advertisement. The person appointed met many people, and on every occasion he was faced with this reply— “We wish to keep our horses here; it may rain, and when it does rain we will want them.” Consequently nothing was done for the moment. But had many of those horses been shifted at that time, they would have been in as bad or a worse plight now than they are by having been kept on the farms by the owners, because parts of the State which some time ago were looked upon as safe so far as feed is concerned have absolutely failed. The stock would have had to have been removed again. Double handling would have been necessary to have placed the stock where they are to-day. Unfortunately, the season still continued its tendency of absolute drought, and many of the people were at last compelled to meet the position of moving their stock to agistment. To meet the necessity which arose, the Government took every step possible to ascertain where feed was available. We called for reports from officers in the Government service, and from others who might have a knowledge. We asked them to volunteer that knowledge for the great advantage of the settlers whose horses had to be removed. But we realised that the civil service staff are not the practical men to look for and select agistment, by reason of their occupation. We then sought theassistance of thesettlers themselves. We invited them in the various centres affected to nominate practical mento come to the city toconfer withmyself and theofficers, with a view *of* taking actionin the desirable direction. A ready response *was* made to that request, and half a dozen or more men came to the city and discussed the question in all its bearings. The men were practical, useful men, who entered into the work with sense and zeal. We sent them throughout the State in various directions which they themselves recommended, in order to seek for feed. We made them for the moment Government officers paying them a fair remuneration for their time and trouble.

Those people were able to locate some feed for the horses. Fortunately some of the pastoralists have come forward and given us great assistance. We first had an offer from Mr. Brookes of Clifton Hills, at whose station there had been a fine rain some few months back and where there was a considerable amount of feed growing, and water was abundant. Mr. Brookes volunteered to the Government to take a great number of horses at his place at the nominal agistment fee of Is, per month. As a result a number of horses made for that direction. Unfortunately the season became droughty there, and the feed began to fail. But even at the present time I believe that the station is affording subsistence to a number of stock. Following on that fine example we have the splendid voluntary offer of Mr. Kidman in respect to a great number of his stations. He has practically placed at the disposal of the Government and the settlers quite a number of his runs, such as Tickalara, Annandale, and Pandy Pandy, on the Queensland border, and on one or two stations above Oodnadatta he has taken some stock. He is charging nothing at all for that agistment. That offer was a great relief to the Government, and has afforded great relief to the settlers. We are, of course, dependent as far as those properties are concerned, on the continuance of a season which will enable the feed to be maintained there. Those who have saved their horses will be able to get them back at some future time. We sincerelyhopethat by this means we will *save* the sinews of war*,* the draught horses, and when the time comes, we trustthatmany ofthose animalswill beinfair condition to work for their owners again. The greatest boon that couldcometo the communitywould be the break-up of the drought in the northern country, and past experienceleads us to hope that the break will occur there, in the country from Booleroo Centre to Petersburg. If rain should come it will produce a vast amount of feed in those localities,, and stock could be removed southward, so that they would be in a better condition for work next year. Mr. Gill, the Conservator of Forests, has kept a diary over a long period of years, and he records that in q896, when we had a similar year to the present one, the northern parts were looking in the same desolate condition as they are today, but a big rain fell towards the end of the month throughout the country round about Willowie and there was splendid feed. Ordinarily speaking, we look upon a summer rain as valueless in this part of the country, but it produces the best results as regards feed in the North.

Mr. Goode – The same applies to the Pinnaroo country.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—Yes, most mallee country benefits in this respect by a summer rain and we are hoping that the experience of 1896 will be repeated. Having attained some amount of agistment, the Government sought to urge settlers to remove their stock. Quite early in the present season we provided for a reduction of three-quarters of the ordinary railway freight from the drought-strickened districts, so that the charge would be a nominal one. The Government are pleased to know that their actions are appreciated, and that the facilities afforded were availed of to a considerable extent. In that way we helped the settlers to move 5,494 horses and 967 cattle. The Department of Agriculture also moved 1,300 head of dairy cows from the North. Not only was the concession on railway freight considerable, amounting, as I have been shown, to three-quarters of the ordinary freight, but in almost every instance they have not even asked for the payment of the quarter freight . We prefer to allow it to remain as a debt which the farmer be expected to pay when the prospects are very much better than at present. The figures I have quoted afford some answer to the complaint that we have not realised the position, and that we have done nothing to help the farmers. We took our steps early, and at a time when even the producers were not prepared to move their stock. The difficulty has increased as the season progressed, because the drought has become more widespread, and, unfortunately, at this moment there is not a single locality in South Australia that is not suffering. Even in the most favored part of the State—I refer to Mount Gambier—feed is not nearly as good as it is in ordinary seasons. On Yorke Peninsula, where it was hoped that the farmers would have a splendid crop, the disastrous effects of the dry season are now seen. We cannot now look for anything like a good crop from that part of the State, although the prospects of the early part of the season were excellent. The difficulties which have confronted the State are absolutely unprecedented, and we can only do our best to meet them. The Government have given careful consideration to every suggestion received. It is easy to make a proposal, but the Government, and all members who have been in a position of responsibility, know that it is difficult to give effect to all proposals. Early in the present year the position became so serious that in some districts the farmers were asking themselves, “What is the good of keeping on the farm? We have nothing this year to support us, and we do not know how we are going to put in a crop.” That question was one that exercised the minds of the Government. Quite early in the present season we were asked if we could hold out any hope for those farmers, and we had no hesitation in assuring them that if they remained on their farms, and got their land ready for a crop, the Government would see that they had seed wheat. In some portions of the State, particularly on the West Coast, there were great difficulties to be confronted in the removal of stock, because so many were mares with foals, or were in foal. The Government were asked if they could do something for those farmers, and we had no hesitation in promising that we would. For some time we have been quietly at work in securing a quantity of fodder. It was a difficult and delicate task, because we knew that there were hundreds and thousands of our people under the necessity of buying chaff and hay for their own purposes, and we were loth to take any steps to unduly disturb the market, realising that in such circumstances we would have done more harm than good. We have quietly procured some amount of fodder—what amount I do not feel disposed even now to state, because of the many difficulties which confront the Government—and we are in a position to help the most necessitous cases as they come before us. We have small quantities of chaff available at almost every point in the districts which are ordinarily looked upon as drought areas, and we will be able to assist a great number of people.

Mr. McDonald—Have you enough hay?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—Not anywhere near enough for everybody, unfortunately, but inquiries have been made, and I hope that the Government will soon be in a position to help a much greater number than at present.

Mr. Bodey—Is any grass available ?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—The only grass available is at the two extremities; in the Mount Gam-bier district in the south, and right away beyond Oodnadatta, and away to the north-east on the Queensland border. It is an extraordinary position, and that is the point which people who criticise should bear in mind. The very widespread nature of the drought has enormously increased the difficulties of the Government in discriminating with regard to the applications received for assistance.

At 6.30 p.m. the sitting of the House was suspended for one hour.

On the House resuming

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—When the House adjourned I was dealing with the difficulty which under normal circumstances faces any Ministry in office in dealing with a question that involves some concession or privilege to individual members of the community, and anyone who has experienced this responsibility will know that at the present juncture such difficulties are enormously increased. In view of that fact I have to express my regret at the attitude , of the Labour Party in respect to the matter. The immediate effect of this drought is almost equal to the effect of a war in our midst, and one expects that at least whatever profit might be attempted to be made out of any question for political purposes, the difficultiesof the settlers would not be made the grounds upon which to manufacture political capital.

Mr. Vaughan—You said the same thing about the unemployed.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—I referred to that in regard to the unemployed, and I refer to it again in regards to this particular question

Mr. Vaughan - They are both incorrect

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS-No. I propose to give illustrations of the attitude of the honorable member and some of the members and of his party, and of the official organ of his party which he was prepared to repudiate the other day.

Mr. Vaughan—That is another inexactitude.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—The honorable member the other day suggested that our quarrel was with the “ Daily Herald ” and not with the members of his party, and if he is guilty of making such a suggestion I do not wonder that he holds his head down occasionally.

Mr. Vaughan—I do not understand that reference.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—People who are in constant contact with the honorable member understand it. Not only did we expect that the 0pposition party would have taken this patriot view of the position, but they themselves knew that the people expected it, and they sought to suggest that they would take that attitude in the present crisis, and they posed as taking it, but I am bound to say that they have not been equal to their professions. It is somewhat satisfactory to the Government to realise that the chief criticism for months past has entirely and exclusively come from the party opposite and not from the settlers themselves, except in a few isolated cases. The settlers in the locations affected have almost universally acknowledged our difficulties, and have acknowledged that the Government have met them and that more has been done by the present Government than any previous Government have done in circumstances at all similar. One can only to the conclusion that this attitude has been adopted for the purpose of party politics- We had an instance in this House bearing upon assistance to farmers raised by Mr Cole, of a case of which he knew nothing except the exparte statement of the man himself, and in regard to the case at Smoky Bay without making any inquiries he made that a basis for an attack upon the Government. I have already indicated that in that particular stance the man has been very well treated bythe Government in respect to his advances, land, shed, and tank, but he has not on his part carried out his bare obligations to the Government so far as the expenditure of money is concerned. The gravamen of the charge was that in the case of an individual who owed £18, of which he had paid £12, the Government had been callous enough to insist upon the balance being paid, and when I said we did not know of the case, it was clearly enough indicated that we were telling an untruth in the matter, because it was pointed out that it would be an easy matter for us to ascertain the particulars of the case of a man »ho paid £12. It might have been so if the man had paid it; but, as a matter of fact, the man had not paid one penny of what he owed to the Survey Department, and so it was impossible to trace the case. The money he owed was not due to the drought year, but it was owed in August, 1913. The man has not paid up yet, and the Government have extended the time of payment of the money that fell due then and the money that fell due in August this year until January next, so that in this case the charges that have been levelled against the Government and myself in particular, and the officers of my department have failed. The party opposite have every reason to know the difficulties of meeting the enormous demand upon the Government at the present time, but rather than assisting me Mr. Denny last week sought to harass me and forced me into the position of declaring that the expenditure for the relief of the farmers would not apply all over the State, and that at a time when things had not reached the critical pitch they have reached this moment; and he attempted to misquote an answer in this House which could only have the effect of misleading the people outside by suggesting that we had determined not to act on every individual case upon its merits. He persisted in his inquiries until he had to retire from the contest because the correct answer showed that every case would be treated upon its merits, and that I, as Minister, had indicated that it was my desire that the party opposite should help the Government to keep the help of the distressed people within reasonable bounds, and that it was a fair thing to ask for that from the Opposition, and not for them to suggest that districts which were not usually called drought districts should have consideration; but they were not prepared to help. Then we had the question of chaff and hay the other day from Mr. Jackson, posing on the plea that he was considering the poor farmer. It was really a new role for the honorable member to play, but the tactics behind it were exposed in a second. I come to the policy and actions of the official organ of the party opposite, and this is the attitude. Any man in the community has simply to write and make all sorts of complaints about the Government and the paper is not only content with merely publishing the letter which I would not quarrel about, but it takes the letter and absorbs it into a leading article as a charge against the Government without making inquiries into the case.

The Hon. J. Verran—The paper is there to tickle the Government up.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—That is the meaning of it—to make political capital.

The Hon. J. Verran—It is nothing to what the “ Register ” says about us.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—The honorable member has fixed it to a nicety when he indicates that it is done for the purpose of making political capital, and still the honorable members are posing that they are standing behind the Government. We have seen a picture of a man standing behind another one with a dagger, and that probably may represent the position. I had occasion the other day to expose the very wicked and malicious statements of the paper concerning the cancellation of leases, and if that explanation did not bring shame to the honorable members opposite, I do not know what will. One of these cases was where a man asked for cancellation of his lease; another was where the lessee had been missing for two years, and the land was a quarter acre business block near Murat Bay; and the third was a closer settlement block near Monteith. The paper has not only been guilty on this question, but day after day as a matter of policy it has made accusations against the Government, and it has suggested to the community that we have absolutely ignored the circumstances of the moment and are callous to the condition of the settlers

Mr. Vaughan—I think it is more a charge of cancellation than anything else.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—No ; the accusation has been made that we have no regard for the people in these conditions, because the statement dealing with the cancellation of leases started by saying that though the Government posed as the friends of the producers they are cancelling leases. The only meaning to that is that we are harsh in our administration.

Mr. Vaughan—I think the responsibility rests with the Minister in not referring the matter back to the Surveyor-General. The responsibility is on the Surveyor- General and the Land Board.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—Does not the honorable member go further and say the responsibility is on the paper for making this statement. If the honorable member had investigated these cases would he not have supported the recommendation of the Surveyor-General ?

Mr. Vaughan—I do not know the merits of the case.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—Take the case of the settler who had been missing for two years. Would he not have followed the recommendation of the Surveyor-General and cancelled the lease? There was no need to go back to the Surveyor-General. I take the full responsibility of the three cases myself.

Mr. Vaughan—The advice of the Surveyor-General is nearly always followed.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—I go very carefully into cases where he advises, and seek, so far as possible, to satisfy myself that his recommendations are right. If I am not satisfied I invariably send a memo, for him to see me—a fact which many dozens of dockets will bear out. Even in today’s issue of the “ Herald,” in the pride of place is a paragraph as follows :—

It is heartbreaking to hear continuously of horses and cattle being shot because there is on feed to carry them through. Itis wicked steps were not taken earlier and more thoroughly to avert the calamity which is befalling the State in this respect

There is nobody in this community who, a month or two ago, expected that we should be faced by the position that we are in today. According to all past experiences we had a right to expect that the month of August would have produced rains in which event the outlook would have been immeasurably superior to what it is today and no people and no Government could have taken steps to avert this calamity. It is sent by Providence for His good reasons, and is beyond the capacity of any Government to have averted. To suggest that it is wicked that such a calamity has not been avoided is a very unjust accusation to make against the Government of the day. In the same issue of the “ Herald ” there appears a paragraph with head lines beginning “The Agriculture Crisis,” “Outlook Appalling”. Those are perfectly fair and accurate held lines. The third heading is “ Farmers leaving their holdings.” I am not so sure that that is absolutely accurate: indeed in the body of the paragraph it is not actually stated that they are leaving their holdings. The headlines continue “And shooting their horses.” That, unfortunately, is correct and nothing that could be done by anybody would prevent the shooting of some horses. The next headline is “ Government refusing assistance.” That is the bald heading without any inquiry as to why, and no statement of instances where refusal has been made. The paragraph itself opens •

Sir Richard Butler was right when he described the outlook as appalling.

Information reaches us every day of farm stock having been shot because the supplies of feed had been exhausted, and there was no money to buy fresh stocks. In some cases the Government had been applied to but had refused to assist.

That is not a fair paragraph to put in a paper without any inquiry as to what the cases were. The paragraph continues “ In one instance 10 brood mares were sacrificed. There is no evidence that the case was ever brought under the knowledge of the Government.

Mr. Moseley—I question whether it is true.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS - It may be true, but the fact is that we are helping people where we can in the matter of mares with foals. The paragraph continues –

A farmer who came from the Brown Well country states that nearly all the settlers in that locality, comprising three or four hundred would have to leave and swell the ranks of the unemployed in the city. They are trying to arrange for one or two of their number to take all of the horses to the Murray to see whether they can pick up enough to keep alive through the summer and autumn.

As a matter of fact we have practically had no applications for assistance from the Brown’s Well line. Only quite recently the country around Brown’s Well line was looked upon as an area to which starving stock could be taken, and we have had applications in the office within the last month from people applying for railway concessions to enable farmers to go there with their stock.

Mr. Vaughan—I had a letter to-day referring to distress in that district.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—No doubt, because the position has gone back rapidly.

The Attorney-General—There will be trouble even in the Hills shortly.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—'Yes, so absolutely widespread is the drought; but the suggestion in the paragraph is that the Government had not helped to avert the calamity by arranging for a suitable rainfall, which is the only form of help that could be suggested to meet the abounding difficulties.

Mr Vaughan—The Government did not secure the stocks of fodder that they might.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS - That is equally absurd, because if we had rain within the last month we have grown enough hay in South Australia for our needs. If members opposite had been in office they would have looked with every justification for rains in August and September, and would not have gone fleeing to Tasmania and New Zealand for shiploads of fodder, comprising thousands of tons, to keep our stock alive. Surely members opposite have not got the audacity to suggest that they would have anticipated a drought lasting right into October, and would have gone to the other States for fodder – a thing that no other State in Australia has done, although the position in every state is almost the same. We are constantly reading reports of a similar crisis in Western Australia, and almost equal difficulties in New South Wales, where they have had to shift millions of sheep, and are now in trouble with their horses. The position in Victoria, except in parts of Gippsland and the south-western comer, is almost equally acute, and I think I read in to day’s paper that horses in the Wimmera have had to be shot. The position is so absolutely unprecedented that not even the Opposition would have foreseen it and taken steps to meet the crisis. In the remaining part of the paragraph I have quoted from a person who was interviewed expresses his opinion that the Government will in future grow and lay by a big stock of fodder, say, 100,000 tons, to meet these crises. The answer to that is that in all the history of South Australia, notwithstanding droughts, in every instance, bar this one, South Australia has been the one State that has had more than sufficient fodder for herself, and in drought after drought has been an exporter of fodder to help the other States in their difficulties. So why should we have taken steps to accumulate 100,000 tons of fodder against a possibility, which our experience teaches us, ought not to occur again in the next century.

Mr. H. D. Young—You cannot store fodder for years.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—No ; and such a proceeding would be attended by great losses. The only thing to be said in respect of the future is that more and more the farmer has to learn the necessity individually to conserve to meet periodical droughts, although the farmers might well be excused for not having made such a provision in districts which hitherto have never known a failure. I am not quarrelling so much with the body of the paragraph I have quoted, but I say that the headlines are absolutely unfair, and indicate clearly the tactics behind this statement—a determination to make all possible capital out of the present position by accusing the Government of refusing assistance, and by suggesting that on that account farmers are leaving their holdings and shooting their horses. The newspaper in question is prepared to take up any case written to it without any inquiry. Members opposite know that the almost invariable courtesy of a newspaper which receives a letter containing a charge against the Government is to go to the Government and ask them what they have to say before they recklessly spread abroad a statement which may be wilfully malicious.

Mr. Ponder—But you have boycotted the “Herald.”

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—No. It is that paper’s duty before spreading lies to come and see whether there is any element of truth in any charges that are forwarded to it.V In addition to such obvious tactics in the organ of the Labor Party, which members inside the House willingly repudiate and deny their responsibility, I come to what is done in the House, and I say that the Leader of the Opposition put up a very poor attempt to make capital out of this provision by suggesting that the Government have no intention of distributing manures.

Mr. Vaughan—I repeat that the Premier’s answer to my question fully justifies that idea.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—The position is that Mr. Vaughan raised an Imperial question. He asked the Premier whether his attention had been drawn to a suggestion emanating between the Federal and Imperial Governments as to the question of securing as large production as possible next year in view of the world’s shortage, and whether in addition to seed wheat we could assist the farmers by granting manures. That the Premier accepted that question as an Imperial one is perfectly clear from his answer. He said

Without any suggestion from the Imperial Government, there is a necessity always in a State like South Australia, which relies so much on wheat-growing, and also in the other States, to produce as much wheat as possible.

The Premier went on to say that it was not the policy of the Government to supply free superphosphate and free money and all that kind of thing because the Imperial Government had drawn attention to the necessity for heavy production of wheat. Clearly the Premier was dealing with the question as an Imperial one, and not as one having any relation at all to the drought and the relief fund. Yet Mr. Vaughan has traded on that to suggest that so far as the distressed farmers are concerned, we do not intend to give any relief in the way of manures. It is almost stupid in its suggestion, because the Government have been educating the farmers for years to go in for scientific agriculture, particularly by the use of manures, and Mr. Vaughan must have known that in advancing money for seedwheat and other commodities the Government would not be so foolish as to withhold the one commodity looked upon as necessary to command success in agriculture. The fact that such an unjust accusation has been repeated every other day in the “ Herald ” shows that it is looked upon as being very valuable in the vote-catching line. The suggestion was that we were going to give wheat, and not manure pushed by the Opposition. In view of the memorial presented to the Government by members for Flinders and Burra in August, I minuted the following docket onto Mr. Kelly : “ I would be glad if Mr Kelly will prepare suggested provisions for the Bill. That was signed on August 7. Mr. Kelly made his suggestions on September 2. The first suggestion is “ Seed wheat not exceeding 250bush. to any one person. Manure, chaff, flour, or other commodities that may be approved shall be supplied”.. On September 5 I sent that on to tie Attorney-General for the Parliamentary Draftsman to prepare a Bill and confer with me. The honorable member’s question appeared in “Hansard” about 10 days afterwards, so the policy of the Government was clear, and as a matter of fact the Bill being printed about the time the honorable member’s question was asked. The measure was in our hands within two or three days after the matter had been arranged afresh. The suggestion about the Government’s attitude was traded on day after day and no answer from the Government was taken.

Mr. Vaughan—Why did you not say it If your position is misunderstood it is entirely your own fault.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWS LANDS—The Treasurer denied the inference the other day, and yet we have the “Herald” repeating the statement that the Government had no intention of distributing manures, although it-has been the policy of the farming community to manure with wheat. Although the “Herald” circulation may be next to nothing, the few who read it are very good at circulating lies. The tactics of the “Herald”

are even introduced into this House.

Mr. Vaughan—Of course the Premier was the first to make capital out of it.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—For very obvious reasons. The Government had already taken step- in the matter, and the honorable member knew we were introducing a Bill, and if he had wanted “manures” in that Bill he had only to move an Amendment, but he sought greater prominence and greater political results by giving notice of an independent motion, thereby involving two debates on the same question.

The Hon J. Verran—It takes the “Herald” tune you fellows up. We do not want any poison cart when we have the “Herald”.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—That is a very frank admission coming from the honorable member. The widespread nature of the drought means that a large number of cases have to be dealt with, and no Minister can deal with them. It falls to the lot of officers of the department to attend to them. During the last 12 months the officers of my department, upon whom I have to fall back, have given their devoted services of many hours a day over the ordinary office hours to meet the extraordinary demand made upon them, and they are officers of approved merit with service extending nearly up to 50 years. They have been dealing with cases from all parts of the State, and from great distances which negative any possibility of inquiry. The officers have to do their best with material their command. That material is infinite- greater than members opposite or their paper have before they criticise, and no Government officer can deal with the multitude of cases without making mistakes. The mistakes are more often in the direction of assisting undeserving cases than of refusing assistance where more favorable treatment should be given. I put it to honorable members opposite that these officers feel the criticism quite as much, if not more, than the Government of the day, who are quite aware that these officers are doing all they possibly can. If for on other reason this persistent persecution should cease. Mistakes will surely occur because they take place, no matter what Government are in power, even under normal circumstances. The Government are always willing to remedy mistakes when they have occurred, and surely the Government and the department should be free of such harassing tactics.

Mr Vaughan – Is this the Minister who harassed me over my land administration ?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS – I criticised his administration, and very justly too.

Mr Vaughan I - And my personal honor.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—No, never. That has never been challenged, but the honorable member need not draw that red herring across the track. I challenged his administration, and without going into that subject it comes curiously enough from an opposition who were hurled out of office by the electors of the State for maladministration, and who could not handle the affairs of the country even in prosperous times. While mistakes will surely be made the Government will continue to resent unjust and uninquiring criticism from the Opposition, and from discontented people throughout the community. The information the Government have may not be complete, but it is very much greater than members opposite, and their paper, have. Above that, the Government and their officers have an obligation to use their discretion, and they are not in the irresponsible position of members opposite, and the discontents among the general community. Even the farmers ought not to be singled out as a class to secure assistance without inquiry, and without consideration of every case. Although we are often called the producers’ Government we do not stand such an outrageous position as that. Mr. Kelly has not only given many years of great service to the State, but he has as intimate a knowledge of the farmers throughout the country as almost any man in the community. His handling of the seed wheat difficulties in the past has more than once been the theme of admiration in this House, and he is the gentleman who has been abused and criticised by people who know nothing about the individual cases. He has a complete record of every case in which assistance was previously given. He knows how those individuals have met their responsibilities with respect to seed wheat in the past. We know of cases of men who were assisted with seed wheat years ago, and have never paid anything back, although they have their land free from mortgage to-day, and yet these men are asking for further assistance now. Surely these are cases where discretion should be used. A man has only to write a letter proclaiming the harsh treatment he has received from the Government, and it is used as a foundation for a long article in a paper that does not wish to make capital out of the matter.

Mr. Chesson—Who has been challenging the administration of Mr. Kelly ?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—The Labor paper is challenging it every day in the week. I have before me a single instance in an article headed “ Government refusing assistance.” It is Mr. Kelly who is accused of refusing it. We as a Government would be the last to shirk our responsibilities, but an attack of this sort is against the officer who takes action. Mr. Kelly is given the responsibility of dealing with particular cases.

Mr. Vaughan—Why not make the money available for Mr. Kelly ?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—If we have not got the supplies, how can we give the assistance ?

Mr. Green—You do not suggest that Mr. Kelly administers the department without reference to the Minister ?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS — Of course he does not. He is given a free hand to avoid delay and to meet particular cases. He is constantly in touch with me on the general question. He knows the Government poliey. The Government policy as declared in this House is to help people in individual cases, and that those cases shall be dealt with on their merits.

Mr. Vaughan—The Ministry is responsible for the limitation.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—What limitation? The hon. member knows the supplies are at the demand of the officer. We have no limitation. So far as money is concerned there was no suggestion of limitation. With respect to commodities, the hon. member must go to some higher authority than us.

Mr. Vaughan—The point is that there is no indictment against the officer.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—If that is the point it is a very futile one. The hon. member ought to know that it is impossible for any Minister to deal with all the individual cases himself. Apart from the applications for horsefeed and similar assistance, in respect to which officers are constantly coming in and going out of my office, dealing with telegrams and letters from all parts of the country, there are many other forms of assistance which the Government are called on for.

Mr. Vaughan — The indictment is that you have not made for supplies.

The COMMISSIONER LANDS—The indictment is that we did not anticipate this drought.

Mr. Vaughan—No, it is not.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS-How on earth could we have anticipated the drought and made provision for it? The honorable member is blowing hot and cold, saying one thing one moment and another thing another moment. There is no basis for his charge that we did not make provision. We were not under an obligation to anticipate the present extraordinary position. The Government would be very foolish if they bought hay without considering the necessities of the future. You can only gauge the necessities of the future by having a prophetic mind. And no human b has that. How could one realise that September in South Australia was going to be a continuation of a drought which had lasted up to that time, and that this year we were going to have the greatest drought on record ? No one could have predicted it. The community took the most optimistic view of the position and hoped for the best. And what a poor life this would be if we did not do that. But unfortunately things did not come to the best, and the community is faced with the worst. The Government have to make every effort to keep the people on the land. As regards those who, from misfortune or otherwise have got no hope of pulling through, the greatest care has to be taken. That is where discretion has to be used. The man on the land who is hopelessly involved is not entitled to any greater assistance than the man in the street who is hopelessly involved through lack of employment. The purpose of this Bill is to keep people on the land. That is the great policy that justifies the measure. It is not merely the granting of seed wheat and manures. -As a State we are not simply helping settlers over a time of distress, and then leaving them in distress afterwards. That sort of thing would not serve any good purpose. That is a fact that a Government with any sense of responsibility must keep in mind There are cases that are repeatedly mentioned in the press. Of course those people will not be allowed to starve. The community is not going to allow anyone to starve if it can possibly prevent it, but any assistance given to such people must be on purely humanitarian grounds, and noton the grounds of this Bill. The case of those people can be represented to the Government, and will be dealt with as adequately as we can possibly dual with them. Let me repeat that mistakes will of course be made in such a great number of cases that will come under the view of the Government. But if a mistake is made surely it is the duty of the man who is affected by the mistake to come and ask the Government that his case may be reconsidered. Surely nothing else could be expected from such an individual. His duty is to make the request to the Government either direct or else through the members for his district. It is not for him to represent his case through a political press which is obviously out to criticise the Government. A men who does such a thing as that has two objects in view : one, of course, is to get his request granted, and the other is to put the Government at a political disadvantage. Any such case as that would be suspected of being without bona fides when the door for appeal is open in every direction. The Government are going to ignore letters in the press, whether they be signed or weather appear under a nom de plume, written by discontented people complaining about the treatment the treatment they have received from the Government. Let them put their facts before the Government; let them invite a statement from the Minister as to why their application has not been granted. If the Government’s reply is unsatisfactory every member of Parliament has the floor of the House to ventilate his grievance on in a proper and legitimate manner.

Mr Vaughan—I thought that was not allowed today

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS The honorable member in his shamelessness knows that the people he mentioned to-day had never made a request to the Government. He knows that the question he raised to-day had never been made to me.

Mr. Vaughan—I did not mention the district until you forced me to do so.

The COMMISSIONER, of CROWN LANDS—I knew that the honorable member did not represent an agricultural district where there were vigilance committees. The honorable member’s district is not one that is suffering from drought. The courteous thing would have been for the writer to have sent the matter on to his members — and members of the party opposite have suggested that course—and they could have handed the letter to me, instead of which the honorable member rushed on to the floor of the House in order to get what political advantage he could out of it. There was one case quoted the other day of a disappointed applicant. The letter was so obviously partisan that it might have made even the editor of the *“* Herald ” a little suspicious as to the bona fides of the writer. That letter stated that before a man could get assistance from the Government he had to get his case recommended from the local branch of the Liberal Union. That is an obviously a partisan and wicked suggestion to make. The man who wrote that is absolutely wanting, in my opinion, in bona fides. He cannot expect a Government to look upon his case as deserving of assistance. The duty of the Government is to resist to every reasonable extent the undue extension of cases under this Bill. The responsibilities of the Government are to the general community. We have to recognise that at this particular time the State is, from a financial standpoint, very unfortunately placed owing to the war. Although we have the utmost desire to give unlimited assistance, we have to remember our responsibilities. And I think that at this juncture and in such a period of national distress, the ordinary duties of an opposition should cease to a large extent. The question of the supply of seed wheat has frequently cropped up of late. The position has altered from week to week. It is easy enough for members to suggest fixing prices.

Mr. Vaughan—They have done it in four of the other States.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—Yes, but with how much credit to some of the States ? They have not realised the necessity of fairness, and in many cases the reason for their action is obvious. For instance, one State has been condemned by another by the variation in prices to the extent of 7d. per bushel. It is very difficult, indeed, to fix prices with justice, and in the case of the State that led off in this matter their action was determined not by the needs of farmers, but by the needs of speculators. No member of this community has asked to have the price of wheat fixed in South Australia, because there is no speculation at the moment. Any man can buy an unlimited quantity at a price not greater than you can buy it in Sydney from the retail shops, although the price is fixed at 4s. 2d. by the New South Wales Government. In South Australia not a single complaint has been made about the price of wheat and until complaint has been made the Commission cannot act in the direction suggested. The position to-day is infinitely worse than it was 10 days ago. Anything like a general rain 10 days ago would have meant abundant supplies so far as our own needs were concerned, but at the moment it is difficult to say whether we will get seed and flour. It is wonderful, however, what results follow a good general rain. In the meantime our supply of wheat is here, and it now remains to the Federal Government, to whom we have made representation, to prevent any of it leaving the State. The question of acquiring that wheat is one which will receive very close attention at the hands of the Government. The position in this respect is not any worse than it was a few weeks ago, as the wheat market in London has been going down steadily for days, and yesterday it was 5s. per quarter less than it was a fortnight ago.

Mr. Vaughan—Was that because of the action of the British Government, or was it due to the American position ?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—It was not due to the action of the British Government, as the market has been going down steadily for seven or eight days. Possibly the American price affected it, but it is also possible that Russia released her wheat, which of course has an important bearing on market prices. In South Australia we have no short dealers of wheat to any extent, and to indicate some of the injustice that could arise in fixing prices I will quote the case of New South Wales. That State fixed the price at 4s. 2d.at which price millers can purchase from merchants, and they are making flour as fast as they can and exporting it to Queensland where they get the world’s prices for it. That is what we have to contend against, because nobody has the power to prevent interstate trade. If the price is fixed like that, millers can grind as much flour as they like and Queensland and Tasmania will take all they can get at the world’s market price. The action of the New South Government has enabled the millers of that State to compete unfairly against the Australian millers, as in New South Wales they can get wheat at a price recognised to be below market value in any other State up to date. Even the Western Australian Government fixed the price at 4d. above New South Wales, and New South Wale is the one State where there is the least danger of shortage. It is quite possible that some members who have been urging the the price of wheat should be fixed have been actuated by some prejudice against merchants, but from enquiries made, we have learned that at least 70 per cent, of the wheat in South Australia belongs to the farmers. To those members, therefore, I would say if they have a prejudice against the merchants they should not use it as a cover for prejudice against the farmers. They should remember too that if the farmers had not stored their wheat the probability is that the whole of it would have been shipped before now and we would have been in a very much worse position than we are at present. As the result of the farmers policy of storing wheat we have in Australia, probably 15,000,000 bush. towards our requirements for the next 12 months, and we should not now go out of our way to try an deprive those people of the legitimate market price. When the Government do take steps in this matter to make available for seeding purposes the wheat stocks of this State we shall do it at market rates, apart from any undue price which might arise from local gambling at the moment. That is of course which nobody can cavil at. Let us remember that the producers have no protection as far as their livelihood is concerned. In perhaps 29 out of 30 years we are in an exporting community, and the farmer has to take world’s market as his price, and often enough when the world’s supply is plentiful he gets a correspondingly low price for his commodity. In face of these facts it strikes me as mean to use the necessities of the moment and the war as a lever to deprive them of a fair market value. Practically very one will fail to reap a crop this year, and probably very many farmers will have to sacrifice some of their horses. Yet this is the time when, if we acted upon the precedent established elsewhere, we should deprive them of the market price for their wheat. The wheat represents their saving, just as in the case of other people money in the bank represents their thrift, and it would be just as unfair for us to say that we would give a man 15s. for every pound he has in the bank, as it would be to say to the farmer that he should receive only a certain price for his wheat. The same remarks apply to the applies of hay and chaff which have been conserved by farmers. In this commodity South Australia has been a great exporting community, and during drought after drought large stocks have been drawn upon,

realising great sums of money from other parts of Australia and the world. Let me point out also that the price of wheattoday has barely affected the price of bread, which I think has not risen during the last few months.

Mr. Goode—It has risen in Naracoorte, where it is 4d. cash and 4 1/2d credit.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS - There has been no increase in the metropolitan area, and individual cases like that quoted by the honorable member are not always justifiable. I do not know the circumstances of that case. But the price of bread to-day is very reasonable compared with that of any other previous drought times. In the dought of 1902-3 the average price of wheat for the whole year was 5s.which meant that at the latter portion of the year the price must have gone over that amount. Many of us remember that it touched 6s. There was no war then, and way back in 1876 and 1877 theaverage price was 6s. 9d. In 1896-7 it averaged 5s. 2d.

Mr. Vaughan—There is no Australian shortage to-day.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—There may be within the next few months.

Mr. Goode—But you have been assuring us all along that there is enough for all requirements.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—So there was a few weeks ago, but the honorable member must know that the prospects have altered, and the position is not nearly so good as it was even a few days ago. At present, however, we have the best part of two million bushels in sight, quite apart from the harvest; and the lowest record we have ever had, even at a time when we did not use manures, or go in for scientific farming, was 1 ½ bush. per acre, and if we had that yield this year we would get nearly four million bushels of wheat, so it was not an idle or futile estimate to say that we had prospects of enough for our local needs.

Mr. Vaughan—How much do we want for seed wheat?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—I should think 2,500,000bush. would meet all requirements. But the seed wheat is one of the minor difficulties. The most important question will be to find the strength to put in a crop next year.

Mr. Goode—That is all the more reason why we should secure the very best possible seed wheat.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—Of course we will try to get all we can.

Mr. Goode—You ought to have tried six weeks ago.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS — The honorable member knows that- during the last six weeks no wheat has passed from the farmers to the merchants. When the wheat gets in the stack it is almost impossible to separate it into types. The practical man would recognise that difficulty.

Mr. Goode—You can go into the stack and pick out many types.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—There has been very little shifting which we can control. We have no power over the export for interstate trade, and the amount of shifting that has been done is absolutely insignificant, and it has been allowed by the Federal Government to enable existing contracts to be carried out with England and South Africa.

Mr. Goode—I am referring to internal shifting.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—The honorable member is referring to the shifting from Yongala of wheat which was taken to Terowie and was milled into wheat for Broken Hill.

Mr. Goode—Some of it might have been suitable for the seed.

Mr. Angas Parsons—Do you object to it being used for such a purpose?

Mr. Vaughan—That is worthy of a lawyer, but not of a member of this House.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—The honorable member cannot object to that, and I think the only other wheat that was shifted was a small quantity which went from Snow-town, which the Federal Government, after inquiry, permitted in order to carry out a contract. There is a certain amount of shifting for mills, and that must go on unless you want them to be thrown out of work. There is a great danger of that owing to the general system of stopping trade. The honorable member does not understand the ramifications of trade, because in helping Peter you may be robbing Paul, and I have no doubt the Federal Government have gone into the matter and have acted justly. I do not think there will be any shifting of wheat of any importance. The price of wheat is not only governed by drought effects in South Australia but elsewhere. The Russian crop has been what is regarded as a failure in Russia, and the Canadian crop at the last moment turned out to be 80 million bushels below what was expected. That is equal to the Australian supply in a bumper year. Victoria and New South Wales produce 30 million bushels each; South Australia, 20 million bushels; and the only other wheat State is Western Australia, which is 10 or 12 million bushels, so that the Canadian shortage is almost equal to the Australian year. The South African prospects are bad, and the Federal Government a constantly receiving cablegrams asking for wheat. The Argentine is also from a southern hemisphere drought, and the United States is one country enjoying a good harvest and the farmers there are receiving 6s,a bushel, so that there is no special cause to cavil at the price of wheat or the fixing of ot from a consumers’ point of view The policy as regards wheat is not dictated by the price or the existence of war. The policy is governed by the necessity of getting seed supplies, and the Government are prepared to act and to deal justly with every section of the community, and to see that the supplies are available for the settlers. The present condition in South Australia is more serious than was in 1896. The drought itself is more severe, because previously they did not have the amount of manures or scientific farming which is in vogue to-day . We have heard that there was a drought in 1865-6, and I have no doubt that it must have been severe, because it has lived in the memory of the old people; but, given equal circumstances, I think we are suffering more severe conditions to-day. In those times they had not reached the land upon which wheat-growing was regarded as precarious, and they had not the water supply, and as the North was well stocked it was rather a stock drought because of the difficulty in obtaining water. Those are the facts which should bear with those who say the Government did not make preparation for the drought. Every week has been in the direction of accentuating the difficulty. The Government have been in touch with the Foodstuffs Commission, although they have no power as regards the fixing of the price of wheat at present, and have discussed with the Commission the position from the point of view of the supply of seed, and Commission are now acting under the Foodstuffs Act. That Commission securing information as to the supplies of wheat and other commodities, and the exact localities where the supplies are at present located and hope at the end of the month to have exact information which will enable the Government to take supplies, and see that the whole of the wheat is available for seed purposes. We are taking many other steps in connection with wheat which would not be discrete to discuss, and we are doing our best in existing circumstances on behalf of the community; but if honorable members think perfect results can be obtained out of imperfect conditions they are asking us to take a responsibility which they themselves would not like to carry. We are seeking from the coming crop to secure seed wheat, because in that way we will be better able to obtain types, and we hope, with the assistance of the Agricultural Bureaus, and by being prepared to offer extra prices to those who can give us special types, to secure wheat suitable for seed. As regards the grain in stacks, it will be difficult to sort that out, but to some extent we may be able to do it. We are concerned as a Government in distributing seed wheat to see that we get the best return, not only for the individual, but for the State, which advances the money, and for the same reason we are offering manures, and, where it is possible, we are anxious to give the best type. We can only do our best to overcome all these difficulties, and speaking generally as a community, we have faced our difficulties, and coping with them in the best way possible. Whatever seed is available we have to look for the best possible results from It . Even if we not have seed true to type, we will not be worst off than we were in years gone by, when farmers did not trouble about the seed sowed; but we realise that we have progressed since then, and so far as circumstances will permit we will endeavour to sort out seed true to type. The Bill is worded and drawn in the most comprehensive fashion, to place the least possible restriction upon Government and the officers in meeting cases that may arise. It is almost impossible for anyone to depict the difficulties which we will have to meet during the next 12 months, and therefore it has been drawn as widely as possible. Clause 3 provides-

The Minister may, for the purpose of affording assistance to such settlers and other persons as he considers to be affected by the drought now prevailing in the State, supply applicants or cause them to be supplied upon credit with seed wheat, manure, hay, chaff, flour, and any other commodity which the Ministry think necessary for the said purpose, providing that no commodity shall be supplied under this Act after the 31st day of December 1915.

That will give Parliament the opportunity next year of dealing with the circumstances that then exist in such manner as will then be found necessary. We propose in section 4 to give assistance to persons who hold freehold or leasehold lands, including leases registered in the Land Titles Office. Clause 5 will enable us to deal with a section of our settlers who are in a precarious condition—share farmers. The share farmer is in a similar position to the working man in the ordinary sense of the word, only instead of receiving wages, he receives his return in kind. He receives wheat as his remuneration for his work of the year, and in many cases for the use of his stock.

Mr. Chesson—Does he not pay his rent in wheat instead of receiving his wages in wheat?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—No. The honorable member, if he had any experience in drawing up the agreement, would know that it is always put as wages, to avoid the stamp duty, if it was put as rent the agreement would have to be stamped. The result is that they have to pay Is. stamp duty instead of contributing more. We have provided that the share farmer can obtain assistance from the man whose land he is working. The ordinary person who ought to receive assistance is the person who owns and is living on his land. Generally the man who is not living on his land, but is working it on shares, has other means of livelihood, and we say that he should not be in a better position than the man who employs labor and pays wages. So we say to the share farmer that it is his business to find the money to continue operations. However, if he cannot do so we provide, under clause 5, that if he will make his land responsible for an advance just as the other class of settler has to do he, too, can obtain assistance.

Mr. McDonald—All advances are made a first mortgage on the land?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—Yes.

Mr. Angus—How will that apply under the Advances to Settlers Act ?

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS-—This will be a first charge in such eases, just as in the matter of advances for vermin netting. I would like to put it from the mortgagee’s point of view that we are doing something of very great advantage to him, inasmuch as we are going to make the land a going concern, which is very important. Applications have to be made to the Minister, and have to contain particulars as prescribed, so that we shall have the fullest information supplied by settlers to enable their cases to be dealt with. Clause 7 reads:—

If the Minister is satisfied that an applicant, or, in such a case as mentioned in section 5, the person on whose behalf the application was made—{a) bona fide intends forthwith to put the land held or farmed (as the case may be) by him, or part thereof, under crop, and is unable to do so without assistance under this Act, or (b) requires the com­modities applied for to feed his stock, or to maintain himself and his family (if any) on such land, he may grant to the applicant or to the person on whose behalf the application was made (according to the nature of the ease) such assistance under this Act as he thinks fit.

As regards fodder, we are not only willing to supply what we are able to buy ourselves, but are willing to pay for fodder which any man can procure himself from whatever source offers.

Mr. McDonald—Will you supply seed wheat to anybody who is able to pay for it ?

The COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS—Yes; if we have more than a sufficient supply; but those who cannot afford to pay for it will have the first call. Under clause 8 every person making application and receiving any commodity must sign an acknowledgment and sign a contract. Clause 9 provides that the cost of any commodity or commodities supplied under this Act shall be fixed by the Minister. The Government have in view the fact that many of our settlers will be starting at the bottom rung of the latter again, and if we have to pay extraordinary prices for any commodity owing to having to import it the Government are prepared to fix a moderate price to the settlers, and to throw the balance as a fair charge on the general community.

Mr. McDonald—Will the price for seed wheat be uniform all the season ?

The COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS—I imagine so, and I do not anticipate undue prices; but such commodities as chaff and hay are very high in price, and may be

we shall be justified in making a moderate charge in all circumstances, and throwing the balance, an infinitesimal amount, on to the community. Under clause 9 also the amount fixed for a commodity shall be deemed to be an advance by the Minister to an applicant. Interest will be calculated from December 31, 1915, at the rate of 4 ½ per cent. In this connection I repeat once more the statement that these people are starting at the bottom rung of the ladder, and we therefore propose to let them have the assistance for one year free of interest. Thereafter we hope that they will have their turn of fortune to justify interest running at the moderate rate of 4 ½ per cent. Clause 10 makes an advance a first charge on land and crops notwithstanding the provisions of the Real Property Act, which would involve a registration. Clause 9 further provides for repayment, but clause 11 sets out that before making any such demand the Minister shall take into consideration the profits made by an assisted person on or from the lands charged with such advance during any season or seasons prior to the making of such demands. The policy of this is obvious—that we are not looking for settlers to repay advances until such time as they have had a reasonable chance of success in their farming operations. If they are able to repay part of the advance, interest should be payable only on the balance remaining unpaid. Coming back to clause 9, there is power to make demand in case a man alienates his land, because that involves purchase money. Clause 12 makes the Act retrospective as regards assistance we have already given. The advances made to date will be deemed to be advances under this Act. Clause 13 makes punishable the furnishing of false statements. The penalty is a considerable one, because it is due from people who are seeking this assistance to tell the truth. There is also provision under section 14 for punishing people who misuse any commodity delivered to them. For example, anybody who obtains seed wheat and then sells it for money would be guilty of a very great offence against the community, and so would the personwho finds that he does not want wheat, and fails to return it, or the person whofails to furnish the returns and particulars required under this Act. Clause15 provides for the service of notices;16 for regulations under the Act; 17 deals with summary procedure for offences; 18 with appealsagainst convictions; 19 has relation to special cases arising out of prosecutions; and 20 provides that the Treasurer may from time to time make advances to the Minister for carrying out the purposesof the Act. A sort of Suspense Fund will be created, which will be wiped away in course of time by repayment from settlers, and there is provision for Parliament meeting any deficiency that may occur. The Government are desirous of making the help as complete as possible, and the only trouble is the difficulty facing any person who has to administer the Act. We shall endeavour to surmount the difficulties with the assistance of our expert officers, but the troubles are so widespread that we expect to call in outside assistance to some extent, as we propose to appoint a board to work under this Act. Members of that board will certainly include Messrs. Kelly and Field and we shall seek the help of outside people who have the business knowledgeto assist us.

Angas Parsons—I hope you will have distance of Mr. Miller.

The COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS - We hope to have such assistance as will enable the board to bring the best possible knowledge and devotion to the work in hand. We have been helped very considerably by many private individuals who have made numerous suggestions, many of which we should be glad to act upon. I also wish to mention in that connection members for the districts concerned. I include the members for Flinders and Burra Burra.

Mr Vaughan – And Stanley ?

The COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS of CROWN No I have not seen them.

The Treasurer – They raise their points in the House.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—I am bound to refer to the members I have. They have seen me constantly, and done it quietly enough in their desire to make helpful suggestions for overcoming our difficulties. Notwithstanding the different constituencies behind them that required assistance to a large extent, the members concerned had been just to the Government in dealing with the matters placed before them. We have endeavoured to meet them on every possible occasion, as we have endeavoured to meet all suggestions we have received. Members have treated me most fairly in placing their cases for consideration. It is gratifying also to hear expressions that I have done my best, and that the officers in the Department have also been of great assistance in dealing with the numerous requests that have come before them. It is with the greatest reluctance, indeed, that I bring this measure forward, not because I do not desire to help the people, but because I regret that the conditions existing in the State should have necessitated such a Bill being considered. I move the second reading.

Mr. VAUGHAN secured the adjournment of the debate until October 7.