**RIVER MURRAY WATERS ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1954**

Murray Waters Bill. £Novkmbkk 18,. 1951. | . River Murray Waters Bill. 1437

**Legislative Assembly, 18 November 1954, pages 1437-8**

Second reading

The Hon. T. Playford, for the Hon. McINT0SH, moved—

That the Speaker do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole for the purpose of considering the following resolution:—That it is desirable to introduce a Bill for an Act to ratify and approve an agreement for the further variation of the agreement entered into between the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth and the Premiers of the States of New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia, respecting the River Murray and Lake Victoria and other waters, and for other purposes.

Motion carried. Resolution agreed to in Committee and adopted by the House. Bill introduced and read a first time.

**The- Hon. T. Playford, for the Hon. M. McINTOSH (Minister of Works)—**I move— That this Bill be now read a second time.

The object is to ratify an agreement recently made between the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia respecting the works for the conservation and regulation of the River Murray waters. I will explain the provisions of the agreement in the order in which they occur. First, the agreement provides for increasing the size of the Hume Reservoir. Under the amending River Murray Waters Agreement of 1948 provision was made for increasing the capacity of the reservoir from 1,250,000 to 2,000,000 acre feet. Works for this purpose are being carried out and the capacity of the reservoir has now reached 1,382,000 acre feet. This is an interim stage and further increases of the capacity are dependent upon the removal of the town of Tallangatta, which is already in progress. Investigations made by the River Murray Commission have shown that it will not be economical at any time to increase the total storage of the Hume Reservoir above 2,500,000 acre feet and the Commission recommended that the Governments concerned should now agree to enlarge the reservoir to this extent, so that further construction works may proceed with this object in view. Completion of Hume Reservoir to 2,000,000 acre feet capacity and subsequent enlargement to 2,500,000 acre-feet would cost a great deal more in total than the enlargement to 2,500,000 acre feet in the one operation as now proposed. The increased capacity will be of considerable benefit to South Australia. The Engineer-in-Chief has estimated that the additional half-million acre feet the reservoir will enable this State to plan its development so as to use an additional 67,000 acre feet of water a year. This would be sufficient to irrigate 27,000 acres or, alternatively, to meet the domestic and industrial needs of 500,000 people. The Government, therefore, had no hesitation in supporting the proposal for increasing the size of the reservoir as set out in the agreement.

The next matter in the agreement is a provision for the construction of embankments and other works to prevent the loss of water from the Murray between Echuca and Tocumwal. At present a considerable amount of water flows from the Murray between these towns into small effluents from which no-one derives any appreciable benefit and it has been agreed to carry out suitable works at an estimated cost of £100,000 to prevent this loss.

As a consequence of the additional works mentioned above it is necessary to alter the financial provisions of the previous agreements. At present the River Murray Waters Agreement provides for an estimated expenditure of £14,000,000 to be shared equally by the four contracting Governments. The new agreement now submitted to members provides that the estimated cost of the works to be carried out will be £19,750,000. This total allows for a general increase in costs and includes a sum of £3,200,000 which is an estimate of the additional expenditure necessary to increase the Hume Reservoir from 2,000,000 to 2,500,000 acre feet. It also includes £100,000 for the works between Echuca and Tocumwal. South Australia’s share of the costs of the additional work is £825,000.

The new agreement also provides that if the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority makes a contribution towards the cost of enlarging the Hume Reservoir that contribution will be applied to reduce the amounts for which the Governments are liable under the agreement. The justification for the contribution is that the enlargement of the Hume Reservoir will relieve the Snowy Mountains Authority from the obligation to provide storage to regulate the large quantity of water which it will divert from the Snowy River into the Murray. Some negotiations have already taken place between the River Murray Commission and the Snowy Mountains Hydro- Electric Authority with the object of settling the amount of the contribution. Agreement has not yet been reached, but no doubt the matter will be settled in due course.

Finally, the agreement provides for an increase in the amount of water to be held in the Hume Reservoir as a reserve for use in years of drought. Under the 1948 agreement this reserve was fixed at a total of 550,000 acre feet. Under the new proposals it will be increased to 750,000 acre feet, as a result of which South Australia would receive an additional 50,000 acre feet in a drought year. The Engineer-in-Chief has calculated that the present reserve is sufficient to secure South Australia against loss of production through drought until the season 1957-1958, but that after that season the possibility of such losses would progressively increase. An additional 50,000 acre feet in drought years would therefore be of great value to this State.

From what has been said it will be apparent that the new agreement provides for South Australia, as well as for the other States, benefits which are of prime importance for the future development of Australia and the maintenance of an increased population. The Bill is therefore confidently submitted for the favourable consideration of Parliament.

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