**PRIMARY PRODUCERS ASSISTANCE BILL 1943**

**House of Assembly, 2 December 1943, pages 838-40**

Second reading

**The Hon. T. PLAYFORD (Gumeracha - Premier and Treasurer)—**I appreciate the action of the House in allowing me to proceed with the second reading of the Bill before it is on hon. members’ files.

Mr. LACEY (Port Pirie)— It is not out of any discourtesy to the Treasurer that I rise to a point of order, Mr. Speaker but I understand that in the ordinary routine of the business of the House questions should preceded with before a second reading debate on a Bill is begun. The Treasurer introduced this Bill and questions were stopped. I was under the impression that he would' proceed with the second reading after questions had been concluded, and I would like your ruling Mr. Speaker.

The SPEAKER—I have not called on the business of the day, and until that is called on questions may be asked, but during question time a Minister may present a Bill at the bar of the House. This has been the custom and practice for a long time and has been" followed to-day. In addition, the Notice Paper carries more than one contingent notice of motion, and the Treasurer has exercised his right under contingent notice of motion No. 2 and submitted a motion to the House to suspend Standing Orders, to which the House agreed. The Standing Orders being suspended, questions are also suspended, and the Treasurer is in order in making his second reading speech.

Mr. Lacey—Will questions go un afterwards!

The SPEAKER—That will depend on another emergency. Standing Orders provide that at 4 o’clock Orders of the Day shall be called on.

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—I appreciate that this is rather an unusual procedure, coming as it does during question time. What I have to say will only take a few moments and then questions can be continued. The reason I am going on with the Bill now is that I thought it would be desirable to make it available to hon. members over the week-end, so that they can consider its provisions and the measure will not be entirely new to them when debate on it takes place next week. We have two Acts—one dealing with farmers’ assistance and another with drought relief. For some time applications under these Acts have been in abeyance, and they are only functioning in regard to applications already in hand. It has been necessary to introduce this measure for several reasons. In the first place, there are a limited number of applications under tie Farmers Assistance Act, and it has become

necessary to consider whether we should have an expensive board to deal with only a relatively small number of cases. In the second place, even in a good season like the present we have found there are certain farmers in isolated districts in this State who have had a bad time and may need help before next season’s sowings have been completed. On the one hand we have a costly administration and on the other certain cases where assistance may be required and cannot be dealt with notwithstanding that full administration has been set up.

Certain anomalies exist in regard to the Debt Adjustment Act. Applications which have set down for consideration can be proceeded with, but others which may be just as meritorious and deserving of consideration can not be dealt with under the legislation. This Bill sets up a new type of control in place of the existing Drought Relief Board Debt and Adjustment Board. The control of these activities will be placed under a Minister who will have a board of three to make recommendations to him. The board will have the same power which existed under both the Drought Relief and Farmers Assistance Acts. The proposed board will make recommendations to the Minister, on which he will make decisions. The board will be appointed by the Governor—it will not be an elected body—and will hold office under the terms provided in the Bill. Two new features are associated with the Bill. As far as farmers’ assistance is concerned, a fund is to be established in the Treasury with moneys provided by Parliament and moneys repaid on advances previously made to assist farmers.

Mr. Stott—By advances, do you mean only advances for farmers’ assistance or under debt adjustment?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—A fund will be established to deal with debt adjustment. That fund must, of necessity, be kept separate from to general fund, because the money we used for debt adjustment originally came from the Commonwealth Government and when it was made available it was stipulated that the money was to be used for primary producers’ debts and that it should not in any way benefit the State Treasuries. Therefore, it could not be used merely for making seasonal advances. Certain sums were paid out originally which are subject to repayment. There is also a sum of about £60,000 in hand and a balance of about £300,000 to come from the Commonwealth Government under the principal Act. Only small mounts have been made available since the war and this year none whatever.

Mr. Christian—Does the Treasurer think we will ever get it?

He Hon. T. PLAYFORD—Until the war the Commonwealth each year made some contribution. By virtue of the fact that the States have not received the pro rata share to which they are entitled it would be unfair for the Commonwealth Government to cease payments.

Mr. Christian—Has it given any indication of its intention ?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—It has not indicated its intention to discontinue the payments, but in actual fact, no payment has been made this year.

The Hon. R. 8. Richards—There has been no restriction of operations as a consequence?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—No adjustments have been held up. Under this legislation both the Principal Acts are re-opened and placed under the control of the Treasurer who may act only on the advice of the properly constituted board. Two revolving funds are established purely and simply for the benefit of the primary producers.

Mr. Pearson—There is no closing date.

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—No, the legislation now becomes permanent and will be administered by public servants within the meaning of the Public Service Act. The department will become a branch of our Public Service which will be advantageous in many ways. Machinery will also be set up to deal with both debt adjustment and advances. There is one alteration to which I should draw attention. Under the original Act as soon as an application was lodged a stay of proceedings automatically came into effect in respect of the applicant’s debts. That does not obtain under the, new legislation, because it was found that, in some instances, applications were merely lodged with the object of obtaining a stay of proceedings, and the moment an application was dismissed a further application was lodged with a view to perpetuating the stay of proceedings. That was never intended by Par­liament. Under the new legislation it is provided that the Treasury may order a stay of proceedings if such appears to be necessary, but it will not be automatic.

Those are the main outlines of this legislation, and I think members will be satisfied that it meets the requirements of the times. Unfortunately, we still have primary producers in financial difficulties, and it will enable the Treasurer, on the recommendation of the board, to afford them relief, and at the same time it provides for a simple form of administration. The administrative machinery is very similar to that set up by this House when the question of drought relief last came up for consideration. The administration was placed in the hands of the Minister and it was provided that he should have an advisory committee. Instead of such a committee, in this instance it is rather more than that, because the Minister cannot act without a recommendation from it. That is justified, because we are now dealing with questions of debt adjustment in which large sums are involved, including amounts due directly to the Crown. To give any Minister the power to wipe out a debt to the Crown without a proper investigation would probably be injudicious and might lead to a certain amount of difficulty in administration.

The Hon. G. F. Jenkins—I do not know that the Crown should receive any more consideration in a case of that sort than a private individual.

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—I did not mean to imply that the Crown should have more consideration, but when a Minister is dealing with such matters, unless there is proper supervision undesirable practices might arise. The administration proposed is very similar to that in operation in the Lands Department, where the Minister may act upon the recommendation of the Land Board. He cannot take any action to lease land or fix prices without a recommendation from the Land Board. Members will find in the Bill much that will simplify the administration of debt adjustment and drought relief, and enable primary producers in difficult circumstances an opportunity to have their cases considered; while at the same time I believe that the administration will be effective and free from any type of abuse. I move the second reading.