**METROPOLITAN ABATTOIRS ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1914**

**House of Assembly, 10 November 1914, pages 1471-7**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS (Hon. F. W. Young)—**I desire to move that the Standing Orders be suspended to enable me to move a mo­tion without notice. It is in reference to a Bill affecting the Abattoirs. I find in the rush of business I overlooked the fact that there was a clause in the Bill which made it a money Bill, and therefore it should have been introduced by a resolution in Committee. It is the desire, I know, of honorable members to make some attempt to prorogue this week, and this measure involves an inquiry by Select Committee after the second reading is carried, and as I desire to advance it to that stage to-day I do not wish to take up time by giving fresh notice and starting over again. At a later stage I will move that the order of the day for the Bill now on the paper be read and discharged.

Standing Orders suspended.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS—I move—

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 that a Bill be introduced to further amend the Metropolitan Abattoirs Amendment Act, 1908, and to amend the Metropolitan Abattoirs Further Amendment Act, 1911, and for other purposes.”

Motion carried.

In Committee.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS said the Bill contained provisions which had been under honorable members’ notice for some time. It was very clear on the face of it, and it would have to be referred to a Select Committee, and after that inquiry mem­bers would be better able to deal with the measure.

Mr. JACKSON, said the Bill was one which was associated with most extraordinary proceedings, the like of which had never before been witnessed in this State. In the first place Parliament approved of a certain scheme being carried out, and when it was given effect to they found that the money set apart for the work was not sufficient. Then another Bill was introduced, and during the last four or five years from the time the first Bill was passed they had been going on amending the Bills relating to the Abattoirs, and granting extra money. He felt sure he was voicing the opinion of a great many members on both sides of the House when he said that Parliament had been duped in connection with the proposal. Evidence given before the various committees had been to the effect that if the money were forthcoming it would be all that was necessary, and they would be able to establish Abattoirs, that were necessary in the interests of the people. Yet within a few months of the demand being satisfied the board had asked for more money. The question arose as to when they were going to reach finality. Two years ago it was suggested that the House should make a stand against the inordinate demands made upon Parliament. The extraordinary expenditure should have been stopped, and if the work could not have been carried out in conformity with the original design, it could have been carried out on a reasonable scale. He understood that the measure was to some extent a validating one, because, notwithstanding the enormous amount the Board had received, they had overstepped the bounds; but it was a question whether the House was justified in granting the proposals brought forward by the Abattoirs Board, who somehow never seemed to know when they had sufficient to carry on. Notwithstanding the enormous expenditure there were continual complaints about the work of the institution, and if the Government were going to give the Board any more money, they should make strong representations to have Government nominees on the Board. It seemed to him that a great deal of money had been spent that should have been left over. It was stated that if the money was not forthcoming the whole arrangement would break down; but if it was going to break down for the want of a little more money, it could not have been well conducted up to the present. He thought the Commissioner might have given them a little more information, and also informed them whether the Government did not think the time had come to call a halt. If they were were the Abattoirs would be known as going on very much longer like they the great white elephant of Adelaide. The House was not justified in granting the money unless there was going to he something like finality. It was said that in order to make a business progress they had to spend money; but in the present case it was not the progress of the business, but it was to pay for things which were not considered necessary at first. If they had not been considered necessary at first, there was no necessity for the expenditure of the money on them now, and the only money they need grant should be to cover that which had been spent without legal authority, and which, if they stopped, would place the Board in a very awkward position. The only thing that stopped him from voting against giving the money was the fact that while the taxpayers were nominally guaranteeing the money, the Government were safeguarded by the fact that the ratepayers in Adelaide, and the contributing corporations, had to make up any loss in connection with the Abattoirs. That being so, the responsibility for the money was thrown upon the ratepayers in the metropolitan area; but as a consumer he considered that the great expenditure of money was making his meat dearer than it otherwise would have been. There was such a thing as purchasing meat at too high a cost, and while no one would like to see a return to the bad conditions of the past, a satisfactory meat supply should be obtained at a lesser cost. He would like the Commissioner to give some information before the report left the House.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS said the only information which could be given in connection with the point raised was set forth in Parliamentary Paper No. 7, which contained the First Progress Report of the Abattoirs Commission, on whose recommendation the loan of £35,000 was agreed to. The application for £35,000 was granted pending the introduction of a Bill authorising the proposed increased capital. The Committee went very thoroughly into the whole question, and he thought that as far as the £35,000 was concerned the Committee were unanimous. There was a slight dissent by Mr. Blundell, but that was not in connection with the granting of an additional amount. He regretted with others that the House had been called upon time and again to add to the capital of the Abattoirs. The movement was an experimental one, and the expenditure had been such that if it could have been foreseen Parliament would not have authorised the creation of an Abattoirs Trust.

Mr. Jackson—There would not have been a dozen members to support it.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS did not think there would have been, but when once one got into the net it was a difficult matter to get out, The Bill dealt as little as possible with matters involved in the Commission’s inquiry, and when the report of that Commission was received honorable members would have an opportunity of dealing with the Bill based on that report. It would doubtless be advisable to take steps to prevent the Abattoirs Board from incurring liabilities, believing that Parliament would later on come to their aid. This particular case had been represented to the Government as urgent, and as a Royal Commission was sitting at the time, it was at once referred to them for consideration.

Mr. ANSTEY, as a member of the Royal Commission, said the portion of the additional capital required was for new machinery, and when the matter was brought before the Commission they recognised that if the Abattoirs were to be successful it was necessary that they should have additional power for the chilling of meat, as the strain they had upon their original plant in the summer was more than it should have to bear. Many little things were done without Parliamentary sanction, but the Commission made a recommendation in its progress report that in future if the Abattoirs Board required a further advance it should be upon a vote of the ratepayers in the whole of the Abattoirs area. The Commission had had it in evidence that the total cost to the consumer over and above the price paid prior to the establishment of the Abattoirs was a shade under a halfpenny per lb. The increased cost of meat was due, not to the establishment of the Abattoirs, but to the increased cost of stock. It had been admitted by the butchers that the increased charges had been passed on to the consumer. He quite agreed with the Minister in charge of the amending Act that there should be some check upon the Abattoirs Board, and he thought that before any further expenditure was allowed, a vote of the ratepayers should be taken. Had Parliament and the public known when the Abattoirs Bill was first introduced that the whole scheme would run into £380,000, the scheme would never have been sanctioned. The increase in the estimated cost was largely due to the fact that the Abattoirs Board had been constructing on a rising market as from the time when the work was first started practically everything had increased in price from 25 to 50 per cent. He believed that the present system was practically perfect, and that the public were ensured of a pure meat supply.

Mr. MOSELEY thought that the honorable member for Stanley was quite justified in his remarks. He was rather astounded at the immense sum of money spent upon the Abattoirs, and when the Royal Commission inquiring into the matter, of which he was a member, first took the matter up, they found they were up against a stone wall, as the money for which they were asking had already been spent. The Abattoirs had been built in a perfect manner, not merely for the present, but equal to the requirements of the next 50 years. He had visited the Abattoirs in the other States, and said unre­servedly that the plant in South Australia was the best in the Commonwealth. The people were responsible for the payment, because as ratepayers they had their representatives on the Abattoirs Board, and while the Government were behind them the Government were not responsible, but the various corporations. He was of the opinion that we had the purest meat supply anywhere in Australia, and also the best deliveries. He saw the way in which the meat was delivered in other States, and in some cases it was a public scandal. At the outset it was understood that the price was not to be more than a halfpenny in excess of the previous ruling price, and that had not been exceeded. The expenditure of £35,000 was absolutely necessary. It seemed a pity to spoil the ship for a happ’orth of tar. The Commission were assured by the Board and by the Secretary, Mr. Ellery, that this would be the last loan required. The Commission took steps to prevent that any more should be asked for before the ratepayers had an opportunity of deciding the matter. It was absolutely necessary that the expenditure should be authorised.

Mr. DUHST, as a member of the Royal Commission, found from the evidence of Mr. Ellery that it was hardly possible to avoid the extra expenditure without endangering the meat supply for the metropolitan area. The experts who gave evidence before the Commission were agreed upon that point. Mr. Davis, the Director-General of works in Sydney, had taken many trips in connection with such undertakings, and that gentleman agreed that the Adelaide Abattoirs were undoubtedly the most perfect in Australia, and also that it would be extremely unwise if the extra expenditure were not authorised. The Sydney Abattoirs authorities had converted their hanging-rooms into cooling chambers, following the system in Adelaide, as they realised that this was the proper course to take, and in this matter they incurred a very heavy expenditure. As there would be another opportunity of speaking in connection with this matter he would content himself by supporting the motion.

Motion carried.

Resolution reported.

The Treasurer, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and the Attorney-General were appointed a Committee to prepare the Bill. The Bill was introduced, and read a first time, and the Standing Orders were suspended to enable the Bill to be read a second time.

Second reading.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN' LANDS—In Committee we have already- had a fairly ample discussion on clauses 3 and 4 of the Bill, dealing with the financial part, and relating to the expenditure of £35,000, which expenditure took place after the money had been advanced by the Government or the recommendation of the Royal Com­mission, as indicated in their progress report set forth in Parliamentary Paper No. 7. Section 5 of the Bill refers to the difficulties which arise between the Produce Depot and the Abattoirs Board in connection with the slaughtering of stock at the Depot and the disposal within the metropolitan area cf the carcasses. The Produce Depot exists for the export trade, but there are some portions of the carcass which are ordinarly regarded as by-products, and for which the only market is the metropolitan area of South Australia; so we are making provision in clause 5 to enable the Abattoirs Board and the Depot to make arrangements from time to time in connection with these by-products. As honorable members know, we cannot prevent by-products which are not produced at the Abattoirs works, but come from the other States, from being disposed of within the metropolitan area, and we see no reason why those produced at the Depot should not find the best market in this State. The Depot and the Abattoirs Board have been working up to date on an agreement which is nor signed, and the Government think it desirable that this agreement should be made effective, so it is proposed to have agreements of a temporary duration, with conditions which may be devised from time to time to fit in with the circumstances of the moment. Honorable members will realise the extraordinary importance of the Depot in normal times. We are a primary producing country, and it is important that we should have every facility to get our primary products on to the market as cheaply as possible. Clause 6 has relation to a matter of momentary, but great, importance to this State. Circumstances have arisen out of the drought which have had the effect of materially lessening the numbers of our stock, and, consequently, as no grower dare hold stock, because of the fear of starvation, there has been a more than ordinarily heavy supply coming on to the market. In ordinary circumstances, as soon as the butchers' requirements, were met, the balance would be bought for the export trade, and to some extent at a sacrifice to the producer. Acting on the advice of stock agents and our own officers, we have deemed it wise to ensure that this meat shall not go out of the country, but be retained, and become available at a time when probably the ordinary sources of supply will be diminished. Consequently, we are arranging for the Depot to take in animals, slaughter them, and place the carcases in cold storage until they may be required for local consumption. But before this can be done, it will be necessary that provision should be made to enable the carcases to be sold within the Abattoirs area. There may be some feeling that in this matter we are competing unfairly with the Abattoirs, but a little reflection will, I think, show that this is not so. That contention vanished on an investigation, because the stock we deal with is only the surplus of the weekly market, and without such provision these stock would have gravitated to the Produce Depot, and be held there for export, and not for internal consumption. The Abattoirs will lose nothing, because in time to come every weekly market will be short, and the Abattoirs will be able to get their revenue from the stock which passes through them, and the carcases which come from the Depot will make up the deficiency in the meat supply. The provision is intended to operate only until October next, when we all hope that the present unsatisfactory condition of things will have ended. Clauses 7, 8, and 9 are mostly machinery provisions to amend or improve existing legislation, to enable a better control over the meat supplies of the Abattoirs area. These clauses are intended to facilitate the proof of offences in legal proceedings in certain cases. Clause 8 prohibits the hawking of meat, and includes useful evidentiary provisions. The Board has power to make bylaws on this subject, and a bylaw has been made; but it has been found unenforceable in practice, owing to the impracticability of obtaining the evidence necessary for a conviction. I believe a number of actual instances have to be proved to meet the case; but where the person is obviously hawking meat for sale, it should constitute an offence. Clause 8 re-enacts the provision dealing with the sale of un­branded carcases contained in the principal Act, but makes the possession of an unbranded carcass presumptive evidence that it was kept for sale. Clause 10 rectifies a non-compliance on the part of the Abattoirs Board with the strict terms of the Abattoirs Act, which has in several cases prevented the Board taking proceedings for breaches of the Act. Under the Act the Board is required to give public notice of the date on and after which the Abattoirs would be available for the slaughtering of stock, and the new market at Gepp’s Cross would be available for the sale of stock. This notice was not in order, and it is necessary to meet that oversight, so that the whole of the work of the proclamation may not be lost. Clause 11 deals with a matter which was brought before me, I think, by the members for Port Adelaide, who pointed out, on behalf of the dairymen at Hilton, that they had to take their springers and dry cattle to be sold at the Abattoirs, when it was much more convenient for them to be disposed of at the milch cow market in Adelaide. This matter has been rectified. I have included no matter which may fairly well be left to the Royal Commission now sitting, feeling that further legislation may be necessary after those recommendations are received, and it may be that it will be desirable at that juncture to bring in some provision to protect this House from unnecessary or undesirable calls for fresh capital.

Mr. VAUGHAN—I offer no objection to the advances of the Abattoirs Board, to bring up to date the works which were established, and to afford further facilities to extend another branch of municipal development. It is not so much a question of the amount expended, as it is a matter of the return of the capital. It does not matter if we expend a million, if we can get interest and sinking fund back again, and I think in endeavoring to secure a pure meat supply the money spent has been worth while. It may be that mis takes have been made in the method of construction, but I am glad that conditions have settled down satisfactorily, and the management is more popular now than at the time when the Commission was first appointed, and the public seem more content with the way in which the meat is delivered. There will always be some friction in the establishment of an undertaking like this, and it is impossible to take this action without treading on someone’s corns. From what I have seen in some of the other States, Adelaide is to be congratulated upon having a pure meat supply. There are more provisions here in regard to the supervision and inspection than in the other States. I notice in clause 6 the Government have made an attempt to deal with the question of the shortage of meat; but I do not think they have gone the right way about it. They made no attempt to prevent the exportation of meat at a time when they were threatened with a shortage of supplies.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands— We asked the Federal Government not to allow the export without consulting us.

Mr. VAUGHAN—I was aware that an embargo had been put upon it, but I did not know that it was at the instigation of the Government.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands— We would like to get rid of some of the meat we have now.

Mr. VAUGHAN—When war broke out, it was necessary to prevent the meat being sent abroad because it might be used by the enemy, and we also should have seen that we had enough for ourselves in the face of the drought which was threatening. We all hope that no meat has been supplied to the enemy, but there must be supervision both on the exportation of meat and foodstuffs, because there are some unscrupulous persons who will always take advantage of the opportunity to make money, even by sacrificing their own country. The Government would have been well advised to have gone into the market and have purchased stock, and then sold it to the consumer when the shortage came.

Mr. Moseley—The residt would have been the same.

Mr. VAUGHAN—I do not think so.

Mr. James—Would you have gone in for a butcher’s shop?

Mr. VAUGHAN—I would not have minded. We have turned the Trades Hall into a baker’s shop, and would not mind if we could turn it into a butcher’s shop if we could get the meat. I do not think there would be any objection in a war time, even from members on the other side, if we went in for a butcher’s shop, although they do not believe in this form of State enterprise.

The Treasurer—You are always very much in favor of a Government soup kitchen.

Mr. VAUGHAN—I know the Treasurer wants to claim credit for the establishment of that great Socialistic soup kitchen—the Government Produce Depot.

The Treasurer—You want to claim credit for what you are not entitled to.

Mr. VAUGHAN—No, I proved that it was on the Labor Party’s platform before it was brought before the House, and in the “Advertiser” of February 17, 1893, there appears the Labor Party platform, which shows that they advocated the establishment of a system of giving assistance for wheat, wool, wine, and agricultural and horticultural producers to assist in transshipping the produce so that the producer might get the benefit of the London market. This is an extension of the functions of the Produce Depot, and I regret that the Government did not seize the opportunity of buying meat and selling it at a reasonable margin of profit to the consumer. We would have ensured the consumer getting the meat at a fair price.

Mr. Laffer-—Have not the Government been doing that?

Mr. VAUGHAN—They have been storing it on behalf of private persons, and if they have been doing otherwise it is news to me. I do not think honorable members are seized of the importance of Clause 7. I have not heard any adequate reason why this clause should be inserted. I believe it was proposed some time ago by the City Council, and the point wants careful investigation.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands. There will be a Select Committee to inquire into the Bill.

Mr. VAUGHAN—Yes, I would like that Committee to go into the question carefully, because it is very important from the consumers’ point of view. The butcher has to send a man round to get the order, and then send another man to make deliveries, which naturally increases the cost of the person buying. Under this clause a butcher will not be allowed to hawk meat to his customers.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands— That is a recommendation of the Abattoirs Board.

Mr. VAUGHAN—I believe they do it on hygienic grounds, but we should be satisfied before going too far that meat exposed in butchers’ shops is protected from the consumers’ point of view. The very fine point, and we should be very careful before the cost to the consumer should be increased. I support the Bill.

Mr. GOODE—I regret that there has been continual application to Parliament for additional funds for keeping the Abattoirs going or to complete the work originally authorised by Parliament. It seems a bad policy for any public body to spend money as the Abattoirs Board have done, and then come to Parliament to whitewash their actions. We all recognise how necessary it is to have a pure meat supply, but I think there is a tendency to carry the matter too far. There are other commodities, such as bread and milk, which should have equal consideration, and in connection with the regulations relating to milk there was nothing to prevent one day’s supply being mixed with the next day’s supply.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands— I believe the idea is to prevent meat being brought in from outside the Abattoirs area.

Mr. GOODE—That may be so. I am strongly opposed to the consumer being put to a disadvantage. As far as this Bill is concerned, it has to go before a Select Committee, and I trust that the inquiries made by that Committee will be the means of safeguarding the public purse with respect to moneys proposed to be advanced under this Bill, and will protect the trade from being unnecessarily hampered. I support the Bill.

Mr. ANSTEY—I am sorry the Commissioner, instead of seeking to amend the Abattoirs Act, did not bring in a special Act, as in my opinion this should be dealt with in the way of seed wheat and other supplies to the farmers. It is only to meet special circumstances, so that instead of having later on a scarcity of meat, prices may be kept within reasonable bounds. I think the conditions could have been met by introducing a special Act. I am also sorry that the Commissioner has not dealt with the question of by-products.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—You are, as a Commission, dealing with that.

Mr. ANSTEY—We have taken evidence in connection with that point. The original Act has been suspended, and the by-products are allowed to come in, and when an amending Act is introduced legal sanction should have been given to that.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands— We want the Commission to make re­commendations before they are embodied in a Bill.

Mr. ANSTEY—We intend to deal with that. It seems absurd to allow bacon and other produce of that kind to come into the metropolitan area regardless of the fact that there has been no inspection, and yet by-products are not allowed to come in. I think the Government were wise in suspending the regulation, and I would like to see Par­liamentary sanction given to it. I have been wondering why it is necessary to insert clause 9 in the amending Act.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands— It throws the onus of proof on a man holding an unbranded carcass.

Mr. ANSTEY—I have no objection to the amending Bill, other than that it should have been regarded as a special Bill brought in for a special purpose, and should become inoperative after a given time, in the same way as the Drought Bill, and other special measures we have passed.

Bill read a second time.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS moved —

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee, consisting of Messrs. Moseley (Chairman), Anstey, Blundell, and Duhst, and the mover, and that the Committee have leave to sit during the sittings of the House, and to call for persons, papers, and records, and report on Thursday next week.

Motion carried.