**IRRIGATION AND RECLAIMED LANDS ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 1919**

**Legislative Council, 6 November 1919, pages 1680-2**

Second reading

**The MINISTER of IRRIGATION (Hon. J. G. Bice)** — This Bill has been found necessary in consequence of what might be called the abnormal development of our irrigation settlements and irrigation lands on the Murray. The position in regard to township lands on irrigation areas is very different from what it is on ordinary irrigation lands. Therefore the Government propose a new method of dealing with those lands which will bring to the Government a revenue justifiable from the point of view that Government money made those township lands valuable. Under the Act as it stands at present township allotments are sold by auction, and the buyer takes an estate of freehold. Although every precaution is taken to prevent the allotments being purchased for purely speculative purposes, these intentions are being evaded in many cases, both at Waikerie and Berri, and more particularly at the latter place. Blocks which were sold at comparatively low values at the original sale have not been in any way improved. Yet the owners either refuse to sell, or ask such exorbitant prices as to prevent business men from purchasing. In such cases the increase of value of the blocks is almost entirely due to the expenditure of Government money in connection with that particular settlement. Take for instance the towns of Berri and Waikerie. Before these towns had been in existence for any length of time considerable sums had to be expended in buying up land for the purpose of enlarging their boundaries. At Waikerie the whole of the business portion is fully occupied, and we are negotiating for the purchase of a 20-acre block required to increase the area of the township, and for which £6,000 is asked. The negotiations have not been completed, neither do I see any prospect of bringing them to a successful issue without this Bill, whereby we can get a revenue commensurate to the large expenditure we must be put to in increasing the boundaries of these towns. What applies to Waikerie and Berri applies to other irrigation towns. We have, however, taken the precaution in regard to the garden settlement of Lake Bonney to reserve a sufficient area for all time. As to other irrigation towns, however, we find that the speculator has bought the land, and the business man has to spend a large sum to get a small location on which to establish his business. In order to remedy this state of affairs, clause 3 of the Bill provides that town allotments are to be let on perpetual lease at rentals to be fixed by the Land Board. The rentals will be subject to revaluation every 14 years in the manner specified in the Crown Lands Act, 1915. Subclause (2) provides that the full amount of the annual rent for a town allotment is to be due and payable in advance. This provision is necessary in view of section 22 of the principal Act, which provides for payment of portion only of the rent during the first three years.

The Hon. F. S. Wallis—The principle of perpetual leasing should have been instituted long ago.

The MINISTER of IRRIGATION—I quite agree that it should have in regard to these particular areas, seeing that the whole value is made up by the expenditure of public money. Then there is another question which I have some diffidence in touching upon. The necessity of doing so has, however, been forced upon me. There is no possible doubt that very many hundreds of our returned soldiers who are not yet in a normal condition, and private citizens as well, are subject to temptation through there being licensed premises in these areas. This Bill, in clause 4, provides that no licence for the sale of liquor is to be granted in respect to any premises situated within an irrigation area without the consent of the Minister.

The Hon. D. J. Gordon—That is right; these places are Government colonies.

The MINISTER of IRRIGATION—They are, and exceptional circumstances exist in regard to them. I am receiving letters every day in regard to this aspect. I received one only this week from a man who has done a great deal of contracting work in these localities, and he assures me that, if the proposed licence for the sale of liquor at Cobdogla is granted, the cost of clearing the land will be increased by at least 10s. per acre. From what I have heard and seen I believe that that estimate is a conservative one. The inability of the men to do a fair day’s work after visiting these premises convinces me that some action must be taken. Some time ago a proposal came before the Licensing Bench for the removal of a licence from Redruth to Cobdogla. I viewed that proposal with great concern. We have hundreds of men working at Cobdogla, and it is proposed to build a lock near there, which will mean the employment of an additional 200 or 300 men. Those people must be protected from the effects of the drink traffic. What I propose is that before that or any other licence is issued the consent of the Minister must be obtained. That is a reasonable proposition. The Government are spending thousands of pounds of the taxpayers’ money, and the department is increasing by leaps and bounds—something like 1,400 men are now employed by the department—and all the officers are agreed that something must be done in this direction. I therefore ask members to agree to this Bill, which contains no other provisions beside the leasing of township blocks and that giving more protection than we have at present against the indiscriminate issue of licences for the sale of liquor in those localities.

The Hon. D. J. GORDON—I am not going to delay the passing of this Bill a single minute longer than is necessary. I heartily support it. It is a marvel that it was not brought down and agreed to long ago. It contains two very desirable reforms, and I trust no hindrance to its becoming law will take place.

The Hon. J. H. COOIQ3—This is one of the most useful and beneficial measures we have had before us for some time. The conditions underlying the towns on the Murray are entirely different from what obtain elsewhere. Those who do not approve of control of the nature set out in the Bill can accept the position by keeping away from such a township. The Government will find that the introduction of the leasing system to places where they are practically pioneering the whole thing will have successful results. There is no question that the control of the liquor business is desirable in those places where so much pioneering work has to be done. It is well to have an industrious and sober community, and the provisions of this measure will tend to that end.

The Hon. F. S. WALLIS—I support this Bill, which might well have been introduced long ago. The principle of leasing township allotments is one I have believed in for many years. In respect to clause 4, dealing with restrictions on the sale of liquor, I am in accord with what the Minister has said in connection with the necessity for giving the power desired, and nothing but good can result from the passing of the measure.

The Hon. W. MORROW—I heartily support this measure, and while, like other members, I regret that it was not introduced before, I congratulate the Government on the fact that they have now taken the necessary steps to protect the men in these areas. Those who have made themselves acquainted with the conditions at some of the irrigation townships cannot escape from the conclusion that the interests of the men are being considerably imperilled, and the men themselves are being considerably injured, by the traffic in alcoholic liquors. I much appreciate the statement made by the Minister this afternoon, and it indicates his sincerity in the assurance that he has given, not only to members, but to a deputation which waited on him, that he is anxious to conserve the interest of the returned soldiers and to protect them so far as the Government are able.

Bill read a second time and passed its remaining stages.