**SOUTH-EASTERN DRAINAGE ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 1919**

**Legislative Council, 29 October 1919, pages 1475-6**

Second reading

**The CHIEF SECRETARY (Hon. J. G. Bice)** —This is a small Bill which has been found necessary to get over some difficult points in administration with regard to drains that will have to be constructed in the South-East to make possible the profitable use of the larger drains which have already been put down. There is only one principle affected in this Bill, and that is the question of how the money shall be collected on the different tenures of land held there. We must clear up that point, because we want to make the drainage system as effective as we can. To ensure the increased development of which the South-East is so sadly in need it is necessary to put this small measure through. By an amending South-Eastern Drainage Act, passed in 1917 (No. 1295), the Crown was made liable to contribute in respect of' Crown lands other than lands held under perpetual lease towards the capital cost of constructing drains in the South-East. This was done by way of an amendment of the definition of “landholder,” which provided that as to Crown lands unleased or leased on other than perpetual lease, “landholder” means the Commissioner of Crown Lands. In the result not only do lessees under miscellaneous leases, the persons principally intended to be affected by the measure, escape the liability to contribute in the first instance towards the cost of construction, but lessees under lease with right of purchase also escape. This is a form of tenure of Crown lands which has now been discontinued, but there are some of these leases. still subsisting in the portion of the State benefited by the construction of the drains. Lessees under a lease with right of purchase hold the land for a period of 21 years, and have a right of renewal for a further term of 21 years, and may in addition at any time complete the purchase at a fixed price. In the great majority of cases these lessees become the owners of the fee simple of the land, or else surrender the right-of-purchase leases for perpetual leases. It is therefore felt that lessees under lease with right-of-purchase should not be treated in any manner different from owners of the land or holders of perpetual leases, and that they, and not the Commissioner of Crown Lands, should be primarily liable to contribute towards the cost of constructing the drain. This is the effect of clause 3. The amendment is made retrospective to the passing of the amending Act of 1917 already mentioned (sub-clause), and provision is made for the necessary adjustments in the “Gazette” notices of the final apportionment of the cost of construction (sub-clause (3) ). Clause 4 enables a drain to be enlarged or deepened on petition by the landholders. At present, under the provisions of the principal Act, this cannot be done. A petition may be presented by landholders requesting that a drain or drains be constructed, but once the drain has been constructed in

accordance with the petition no further petition can be presented with respect to the same drain. In some cases, as for instance in the case of the Mount Benson petition drain, it has been found desirable to deepen or regrade the drain. Clause 4 enables a petition to be presented for this purpose, and provides for giving effect to the prayer of the petition. It will be seen in regard to this Bill that there is a very simple proposition. I want members to realise the position in regard to drainage in the South-East. It is a subject that demands their earnest attention from the point of view of an adequate return being given to the State, either in the form of a direct contribution to the cost or in the form of a much increased population, so as to enable us to have a much greater production and revenue from that valuable portion of the State. It is generally admitted that the rich lands of the South-East could support a greater population than the population of the whole of South Australia at present, and everything that can be done by members to enable the Government to be recompensed for the great expenditure in carrying out the drainage works in that part of the State should be done. We have spent over £800,000 in the South-East in drainage works. That amount has been willingly spent with the view of bringing those valuable lands into occupation and enabling the settlers already there to get a better return. It will be within the recollection of members how within the last few years the scheme has been varied in regard to carrying the water away to the north instead of taking it from one holding and leading it to another, thus causing heartburning and trouble all round. Under the new scheme we are carrying out we are cutting through the bulwarks between the richer land and the coast, and letting the water run to the sea. Under the original scheme there were only a few openings whereby the water could get away, but under the new system we have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds cutting through the Woakwine Ranges, and providing other openings, so as to enable the water to get to the sea more quickly, and thus completely drain the land. We have in Millicent an example of what can be done by a complete system of draining. While I was administering the South-Eastern drainage works I endeavored to get such information as would lead to the establishment of another concentrated area completely drained which would build up in the South-East a settled prosperous population such as there is in Millicent to-day. We must conclude that the land around Millicent is wholly occupied because during the last 21 years the population has been at a standstill. Indeed the popu­lation has been at a standstill as regards five district councils which comprise the whole drainage area. As a matter of fact since 1917 the population in that area, where so much money has been spent in drainage, has decreased by something like 100 persons. That is a result that should not be. With all the money spent in developing that country there should be a better result generally. If we can bring about another concentrated area by utilising the methods provided in the Act, connecting up the scheme drains, and putting the responsibility on the people who benefit, we may see the great advance and the large increase in population we so much desire. I am sure that members will agree that every effort should be made to increase population and production in one of the best districts of the State. I move the second reading.

The Hon. J. BOTTEBILL secured the adjournment of the debate until October 30.