**DROUGHT RELIEF BILL 1946**

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**Legislative Assembly, 27 March 1946, pages 32-3**

Second reading

**The Hon. T. PLAYFORD**—This Bill makes further provision for the assistance of farmers who have suffered loss through last year’s drought. In November, 1945, a Bill was passed which enabled the Government to make loans to these farmers, but since then a good deal of evidence has been placed before the Government in support of the view that some farmers need more than loans to extricate them from their difficulties. It has been found that where farmers have had two successive years of drought they are reluctant to accept, as a means of extrication, a loan which in many instances only involves them in further financial difficulties. Recently I personally made an inspection of Eyre Peninsula and found that conditions in certain parts were deplorable. On the West Coast, particularly, a number of farmers have had total failures of crop and very large losses of sheep. Some of them are already heavily in debt, and loans only add to their indebtedness and make things harder than ever for them in the future. It is argued, therefore, and with considerable force, that if these men are to stay on their holdings it is .desirable to alleviate their position by grants similar to those provided for by the drought relief legislation of 1944.

As soon as the Government was apprized of the position of these settlers, it obtained full particulars from local agricultural officers and communicated with the Commonwealth Government to ascertain whether it would share half the cost of a scheme of grants. The Commonwealth agreed to list the matter for consideration at the January Premiers’ Conference. At the conference the Premiers resolved that the matter of drought relief grants should be investigated by Commonwealth officers in con­junction with State authorities, and that they should report to their Governments. Pursuant to this resolution an officers’ conference was held in February last. The officers worked out, a scheme for grants, and from their knowledge of the bad effects of the drought in certain parts of South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales they expressed the view that assistance by way of grants was necessary for cereal growers in certain areas. They also expressed the view that the established policy was that drought relief was a State function and that the Commonwealth assisted only where, the drought was so widespread that the relief required was beyond the financial capacity of the State concerned. So far, efforts by the State Government to persuade the Commonwealth to change its views have not succeeded, but the matter is again before it and I am not completely unhopeful that there will not be a further grant in the meantime. The Government is therefore proceeding with the present Bill to provide for grants financed wholly out of State revenue. The Bill appropriates the sum of £125,000 out of general revenue for this purpose. It provides that if arrangements should be made with the Commonwealth for a joint scheme, then the drought relief grants will be distributed in accordance with those arrangements. If, however, no such arrangements are made, the grants will be distributed in accordance with directions to be given by the Minister of Agriculture. Probably the grant will be based on similar lines to that of last year, but, of course, the amount will fluctuate this year because only one authority is contributing, whereas last time there were two. Advances will be limited to cereal growers.

Mr. Thompson—What about dried fruit and lambs?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—The Government contemplates making grants to cereal growers. The £125,000, which is all the State can possibly make available for the purpose this year, would not permit of any extension to other production.

Mr. Stott—If the Commonwealth Government does not subscribe any money, will the State Government make the grant up to 6s. 6d. an acre?

The Hon. T. PLAYFORD—I cannot make any definite statement on that, but it is expected that 6s. 6d. per acre will be available for wheat, with corresponding amounts for barley and oats. It is not the Government ’s policy to pay bounties for areas that are not actually sown. I believe that last year some areas were prepared for seeding but were not sown

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Mr, Christian—Will the scale of payments be the same as if the Commonwealth Government came into the scheme?

The Hon. T. PLAYFOBD—If the Commonwealth Government comes in the scale will automatically increase to 12s. 6d. The Bill contains provisions similar to those of the 1944 Act for protecting the grants against preexisting creditors of the farmer, and the usual provisions as to regulations and exemption from stamp duty. It is the Government’s desire that the passage of the Bill be expedited. The money will be made available as quickly as possible and we will take all steps to see that application forms are ready without delay. I commend the Bill to members and move the second reading.

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The Hon. R. S. RICHARDS secured the adjournment of the debate.