CATTLE COMPENSATION ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1967

House of Assembly, 11 July 1967, page 482

Second reading

His Excellency the Governor’s Deputy, by message, recommended to the House of Assembly the appropriation of such amounts of money as might be required for the purposes mentioned in the Bill.

The Hon. J. D. CORCORAN (Minister of Lands): I move:

*That this Bill be now read a second time.*

It amends the Cattle Compensation Act, which set up a Cattle Compensation Fund and provided that compensation may be paid out of that fund to owners who suffer loss by reason of the destruction of cattle or carcasses that are infected or suspected of being infected with diseases prescribed by or under that Act . The fund is built up by a levy, called cattle stamp duty, payable on the sale of cattle.

Since its passage in 1939 the Act has been amended several times and the end result of the amendments has been:

(a) to reduce the levy payable under the Act, calculated on the sale of an average animal, by more than 30 per cent;

(b) to increase the maximum amount of compensation payable under the Act for the destruction of an animal from the equivalent of $40 to $120; and

(c) to provide an alternative means of paying the levy under the Act.

In spite of the substantial decrease in the amount of the levy and the even more substantial increase in the maximum compensation payable under the Act, the fund has developed considerably from, in round figures, the equivalent of $112,000 in 1953 to $275,000 on June 30, 1967.

To date, most claims against the fund have been in respect of bovine tuberculosis. For the year ended June 30, 1954, compensation was paid in respect of 248 head of cattle suffering or suspected of suffering from this disease and, in respect of the year ended June 30, 1966, this figure was 174. This drop occurred despite an increase over the period of more than 25 per cent in the number of carcasses inspected on the slaughter floor. No doubt this decline in numbers for which compensation was paid is related to the tuberculosis testing programme undertaken by the Agriculture Department. The success of the programme may be judged by the marked decrease in the number of reactors to the tests administered under the programme. In 1953-54 about 33,000 cattle were tested and 108 reactors were detected, whilst in 1965-66 about 43,000 cattle were tested and only 20 reactors were detected.

The number of reactors has declined at a faster rate than have the numbers of cattle for which compensation has been paid. This is accounted for by the fact that compensation is payable under the Act for cattle coming from outside the area in which the programme is operating. This shows the need for an extension of the programme. The need for the programme cannot be denied. Bovine tuberculosis is a distinct health risk in that it can be transmitted through milk and, to a lesser extent, through meat to humans. So far, substantially all dairying areas and some agriculture areas in the State are covered, but there are indications that by 1975, at the latest, our valuable export trade to the United States of America and certain other countries will be effected unless the whole State is covered. It is likely that, after that year, the United States will only accept meat and dairy products from areas certified as being free of bovine tuberculosis.

At present most of the programme is undertaken by private veterinary surgeons paid out of general revenue. The expenses of the programme are continuing ones, as testing must be carried but at regular intervals. The availability of funds has, in consequence, determined the degree of expansion of the programme. The primary purpose of this Bill is to authorize the Minister to meet the costs of this programme out of the Cattle Compensation Fund. Clearly, the programme has already effectively reduced the claims for compensation under the Act, and the programme itself falls within the purposes of the Act, which was to facilitate the eradication of, amongst other diseases, bovine tuberculosis, by spreading the cost of that eradication over the industry as a whole. In considering the Bill in some detail, clauses 1 to 3 are quite formal. Clause 4 brings up to date references to the Stock Diseases Act, which appear in the Act under its former title, the Stock and Poultry Diseases Act. Clause 5 has a similar effect to that of clause 4. Clause 6 again has a similar effect to that of clause 4 and, in addition, ensures that both methods of payment of duty being:

(a) the affixing of stamps on each record of a sale; and

(b) the payment by periodical remittance in respect of all sales taking place during that period,

are fully recognized in the Act.

Clause 7 amends section 11 of the Act by re-enacting the provisions relating to credits to and payments from the fund. The only new matters of substance covered here are:

(a) recognition of the fact that the Treasurer may pay interest on amounts standing to the credit of the fund (the Treasurer is authorized to do this under section 33 of the Public Finance Act); and

(b) provision for the payment from the fund of sums agreed to be paid in connection with the tuberculosis programme.

Clause 8 adds a new Part IIIa to the Act, and this Part sets out the powers of the Minister in relation to the authorization of veterinary surgeons, and also empowers the Minister to enter into agreements with authorized veterinary surgeons for the testing of cattle.

Mr. RODDA secured the adjournment of the debate.