**FROST RELIEF BILL 1927**

**Legislative Council, 14 December 1927, page 2136**

Second reading

**The MINISTER of AGRICULTURE (Hon. J. Cowan)—**This is a short Bill in the usual form to enable the Government to assist fruitgrowers whose crops were destroyed or damaged by the frosts which occurred in September last. It follows closely the general lines of previous Drought Relief Bills. The Bill will be administered by the State Bank, but the Bank will be provided with the necessary funds by the Treasurer (Clauses 4 and 13). The assistance will, in the majority of cases, be granted by way of supplying commodities as required to fruitgrowers who apply under the Act, but in special cases the bank may advance money (clause 4). Any money advanced and the cost of any commodity supplied must be repaid by the fruitgrowers in ten yearly instalments, the first instalment to be paid on July 1, 1929; and interest will be charged at six and one-half per cent. Any fruitgrower, however, may repay any part of the principal at any time whether it be due or not, and his subsequent payments of interest and principal will be correspondingly reduced. There is power for the bank to postpone the due date of any payment in cases of special hardship. As security for repayment of any moneys advanced the bank will have the undertaking of the fruitgrower to repay, and the right to call for the execution of a lien under the Liens on Fruit Act, 1923, over any of the crops on the fruitgrowers’ land. In addition, any amounts due by a fruitgrower under the Bill will be a first charge on his land in priority to all other charges (clause 7). The Bill contains the usual provisions to prevent misuse of any commodities supplied, and to punish persons who endeavor to obtain the benefits of the Act by false statements. This measure follows the lines of the Drought Relief Bill. It is most unfortunate that the irrigation areas suffered this serious loss just at a time when most of the settlers thought they would be in a position to become more prosperous. I hope that the damage will not be so great as was at first expected.

The Hon. Sir DAVID GORDON—I support the Minister in his desire that this Bill should be agreed to. I had an opportunity of visiting that part of the State where, I think, the frost did most damage shortly after the occurrence, and it was most pathetic to see the devastation that had been caused. The growth of the vines was prior to the frost coming forward very nicely and everything looked most promising throughout the valley of the Murray, and as regards many of the vines and citrus trees it was as if a fire had passed right over the country. Strangely enough some places escaped the frost, but where it did touch the vines and citrus trees an immense amount of damage was caused. It would be impossible for the Government and Parliament not to take notice of the effect this must have on the settlers. It is another case of coming to the relief of producers similarly as we did yesterday so far as the wheat farmers are concerned. It is a good policy to do everything possible to help these men. We can only hope that this measure of relief will enable them to stay on their blocks and recover the position they have lost through the frost. I am afraid that the result will be damage from one-third to two thirds of the crop. It will take the settlers at least two years to recover the position they were in before those few minutes of frost. They are in an infinitely worse case than are the wheat farmers who are affected by the drought as the latter may possibly recover their position next year. I am sure that in the administration of this measure every consideration will be shown to the settlers concerned.

The Hon. J. JELLEY—I feel certain that all members will support this measure for the assistance of the vine growers who suffered loss through the frost which occurred some time ago. Undoubtedly things looked fairly prosperous for them, but their prospects were blighted very quickly. I was somewhat amused at the time of the occurrence at the visit of the members of the Migration and Development Commission to the affected areas. Knowing the personnel of the Commission one could hardly help feeling amused that those gentlemen should have visited the settlements and spent their time condoling with the settlers and suggesting various remedies to ensure that such a happening should not occur again. I think this one of the matters in regard to which the State might well ask the Federal Treasurer to finance the State Bank. I notice that the interest to be paid on all moneys advanced is fixed in the Bill at the rate of 6½ per cent. I suggest that that provision should be amended similarly to the alteration we made in the Drought Relief Bill where we provided that the rate of interest should not be more than 6½ per cent., thus giving the State Bank power to charge a less rate.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Clauses 1 to 5 passed.

Clause 6—"Liability of applicant to repay cost of commodities.”

The Hon. J. JELLEY—I move to amend subclause (5) so as to read:—

Interest and all moneys advanced to an applicant shall be payable at a rate not exceeding six and one-half per centum.

Amendment carried; clause as amended passed.

Remaining clauses, schedule, and title passed.