**CROWN LANDS ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 1910**

**House of Assembly, 4 November 1910, pages 904-6**

Second reading

**The TREASURER**, in moving the second reading, said the Bill was small, but highly important, and it was necessary it should be passed this session, as repurchased lands and a condition of things that needed alter­ing were dealt with. Mr. Butler recently gave notice that he would move for the amendment of the Closer Settlement Act in the direction of several clauses of the present Bill, but withdrew on learning the intention of the Government to bring down a measure acting upon a recommenda­tion of the Land Board. The enhanced price of land made it imperative to increase the amount which the Government could spend in any one year for repurchase of large estates; also to increase the value of property which any individual settler could hold under closer settlement terms. First, it was proposed to enable the State to spend as much as £300,000 instead of £200,000 in one financial year. Some time ago the Government had had a purchase in mind that would have absorbed the whole of the smaller sum, and then if there had been another opportunity for a transaction that would have been in the interest of the State it could not have been entertained. He did not think there was so much need for repurchase of large estates now as there was before the taxation measures of the Federal Parliament. Still, chances did occur when; it would be for the benefit of South Australia to make such purchases, and the Bill would give the necessary power. It was desired to increase the value of holdings of any individual from £2,000 to as much as £4,000. Members knew the difficulty of settlers to make a living on too small a holding. ( Mr. Homburg—“Have you come to that view at last?”) They had been of that view as long as Mr. Homburg, besides land values had so gone up that a man possibly got no bigger holding to-day set down as worth £4,000 than he did a few years ago for £2,000. Those were the two leading purposes of the Bill, but there were one or two other considerations. One was that holders of repurchased lands might be enabled to surrender that land and come under perpetual lease. The need had principally arisen through difficulties experienced mainly by settlers on some of the south-eastern estates in contending against adverse natural conditions. He had a report which indicated what those difficulties were. The State had paid too large a price for some of the south-east land—perhaps not too large with an effective drainage scheme— but certainly too large in the flooded condition. He did not hesitate to condemn those purchases. (Mr. Homburg—“Departmental officers made recommendations before they were acquired.”) That was so, but a Minister of the Crown should exercise his own judgment in such matters. The fact remained that some settlers were not able to get a living through land not suitable for closer settlement being cut into too small blocks. Last year the crops proved a failure owing to too much moisture, and the farmers did not obtain more than a 6-bushel harvest. This season much larger areas were under crop, and up to September there was every appearance that there would be a fair return, but owing to excessive wet—not merely local rainfall, but the inflow of water from Victoria—the returns would be practically nil. For a long while the crops were under water. Wild ducks and swans swam, and bullfrogs croaked among the wheat. That experience was not confined to Binnum, but had applied to nearly all the south-east estates for several years past. The report of the inspector continued:— “Many of the settlers on this estate say the land is unfit for agriculture, and that the blocks should be larger, and be used for grazing only. Drier seasons would, however, alter their opinion, as in 1907-8 high results were obtained in many cases from similar land on the Kybybolite Estate, which is a proof that cereals will grow to advantage in these localities under favourable conditions which in all probability may obtain shortly. The settlers were unfortunate in having to experience such wet seasons at the start. This land will carry about three-quarters of a sheep to an acre, but could be improved to nearly double the carrying capacity by sowing grasses on the cultivated land after harvest. Their position has been rendered acute by having to pay five instalments of interest, with a sixth owing, cost of improvements, purchase of stock and implements, and living expenses. Those with small capital are therefore at the end of their resources, and cannot make any further payments until after shearing and harvest. There is a general discontent among them, and they say how are we to tide over the time until drier and better seasons prevail. The northern farmers, that is those who come from the dry areas, are in the worst position, not understand­ing the working of the land so well as the old settlers. Kybybolite.—This estate has been held under closer settlement since 1904. The first returns were rather low, but the two following seasons showed better results, especially on the higher lands. The flats were altogether too wet, but the general average for those years was from 10 to 11 bushels. Last season was, however, much wetter, and the returns were again low, and in some cases almost a total failure. This season also there has been too much moisture, especially in September, and on low-lying land the crops suffered considerably, but since then better weather has prevailed, and there is im­provement in consequence, and there may yet be a fair harvest, but under no circumstances can it be good, as the crops are thin and patchy and much choked with water grasses. By far the greater portion of this estate is used for grazing purposes, and from 10,000 to 14,000 sheep are depastured. The blocks held by old settlers and who have other lands as well make comparatively few improvements, and expenses are so heavy that those who come from other parts of the State and carry on mixed farming—these latter settlers—feel the pinch more severely. Those who came with small capital, and have expended their all in making improvements, buying stock and implements, as well as the payment of the half-yearly instalments, are in an un-envious position, have lost heart, and say they intend to sell out as soon as a buyer can be found; but some wish to remain, hoping for better seasons. These have started with more capital or received assistance from relation or hold other land. The present position of some of the settlers on this estate is certainly unsatisfactory, but not altogether so acute as those on Binnum. Hynam Estate.—Allotted March, 1909. A very small area was put under crop in that year, but the return was good—up to as high as 18 bushels. This season there is a considerable area under crop, much of it now looking really well, and the average is expected to be from 10 to 20 bushels. As on Binnum and Kybybolite, the heavy rains in September put a bad appearance on the crops, and settlers thought there would be a total failure, but since then the improvement has been very marked. In the south-west comer of the State several blocks are not so subject to inundation, being higher land, and the crops did not suffer so much in September as those on more level country, so that returns will be good. Much of this estate is very wet in the more rainy seasons, but should the drier seasons prevail, which is more than likely after so many wet ones, the settlers will have good returns and be able to meet their engagements. One or two of the farmers are selling out, thoroughly frightened with the heavy rainfall. These men are from the dry northern districts, and are too impatient to remain, and so gain experience as to how the land should be worked. Generally speaking there is not much discontent, but some of the settlers find it hard to meet the half-yearly payments, not having much capital, four of these payments having had to be made before they got any appreciable return from the land. Yallum Estate.—The allotment of this estate was made in May, 1906, which was a very wet season, but only a small area was under crop. The next three seasons gave fairly good returns; two were wet, and one dry. The averages were:— In 1907-8, wheat 15 bushels, oats and barley 16 1//2 bushels, hay 11/4 tons; 1908-9, wheat 17 bushels, oats and barley 26 bushels, hay 14 tons; 1909-10, wheat 10 bushels, oats and barley 15 bushels, hay 1 ton. In considering these averages the highest lands east of the railway line added greatly to the results, but in the one dry year the lowlying back flats to the west of the line went very well, and one farmer reaped 44 bushels of wheat and 63 bushels of oats to the acre. This year these flats have been deluged, and the crops have suffered greatly, and in this locality returns will be low; east of the railway line to as far as the east side of the Coonawarra Settlement, with one or two exceptions, the crops will be very fair, but the averages will not be so high as quoted above. Wet country lies to the east of the fruit colony, but on the banks there are some fair crops. The returns given, together with the wool clips, show that the settlers of this estate are in a far more satisfactory position than those on the other settlements reported on. When visiting among the landholders of this estate not much discontent was noticeable, but there were exceptions mostly from the west of the line on the lowlying lands; some say they will have to sell out if the seasons do not change, or a system of drainage is at once carried out. The measure had been introduced to enable settlers to surrender the leases and take perpetual leases. The rents were to be fixed by the Land Board. Relief was to be given for the first seven years, and after that up to 21 years rent was to be charged so as to return 4 per cent. A small amendment was necessary to ensure that they would not have to pay more than 4 per cent. There was the same difficulty about township lands as Mr. O’Loughlin, then Commissioner of Crown Lands, had experienced at Tumby Bay. The blocks in the private township there were all held by one individual, and the town could not extend. When another township area was cut up by the Government, that same gentleman outbid everybody at the public sale. The deposit, however, was forfeited and the land was put up again. People had an idea that the allotments then to be offered were situated out back, or they had not dreamed that the land would be forfeited. Consequently nobody turned up but the individual referred to, and he got the blocks at a very small price. The position was that park lands had to be cut up, and the same gentleman came along and threatened to purchase every block put up, as he had plenty of money and could outbid all the others. The then Commissioner of Crown Lands said that that certainly would not be done. The park lands, therefore, were not sold, but were leased as miscellaneous leases for 21 years. The same difficulty existed in other parts of the State, people having asked for park lands to be cut up for township blocks. The available land was held by speculators, who would not sell them. The result was that land which should be retained for the people had to be cut up. The Government had proceeded on the same principle as that adopted by Mr. O’Loughlin—perpetual leases, and personal residence. They desired to balk speculators. (Mr. Coombe— “Tell us the name of the gentleman at Tumby Bay.”) He need not do that, but the individual was once a member of the House. All the money received by the Commissioner was to be credited under the Surplus Revenue Act of 1906. That would commend itself to members on the other side. (Hon. A. H. Peake—“You can do that easily in good times, but not in bad.”) It was a question whether they ought to do it. This was a case of selling the birthright of the people, and that should not be devoted to the purpose of general revenue. It was only right that such money should be put straight away towards the reduction of the public debt. (Hon. R. Butler—“Then you will have to reduce the Estimates by £80,000.”) An amendment would be necessary to make the Act apply from June 30, 1911, so as not to interfere with the Estimates that had just been passed. The State would get a greater return from the Commonwealth next year. (Hon. A. H. Peake—“You are £40,000 better off this year.”) Since it was proposed to deduct that £40,000 they were no better off. (Mr. Butler—“We will not get that next year.”) That was true. There were certain exemptions made in regard to the repurchased land, and in the Pinnaroo Railway Act. If it was right to observe the principle in connection with railways, it was right in connection with the general policy of land. If they came out with a surplus only by the aid of money derived from the sale of land they were not putting a straight balance sheet before the country.

On the motion of the Hon. A. H. PEAKE the debate was adjourned until November 8.