**LOANS TO PRODUCERS ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1925**

**House of Assembly, 17 December 1925, page 2341**

Second reading

**The Minister of Agriculture (Hon. T. Butterfield)** having obtained leave, introduced a Bill for an Act to further amend The Loans to Producers Act, 1917. Bill read a first time.

The MINISTER of AGRICULTURE—This is a short Bill, the object of which is to extend the scope of the Loans to Producers Act to enable the Minister to make advances for the purpose of clearing scrub or timber on land held under lease or agreement from the Crown. The object of the amendment is to facilitate the operations of the pioneer settlers in the heavy timbered scrub country. Clearing operations are slow and comparatively costly, and are a serious handicap to the settlers in the early stages of settlement. The Government is of opinion that it would be a substantial aid to successful settlement if the settlers could have land logged by contract either between the Minister and an owner of a logging plant or between the Minister and the settler direct. In the latter case the settler would be paid on the basis of contract rates the value of his labor, and under such a system he would be enabled to get a substantial area under crop under suitable conditions at a much earlier date than at present. Under a system of contracting with persons who will make a business of this class of work if sufficient inducement offers, the land will be cleared quickly, and probably a substantial area, say, 200 to 300 acres, before the settler actually goes to live on the block, in other words, he will be enabled to put in a crop the first year of settlement. The proposals of the Government in this direction have met with very strong support from the farmers on the West Coast, particularly in the hundreds of Pinkawillinie and Buckleboo, and adjoining hundreds. At present the settlers have indicated a desire to have about 10,000 acres cleared in this way. The idea generally is that the settler should be allowed nine to 10 years in which to pay off the amount, and that payment should be made in half-yearly instalments commencing say, 12 months or two years after the cost is incurred. Under the Advances to Settlers Act there is no power to carry out the proposed work.

Mr. Nicholls—How does, this differ from advances to individual farmers?

The MINISTER of AGRICULTURE—The Advances to Settlers Act does not give any opportunity of doing this. Those advances are based on the amount of improvements that are on the land, so they do not give a man that assistance which is so necessary in the settlement of a scrub block. Neither does -the Loans to Producers Act at present make provision for them. There is to be a further amendment which will give the Government power to make advances against fallow. They would apply to different parts of the State particularly. Loans for fallow would be short dated and would be made particularly for lighter scrub lands in the Murray districts. Take, for instance, hundreds like Ettrick. The land is of poor quality and the people have got behind in many instances so that they are not able to fallow the land and give themselves a chance to make good. From what I saw recently in the district of Albert I believe that, if they were given an opportunity of fallowing and working their fallow according to the most up-to-date method, with a heavy dressing of super, that the land is going to pay and these people would be given a chance.

Mr. Nicholls—Do you think that fallowing would make all the difference to poor country like Ettrick?

The MINISTER of AGRICULTURE—I do. It is the only possibility of making it go. The people have given 10 and 12 years of their lives to eking out an existence by carting stumps, which is at best a bread-and-butter job, and offers no possibility of making progress. It is one of the best things that can happen in scrub areas when the farmers cease to cart stumps for a living. While they are carting stumps for firewood in the metropolitan area to enable them to live it is only keeping them in a difficult position. They have made no advancement and they are carting stumps when they ought to be preparing their land for next year’s crop. Quite recently in company with Mr. McMillan I met a man who had a good crop growing and excellent prospects for the year, but he owed the department £80 or £100, and he asked for a fortnight’s time in order to be able to cart stumps so as to meet half his obligation to the department then and the balance after harvest. It was a most unfortunate position for the man to be in, as he should have been working his fallow. If we make an advance of 8s. or 10s. an acre against fallow it would give the farmers enough to pay for their bread and butter while they were fallowing; and enable them to reap a better crop the next year. This Bill will give the Government an opportunity of making advances and helping these people immediately, but if they have to wait until the bank functions it will be at a much later date, and the bank will not have the information which is possessed by the Lands Department. The Government do not intend to apply the provisions of this Bill to whipstick mallee. If that mallee is rolled down and is not properly treated for a considerable time after, it is no good. The rolling of big timber is another matter. There is much of this big timber around Kimba and some portions of the West Coast, also on parts of the river, and where it is broken down it is an asset to the country. If the bushes were left for a year or two the work would still be a permanent asset to the Government. I hope there will be no opposition to the Bill. It will benefit not only the settlers but the Government in various ways. It will bring land under cultivation quickly, create freights for the railways, increase trade, and will result in bigger incomes being earned. It will also give these settlers ready money in the pioneering stage and give some easement to them by enabling them to have their scrub broken down with a good plant. Many of the failures we have had in our scrub country could have been avoided if the opportunities which I have indicated could have given effect to. I move the second reading.

The Hon. G. R. LAFFER—I have followed the Minister’s remarks very closely and I support the measure. At present there is no provision to deal with advances for fallowing. I agree with the Minister that on some classes of country the expenditure of money is a real asset, and that on other classes the expenditure of money, unless followed up by proper work, is not only a loss, but leaves the country in a worse condition than it was previously. I discussed this matter with Sir James Mitchell when I was in Western Australia, and he said that every case where an advance was made to a settler in connection with clearing of country was an additional asset and benefit to the country. I instanced our mallee country. The heavy timbered country, such as that around Kimba, is easily disposed of, provided you get the necessary plant to deal with the mallee in the initial stages. It is astounding to see the effective manner in which the men in this district have cleared their scrub with primitive implements. When I went through the West Coast and saw these men, I came to the conclusion that they were the finest settlers I had seen. The advance which will be made under this Bill will enable a settler to have his land cleared effectively. The thing which impressed me with regard to the heavy timbered country was that, once the scrub was cleared, there was very little effort by the scrub to establish itself again. The Minister said that this Bill would not apply to whipstick country, and I agree with that. Unless the clearing of this class of country is followed up for a number of years in a most persistent way, the money spent will be lost, and the country will revert to a worse condition than it was before it was touched. I intend to move an amendment that what is done shall be on the recommendation of the Land Board. The present Minister may not be in charge always. Such a proviso would safeguard any Minister, and the members of the Land Board, who are competent men and know every inch of the settled areas, will be able to advise the Minister who may happen to be in charge. If an application is made it could be referred to the Land Board for report and recommendation. I hope the Minister will agree to that. It is well known that the first five years or so on a farm is the most critical period. At present if a settler wants a loan of £400, he has no chance of getting, it unless he has improvements on his land to that value. It is important that a man should be able to reach the fallowing stage as early as possible. While stumps have been a great asset to a number of men in tiding them over difficult periods, the most important thing is to get the land cleared at the earliest possible date. The position would be safeguarded in the Lands Department. Inspectors are stationed at various places throughout the State, and are travelling through their districts constantly. If the Minister wanted an opinion as to how a man was working his block, say, east of the Murray, there are records in that department which would assist him in arriving at a decision. If a man is not making proper use of his land, and is not likely to make a good settler, the Minister will use his discretion as to whether he will assist him or not; and will have the officers to advise him in practically all the mallee districts of the State. I am glad the Minister has introduced the Bill and if it becomes law, it will prove very beneficial to settlers in the early stages.

Mr. O’CONNOR—I support the Bill, knowing what it will mean to many settlers on Eyre Peninsula. Apart from water reticulation, this is one of the finest schemes which could be introduced, because it will help the new settler. In the last few years many pioneers have taken up land at Kimba and other parts of the West Coast, and within the last month or so I have received several inquiries regarding the intentions of the Government in regard to this matter. A few days ago, I received a letter from a farmer intimating that he hoped the Government would push on with this proposition. He said that the settlers were behind the Government and pointed out how the proposal would increase production. If the Government clear 200 or 200 acres for a new settler, it means that the land will be brought into early production and give the men a chance to earn something almost immediately. It means that the land will quickly produce revenue for the railways which will prove of considerable advantage to the State. I support the Bill.

Mr. NICHOLLS—This Bill represents one of the most forward movements we have had in regard to land settlement for a long time. The measure should do a great deal for Eyre Peninsula and mallee lands in other parts of the State. It means that holdings not occupied can be taken up and cultivated. The first year or two comprises the crisis in the settlement of mallee lands. Usually, such country is taken up by men with little capital and the hardships they endure are enormous, because of the fact that they are so far removed from the amenities and conveniences of the life in the settled areas. It is stated in some quarters that it takes 10 years to bring a scrub farm to a point of reasonable cultivation and production. That is due to the fact that for the first five or six years a settler cannot get ahead of clearing four of five hundred acres, because his surplus capital, after having met his commitments, is so small. One of the reasons why agricultural settlement has proved so successful in Western Australia is that the Agricultural Bank there will pay a man for the first work he does on his holding, in the way of clearing, fencing, and fallowing. This measure will have the effect of qualifying a settler early in the occupation of his block for the splendid provisions of other Acts designed to assist the man on the land. Of course, he must have something to show in the way of improvements before he can get the money, but the Government will have a reasonable security for any advance. Though there is a possibility that advances made for clearing may be lost, such cases are likely to be very few, and the advantage of the experiment must commend itself to every member. I did not quite understand from the Minister the amount of money which would be available for this scheme, but, of course, that has an important bearing on it. The greater the inducement which can be offered for groups of settlers to take up land in any locality and establish a community, the better it is for themselves and the State, because they more quickly become imbued with the community spirit and form associations and societies which assist to develop the district, and create a social life. I hope that if numerous requests come before the Minister sufficient money will be available to enable him to meet them. Of course, great discretion must be exercised in making the advances, but I have a high opinion of the manner in which the various Acts are administered. That administration may be a little stringent at times, but it must not be forgotten that the department is the guardian of public funds. This Bill represents a forward movement, and I hope success will follow the introduction of the legislation.

Mr. MOSELEY—This gives evidence of being a very useful Bill, because it will help the pioneers. As one who knows the difficulties of settlers when they are beginning, I appreciate the fact that any assistance given to them in the early stages will not only help them, but the State . I do not know what the Minister intends to allow for fallowing or the breaking down of the heavier scrub.

The Commissioner of Crown Lands—Each ease will be taken on its merits and on recommendations.

Mr. MOSELEY—I have not the slightest doubt that there will be ample protection. We cannot go far wrong, because we know that if a man fallows 100 acres he intends to sow it. For many years our farming methods have been too slipshod. Men have taken up new blocks with little or no capital, except a big heart and a pair of brawny hands. Of course, they are the men we want to take up land, and any little help we can give them in the early stages will tide them over their most critical time. The land about Kimba carries heavy scrub, and a man taking it up at first has to get along very slowly. He can only cut down about 50 or 100 acres of the scrub, when he must start planting, in order to get a crop to keep him going. If he can get a decent area rolled and fallowed he can push on with his other work, and will get a return all the quicker. The men on Eyre Peninsula have had a hard time and they have not received much help from the Government, so far as water is concerned. They have gradually surmounted their diffi­culties, however, because the more hardships they encountered the more willingly they worked. A few years ago, it was said that Eyre Peninsula was too dry to grow wheat, but in the last two years more than £3,000,000 worth of grain has come from the West Coast. This year the new province will produce practically one-third of the State’s wheat. The Minister is quite warranted in spending money in developing Eyre Peninsula. We have done so little to make South Australia any better for production purposes. While we encourage these men to put the land into production, we should use every endeavor to give them water. Only recently I received many pitiable letters from settlers who were carting water eight or 10 miles for five days of the week. They had no time to fallow, or break down scrub, as most of their time was spent in carting water. If we can quickly give them water it will have a wonderful effect. Somebody asked “What is a million?” Now, what is a million pounds if we spend it in opening up a new province like Eyre Peninsula. The Bill is a good one and should meet with the approval of the House.

Mr. McMILLAN—I support the second reading because I realise what a great benefit the measure will be to settlers on the land, particularly those in the poorer class mallee country. It is the first few years that are the most difficult. Often the settler taking up a, block starts on the bread line and he is kept on the bread line, which prevents him from progressing as rapidly as he should for his own good, the good of his family, and the good of the State. This legislation will be of the greatest assistance, as it will allow men to work on their own blocks instead of on the roads, which is the position with about 70 per cent, of those in the newer areas. They are out carting stumps or doing odd contracting work on the district roads when they should be employed on their own holdings. I am glad that the Minister saw the country and its possibilities. There is no doubt that areas which were despised a few years ago are coming into their own, and proving that they can grow crops equal to or better in some seasons than our best northern lands. I refer particularly to the belt of country at the back of Karoonda extending out to Nunkeri and Yurgo. In that district Mr. Sanders, conducting experiments for Mr. Spafford, has grown as much as 36 bushels of wheat to the acre on experimental plots and over 30 bushels to the acre for his farm average. That is far above the average of the best areas of the State, and above the average of probably 80 per cent, of farmers in South Australia. I commend the measure more particularly because Mr. McIntosh and I have consistently advocated that something along these lines should be done. Water is admittedly of vital importance to the man on the land. In our district water is generally procurable by getting a loan from the Advances to Settlers Board to assist in putting down a pump, erecting windmill, tanks, and piping. However, in the northern end of the district, in the hundreds of Murtho and Paringa, water cannot be obtained by boring. A Bill has been passed for a water supply for that district, and I want again to take the opportunity of drawing the Minister’s attention to the fact that those hundreds, if given a water supply, would accommodate probably ten times the number of settlers resident there now.

Mr. COOKE—The Minister is to be congratulated upon bringing in this Bill. It is one which should have been introduced years ago. It is peculiar that all parties agree upon it now, but they would not pass such legislation in days gone by. One of the things that strikes me most forcibly about the measure is that when a man goes on to a new farm he wants a heavy team, and of a necessity he spends a lot of time in carting mallee in order to be able to pay his way. Often some of his best years are wasted in clearing, while he is broken-hearted, and his team practically worn out before he has got 300 or 500 acres ready for cultivation. I know a man who left South Australia some years ago for Western Australia with £15 and five children. I met him recently, and he told me he was worth over £3,000. He remarked, “I can honestly tell you my present position is due to the assistance of the Western Australian Government in putting me on the land, and paying me for my own clearing.”

Bill read a second time.

In Committee.

Clause 1 passed.

Clause 2—"Amendment of principal Act, section 4.”

The MINISTER of AGRICULTURE—I move an amendment: —

That after “land’' in line 15, the words “or fallowing such land but no loan shall be made as aforesaid except on the recommendation of the Land Board” be added.

That will take in the amendment suggested by Mr. Laffer, also one which I discussed myself for the purpose of extending this Bill for the purpose of assisting settlers to fallow.

Amendment agreed to; clause as amended passed.

Title passed, and Bill taken through remaining stages.