

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

TUESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 1946

Electronic reproduction of original hardcopy

ing, painting, water, gas, and electrical reticulation and alterations in the design, &c., as indicated on Sheet No. 2 of the drawings, all in accordance with the plan and specification. No allowance has been made for building fees, but a provisional sum has been allowed for water fees as previously mentioned. The fees in connection with the preparation of the drawings and specifications have been included in the quotation submitted. These documents are completed and have been inspected by officers of your department.'

'2. (a) The plans and specifications were submitted by the contractor and after examination and alteration as required by the Commission, were accepted; (b) there is one basic arrangement as to size and number of rooms; there are four variations in roof construction to give variation in appearance; also there is a varied exterior colour scheme; (c) the contractor supplied the plans and specifications, as per (a) above. The price is included in the total contract price, and there is no special item for plans and specifications.

'3. The average price per square is £119.91.'

COST OF OVERSEAS TRIP OF HON. F. A. COOPER.

Mr. LUCKINS (Maree) asked the Premier—

'In view of the fact that the costs of the ex-Premier's recent overseas trip total £2,987 3s. 6d., as disclosed by returns of travelling expenses for 1944-45 and 1945-46, will he explain his statement in the House on 16 October last that these costs were £1,947 11s. 11d.—being £1,039 11s. 7d. less than the amount shown in the official returns?'

Hon. E. J. WALSH (Mirani—Minister for Transport), for Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca—Premier), replied—

'I am unaware that any statement was made by the hon. the Premier in the House on 16 October.'

PAPERS.

The following paper was laid on the table, and ordered to be printed:—

Report of the Queensland Health Education Council for the year 1945-1946.

The following paper was laid on the table:—

Order in Council under the Fauna Protection Act of 1937 (24 October, 1946).

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1945-46.

Mr. SPEAKER announced the receipt from His Excellency the Governor of a message transmitting the Supplementary Estimates for the year 1945-46.

Estimates ordered to be printed and referred to Committee of Supply.

TUESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER, 1946.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. S. J. Brassington, Fortitude Valley) took the chair at 11 a.m.

STOCK ROUTES AND RURAL LANDS PROTECTION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2).

Assent reported by Mr. Speaker.

QUESTIONS.

STATE HOUSING CONTRACT, ROCKLEA.

Mr. PATERSON (Bowen) asked the Secretary for Public Works—

'1. What are the terms and conditions of the contract recently made between Percy Ayre and the State Housing Commission for the construction of 19 homes at Rocklea?

'2. (a) Who supplied the plans and specifications; (b) how many types and/or variations were provided for in the plans; and (c) how much was paid for the plans?

'3. What was the contract price per square?'

Hon. H. A. BRUCE (The Tableland—Secretary for Public Works) replied—

'1. A contract was signed on 17 April, 1946, for the erection of 19 timber dwellings for the sum of £19,821, at Ipswich road, Moorooka. The contract provides for fencing and drainage, including the removing of existing fencing. The contractor's own quotation is as follows:—'The quotation submitted includes demolition of existing fences, clearing of the site, new fence-

VOTE ON ACCOUNT, 1947-48.

MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNOR.

Mr. SPEAKER announced the receipt from His Excellency the Governor of a message recommending that the following provision be made on account of the services of the year ending 30 June, 1948:—

From the Consolidated Revenue Fund of Queensland (exclusive of the moneys standing to the credit of the Loan Fund Account) the sum of £4,000,000.

From the Trust and Special Funds the sum of £3,000,000.

From the moneys standing to the credit of the Loan Fund Account the sum of £800,000.

Message referred to Committee of Supply.

AUSTRALIAN CONSULAR OFFICERS' NOTARIAL POWERS AND EVIDENCE BILL.

THIRD READING.

Bill, on motion of Mr. Gledson, read a third time.

SUPREME COURT (COMMONWEALTH PAYMENT TO JUDGES) VALIDATION ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

THIRD READING.

Bill, on motion of Mr. Gledson, read a third time.

MATRIMONIAL CAUSES ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

THIRD READING.

Bill, on motion of Mr. Gledson, read a third time.

SUPPLY.

RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE—ESTIMATES—THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH ALLOTTED DAYS.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Mann, Brisbane, in the chair.)

ESTIMATES-IN-CHIEF, 1946-1947.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS.

CHIEF OFFICE.

Hon. A. JONES (Charters Towers—Secretary for Public Lands (11.14 a.m.): I move—

“That £74,409 be granted for ‘Department of Public Lands—Chief Office’.”

The increase of £7,080 in this vote is due to a net increase of £11,439 in salaries charged to revenue, provision having been made for an additional 33 officers, less a decrease of £6,334 in the amount provided from Consolidated Revenue to meet expenditure under the Land and Water Resources Development Act of 1943, and an increase of £1,975 in other contingencies.

The Department of Public Lands, as hon. members are aware, embraces a number of very important sub-departments. As part of the activities of the department we have the

Sub-Departments of Forestry, Irrigation and the Surveyor-General, sub-departments that play a very important part in the government of this State. This is the first time that the Estimates of this department have come before Parliament since the cessation of hostilities in the Pacific. For the information of hon. members I might say that at one time during the war period approximately 40 per cent. of the staff of the Department of Public Lands were in the forces. It will be appreciated what that means to such a department, because from 1939 to August, 1945, no field officers or technical officers were being trained, and we are now feeling the effects of that shortage. It is not a matter of this department's at once going back to the normal work that was being undertaken when the war broke out in 1939. Immediately on the cessation of hostilities it became necessary for the department to undertake much additional work, the War Service Land Settlement Scheme being perhaps the most important. It is necessary also to build up and go ahead with a vigorous policy in the Sub-Department of Forestry, and the same thing may be said to the Sub-Department of Irrigation. As hon. members know, we have certain works already in hand and under consideration, and additional staff is necessary to carry on that work.

During the past 12 months, and in some parts of the State during the past two years or more, Queensland, particularly the south-west part, has been passing through a devastating drought.

Mr. Sparkes: And still is.

Mr. JONES: Yes; as the hon. member for Aubigny states, the drought is unbroken in places. That of course further accentuates the difficulties of the department. Consideration is being given to some form of help to owners of grazing selections in the South-West. The Government decided early this year to give 28-year leases and review rentals, each case to be determined on its merits. That will provide some relief. There has been some suggestion, and a statement was made by the secretary of the Queensland Selectors' Association recently, that the Government were rather slow in implementing this policy. Hon. members will realise that it is impossible at this stage to do so. Whilst the drought continues it is impossible to ascertain losses, and before we can consider any case we must know the approximate losses suffered by the applicant; it is necessary to know every detail before a case can be determined. It is impossible to do anything until the drought breaks and we know where we stand.

Since August of last year—immediately after the war with Japan ended—with the gradual return of staff to the department, it has been possible to proceed with work in connection with the War Service Land Settlement Scheme. Certain criticism has been levelled at the department from time to time—that we had not made the land available immediately the war ended so that the returned soldiers could be settled. I have said before in this Chamber that this pressure

or criticism was to be expected, as a big percentage of people would have very little knowledge of land and the basis of settlement and these would criticise without giving the matter much consideration. We must not repeat the mistakes that followed the war of 1914-1918, when the settlement of soldiers on the land was a disastrous failure. On this occasion we are making the very best land available for soldier settlement and I was very pleased to learn from a Commonwealth liaison officer who had inspected land for soldier settlement in every State of the Commonwealth that the land we were making available was better than anything he had seen elsewhere in Australia. We are desirous of getting the very best land and we are moving in that direction but we are not getting the co-operation that we expected from many land-owners. There is an attempt on the part of some of them—and big owners too—to put every obstacle in the way of the Government's obtaining the land they require. One man, a big property-owner with over 20,000 acres that we have inspected with a view to resumption, is not prepared to negotiate with us and he makes his attitude very clear. On 17 October last the following report appeared in "Country Life," the official organ of the United Graziers' Association—

"Dalby land-holders are preparing to fight the Government tooth and nail to obtain adequate compensation for land resumed for soldier settlement.

"First shot in the campaign was the formation of a committee to represent the land-owners and to raise funds by a levy of threepence per acre on frozen land; this money to be used as a fighting fund to obtain the best legal assistance and carry the case to the highest authority if necessary."

I think that the gentleman to whom I referred a moment ago is behind this move and is actually organising this opposition. He is attempting to persuade any of the land-owners that we might approach not to negotiate with us but just to treat us with contempt. I am not suggesting that that is the general attitude towards the department because some of the small men have been quite reasonable, but it is worth our while to refer to the article in "Country Life" as it is based on false premises and it will give hon. members some idea of the manner in which the department has been prepared to treat with the persons referred to in the article. It goes on to say—

"We do not object to settling soldiers on the land but we feel the Governments should be prepared to give us a fair valuation on land resumed, said Mr. E. A. Pietsch, Plainview Park, Dalby, who has received notice of resumption.

"The unfairness of present Government policy is well illustrated by Mr. Pietsch's case. His original purchase, 3,167 acres, was made in 1941."

When he made this purchase in 1941 he paid less than £3 an acre for the property.

At 11.24 a.m.,

Mr. DEVRIES (Gregory) relieved the Chairman in the chair.

Mr. JONES: The article goes on—

"On obtaining possession he applied for a wheat-grower's licence but was refused and he contained using the property for grazing. Last year, after some persuasion, he sold two blocks, each approximately 750 acres—one at £5 and one at £6 per acre. Both sales were approved by the delegate to the Treasury and the transaction was completed.

"Later the remaining 1,600 acres was placed under offer at £8 per acre. Contracts were drawn up but before the transaction could be put through the land was frozen and the sale cancelled."

"The Government offered to purchase the whole block, including all improvements, at £4 16s. an acre, or one portion without the house at £3 6s., even though the country through the fence, in every way equal to it, was passed by the Treasury at £6.

"The Government's excuse that land is being resumed at a 1942 valuation to avoid inflated values hardly bears investigation. Experienced business men and returned soldier farmers who are strongly behind the settling of returned men on the land scoff at the Government's offer of £3 7s. per acre, pointing out that the first wheat farmers in the district paid £3 2s 6d. an acre, and 15 years ago, when Blaxlands was thrown open, it cost £4 an acre while land in 1938 was selling at £5 in the Dalby district."

Desiring to be quite fair, I will continue reading the article—

"From opinions obtained, there is very little doubt that a figure in the vicinity of £5 to £6 per acre would have the approval of the landholders, even though, working on returns per acre over the past 10 years, valuations, in many instances, would be closer to £15 than £6."

Just imagine this property, purchased in 1941 at less than £3 an acre! He suggests the price should be nearer £15 an acre.

"Values on which the Government is now working make it appear that landholders are being penalised to settle service men.

"The Federal and State Governments would do returned men a much greater service by compensating existing owners at a reasonable figure and getting on with the job of setting up the farms than by becoming involved in lengthy legal issues which will still further delay settlement and prove costly to all concerned."

I am only dealing with this matter because this article appeared in "Country Life." Ordinarily I should not refer to the matter as it will eventually come before the Land Court. I should not attempt to discuss in this Chamber the acquisition of any land the value of which was likely to be determined by the Land Court, but seeing that so much

publicity has been given to this case it is only right that hon. members should know the truth.

Several months ago I looked into this man's position. Those hon. members who have a knowledge of land values will be able to judge the position for themselves.

Mr. Maher: Is this a freehold property?

Mr. JONES: Yes. In 1941 Mr. Pietsch bought 3,167 acres for £9,300, which works out at a fraction under £3 an acre. An analysis of the figures shows that Mr. Pietsch has received £8,076 for 1,486 acres of that land disposed of by him. He therefore has recouped himself for his outlay to within £1,224 and still retains 1,677 acres of his original purchase, or more than half the property. The point I am making is that this gentleman bought this property in 1941, has sold half since, and has received all the money he put into it except £1,224. That shows how unfair it was of the "Country Life" to take up a case like this without inquiring from the Department of Public Lands as to the actual position. In nine cases out of ten where unfair criticism takes place the people who criticise do not know the facts, and it is their duty to make themselves conversant with them.

Mr. Maher: This is an isolated case?

Mr. JONES: It is not an isolated case; many cases are on all fours with it. All sorts of tricks have been resorted to in order to defeat the Government's policy of obtaining suitable land for their War Service Land Settlement Scheme. A big landowner in the Dalby area, although he was aware that his land was frozen and knew that eventually the department intended to take part of it if suitable for soldier settlement, immediately began to settle share-farmers on it, apparently thinking that if he did we would not look at it. He now has 20 share-farmers on it. That is his way of looking at it; I think we shall probably find another way of looking at it. Those young fellows are good types of soldiers; I met them while I was in the Dalby area.

Mr. Sparkes: They have had a bad spin.

Mr. JONES: They have. None of those share-farmers will get a bag of wheat this year.

Mr. Sparkes: I am not appealing for the gentleman, I am appealing for the soldiers.

Mr. JONES: This same gentleman, who has been responsible for placing these young fellows on his land on a share-farming basis has taken up the matter with me through a Federal member on two occasions asking whether we could not give some help to carry on these people—not only the soldiers but this particular gentleman also would be assisted.

That is a type of the ruses resorted to by certain interests to overcome the department. People say, "Why can you not go much faster?" We would do so if it were possible. For instance, we took the matter up with the owner of a block of about 20,000 acres some months ago, and we shall eventu-

ally go to the Land Court for resumption, and he can appeal against the decision of the Land Court, and it may take 12 months to reach finality. We find that much of the talk that was prevalent shortly after the war about helping to get returned soldiers on the land is not translated into practice. The larger landholders are not patriotic enough to give up their land to the soldiers. As I have said on previous occasions, if Queensland is to develop and progress, there is only one way in which it can be done, that is, by the cutting up of the large pastoral holdings into grazing selections and the cutting up of grazing selections into areas suitable for farming. If we cannot get down to that basis, what is the use of talking of carrying a greater population? That is the only way in which we can expand.

This area in the Dalby district is well known to members of the Opposition. It is first-class country—I know nothing better in Queensland—and we are quite sincere in trying to get the best country possible without causing any undue annoyance to anyone. Although lands have been frozen, we have from time to time gone to a good deal of trouble to help returned soldiers who may be in a position to acquire land themselves. They have come to us and said, "So and so's property is frozen. I should like to buy, say, 1,200 acres. What is the attitude of the department?" In 94 cases we have been able to help these men by unfreezing the land and getting them settled.

Apart from doing anything else, I have gone to some trouble to make inquiries about what has been done in the other States through Rural Banks and other instrumentalities and I find that through the Agricultural Bank, Queensland, has done more, on a population basis, to help soldier settlement than any other State. What is the position regarding approvals of loans to ex-service men under the Agricultural Bank Act? Up to 30 June, 1946, 522 applicants received loans totalling £671,065, and from 1 July this year to 22 October a further 256 applicants received £376,295, and the total loans approved amounted to £1,047,360. In addition, there have been a number of approvals under the Commonwealth Act, which is administered by the Agricultural Bank. To 30 June, 1946, 26 applicants received loans totalling £40,275, and from 1 July to 22 October a further 158 applicants received £84,476, making a total of £124,751. The total loans to ex-service men from these sources approved to date total £1,172,111.

This also is very important: in the three months of this year, from July to 22 October, the Agricultural Bank did more business than in the previous year. A big job has been done through the Agricultural Bank in that direction and I know of no State that is further advanced than we are under the War Service Land Settlement Scheme.

We have acquired a few properties and made efforts to acquire several others. To date we have completed the investigation of about 457,720 acres and areas totalling 150,837 acres are under examination. We have

unfrozen approximately 1,000,000 acres. We had tied these lands up but they were found to be not suitable. We unfreeze land from time to time if after examination we find that it is not suitable for our purpose.

We have acquired one or two small properties. In the Nanango district we acquired an area of 3,560 acres for £11,520.

Mr. Sparkes: That was by mutual arrangement?

Mr. JONES: Yes.

Mr. Sparkes: It is only fair to say that in contrast with what you said a few minutes ago. That was a man who was willing to help.

Mr. JONES: And he is a comparatively small man—that is where we get the co-operation. The organisation of this campaign against soldier settlement in the Dalby district is brought about by one individual who not only has a big property in that area but has been associated with many large pastoral properties throughout Queensland. He should be one of the last men to squeal.

In addition we negotiated with and acquired a property of 1,038 acres in the Kilkivan district, for which we paid £4,200. We are now negotiating with another person in the Dalby district for an 8,000-acre property and it is possible that before long finality will be reached.

I think we can safely say that balloting under the War Service Land Settlement Scheme will begin early in the new year, and of course once it is begun it will be a recurring process as land becomes available from time to time. Hon. members must realise that in this scheme we are handling millions of acres of land. We are investigating and classifying and there is much work to do if we are to pick out the very best land and make sure that we have no mistakes. If we are slow in Queensland I will take the responsibility. I say that we are not, compared with any of the other States. We made inquiries as to the position there and I believe in our investigations we are far in advance of many of the others. There have been staff difficulties, as I have mentioned. Surveyors and other technical officers are absolutely necessary in this class of work and we have not been able to obtain sufficient of these men. The Surveyor-General visited the southern States to endeavour to engage surveyors but had no success. No one was willing to come to Queensland for this work.

There are many important factors in this settlement scheme. I for one am very pleased that we were not in a position to put men on the land immediately after the end of hostilities with Japan. Had we been in such a position the settlers would have run slap-bang into the drought. We know what has happened to share-farmers on some properties.

Mr. Sparkes: You are not taking credit for that?

Mr. JONES: A relation of mine is very good at forecasting.

I repeat that because of that fact I am very pleased that we are not further advanced than we are. We have thrown open 13 sheep blocks and one cattle block exclusively to returned soldiers.

We have a few more in the drought-stricken Cunnamulla area, but we will not throw them open because we think that would be unfair at a time such as this. We are waiting until the weather breaks, in order to give anyone who is successful in the ballot a reasonable chance of making good. Any hon. member who has any knowledge of land matters will appreciate what would have happened if we had placed soldiers on the land and they had been unfortunate enough to encounter this drought.

The department has also given generous concessions to Crown tenants on active service. The War Service Land Settlement Act of 1946 provides for the granting of the undermentioned concessions to the holder of any holding who has been engaged as a member of the forces:—

Relief from payment of rent which may accrue during period of service.

Postponement of instalments of survey fee payable during the period of service.

Extension of lease for period equivalent to the period of service, in the cases of those holdings having a defined term of lease.

Suspension of condition of personal residence or occupation for a period of service and for six months thereafter.

Non-enforcement during the period of service and for six months thereafter of penalties provided for non-compliance with provisions of development and improvement and clearing of noxious plants.

The total number of such Crown tenants who have been recorded as eligible for concessions to date is 1,775; who hold between them 2,378 holdings. Of that number 789 have been discharged from the forces. Sixty-four have been killed in action or died on service. One hundred and four holdings were transferred on enlistment of the tenant, and 49 have been surrendered or reverted to the Crown.

The total amount remitted or postponed in respect of these tenants is—

Rent remitted	£	72,898
Purchase money postponed .. .		3,780
		<hr/>
		£76,678

The number of Crown tenants whose concessions have still to be determined is 769, and the total annual rent on their holdings £9,888.

I think hon. members will agree that the Government have treated members of the forces very generously compared with what has happened in some of the other States. Of course, it is not so easy for other States to give concessions in this direction because there the Governments do not hold such a high percentage of the land as the Government here.

During the past year the Bureau of Investigation set up under the Land and Water Resources Act, in association with the Sub-Department of Irrigation, has continued to carry out investigations in various parts of the State. Very few rivers and streams in any part of the State have not received some consideration or investigation. It is necessary to do this if we are to proceed with an effective irrigation programme.

I have said before, and I repeat, that there is much loose talk about irrigation in Queensland, and I was impressed by the remarks made by the hon. member for Aubigny when he pointed out that the possibilities of irrigation in Queensland are limited as compared with the other States. We have not the mountains nor the snow run-off during the winter months that they have. In Victoria and New South Wales, although they may have no spring rains, they get a snow run-off from the mountains, and it has not been uncommon for the Murrumbidgee, the Murray, and other rivers to be in flood even though no rain had fallen for six or eight weeks.

Mr. Pie: You have still plenty of water in Queensland unharnessed.

Mr. JONES: There is not too much water in Queensland. What we can do in Queensland with irrigation is limited to some extent. There is much loose talk about irrigation. Some people have the idea—and I think the hon. member for Windsor is in that class—that it is only a question of getting water and you can do anything. They think you can go to a river and put a pump on it, and you have an irrigation system. But that is not so. It is a matter that needs close investigation by experienced engineers.

I heard a long debate in this Chamber on the Dr. Bradfield scheme but I have yet to meet anyone who can tell me what it is. All he ever did was to suggest or put forward certain ideas or theories worthy of investigation by competent engineers. There is no doubt that he was a clever man but he did not put forward any actual scheme. I repeat that the logical approach to the subject of irrigation in Queensland is to make the best use of stream weirs from which you can get immediate benefit.

Mr. Sparkes: The nature of the soil is an important thing.

Mr. JONES: It is. You cannot irrigate any type of soil. If you go into the irrigation areas at Leeton and Griffith you will see what is necessary. At Griffith you will see that the C.S.I.R. is very active. In its office there is a map depicting the type of soil in every paddock in the irrigated area. Those people can tell you exactly what the absorption capacity is, what water the soil will carry, and whether it is suitable for irrigation. Victoria has had some sad experiences in irrigation projects. Thousands of acres of fair country suitable for irrigation were spoilt as the result of putting water on the land before as much was known as we know today.

Mr. Brand: On the flooding system.

Mr. JONES: Yes.

Mr. Brand: You can irrigate any land by the spray system.

Mr. JONES: If you put too much water on the land under any system or over-irrigate you bring the watertable up and you get salt. That has happened in many areas and it could happen in any part of Queensland and it is one of the reasons why I think the Government were wise in setting up an experiment station at Gatton. It is necessary that similar experiment stations should be erected where we undertake irrigation schemes.

Mr. Sparkes: You can waste a lot of money in irrigation.

Mr. JONES: The idea is prevalent that it is only a matter of making water available and you have an irrigation system.

Mr. Pie: What part of Queensland is suitable for irrigation and what streams have you?

Mr. JONES: Possibly the Burdekin and the Dawson to some extent but there are not unlimited supplies of water. We have the land but we have to get the water.

Mr. Sparkes: The loss of water in the western area is very great. For every gallon they put on in America they lose a gallon.

Mr. JONES: I have said that before; the rate of evaporation is very great. That fact would perhaps apply more to Queensland than the other States.

Mr. Pie: Where will you spend this £5,000,000?

Mr. JONES: I do not know what the hon. member refers to. I think he is a bit mixed on this matter, as he is on many things.

Mr. Power: He was mixed in Toowoomba last night.

Mr. JONES: He said that the Labour Party was a party with a vested interest in ignorance; yet, he and his party sat through five days while the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture and Stock were being discussed and did not get off their hind feet. Why? Because they knew nothing at all about these subjects. Here is a gentleman who aspires to be Premier of the State and yet he knows nothing about these subjects. The other day the hon. member for Windsor interjected when the hon. member for Aubigny was speaking and the hon. member for Aubigny said to the hon. member for Windsor, "You look after your factory and singlets; you know something about them."

I shall deal with the other sub-departments when the votes in respect of them come up for consideration and I shall reply to any statements or criticisms by hon. members generally.

Mr. MAHER (West Moreton) (11.52 a.m.): First of all, I should like to congratulate the officers of the department, especially the officers of the Land Administration Board, on the excellent report submitted to Parliament for the year 1945-46. It is signed

by the chairman, Mr. McLean, Mr. Grenning, and Mr. Lucy. It is a very comprehensive report of vital interest to those who are concerned with the progress and development of the land; it is a good guide for hon. members and an excellent handbook for the Minister himself.

I suppose the most important matter that comes up for consideration under these Estimates is unquestionably soldier settlement. I realise all the difficulties the Minister has to face in resuming land on a grand scale and preparing it for soldier settlement—and I have always been willing to exercise forbearance in that respect—but over 12 months have elapsed since Parliament discussed and passed the War Service Land Settlement Act. In answer to a question by the hon. member for Cooroora at the beginning of the present session it was ascertained that the number of selections allotted to service personnel under the provisions of that Settlement Act of 1945 was nil and that the number of selections allotted to service personnel under the provisions of the War Service Land Settlement Act of 1946 was eight. That is not many, having regard to the time that has elapsed since the passing of the Act, and to put it mildly I think I am justified in saying that the record of the Government in soldier settlement up to date is not very impressive.

I listened to the Minister's criticism of a land-holder in the Dalby district named Pietsch, I think. This land-owner asked the Crown what they considered the market value of his property to be and I do not think that the profit likely to accrue to the land-owner concerned matters very much.

He bought the freehold property, according to the Minister's own version, in 1941 at the market value then ruling. Since then the price of land in the Dalby district has considerably advanced, in accordance with the productive earning capacity of the country. Who will deny to the title-holder of a freehold block of land in the Dalby district the actual market value of the land? If the property has appreciated in value and he wishes to sell it to a prospective buyer, who is to deny him the right to the appreciated value? On the contrary, if he had paid a price based on a high productive earning capacity for the land and a depression ensued within four or five years, who would make good to him the loss in value?

At 11.56 a.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

Mr. MAHER: The Minister cannot have it both ways. The case he quoted is isolated and remote from the typical, but even so I think that if the Minister found himself in the shoes of Mr. Pietsch he would do exactly what Mr. Pietsch has done.

Mr. Jones: He can go to the Land Court.

Mr. MAHER: What other course of action has he? The Minister quoted that case as the case of a rapacious landowner who would not sell his land at a fair price to the purchaser. All he asks is a fair market value. He is entitled to get it. If that land

appreciates to £25 an acre he is entitled to get its fair value. He bought it in 1941 at a price. Conditions since then have been favourable, and if the Crown wants to go in and dispossess him of his freehold land then the Crown should compensate him fairly and justly, on existing values. If not, then they should leave him in possession of it.

Mr. Jones: The Land Court will see to that.

Mr. MAHER: Why should the Minister put this case up as an instance of landowners' rapacity?

Mr. Jones: Because "Country Life" gave prominence to the matter.

Mr. MAHER: The Minister is trying to put Mr. Pietsch in a false light. The whole approach of the Government Party to the resumption of land from freehold proprietors and lessees has a false basis. A section of the Government party without doubt say, in effect, that the landholder should bear any loss caused by the difference between 1942 values and 1946 values, not the returned soldier. You see the subtlety in the thing that appeals to the soldiers and masses of the people generally? They put the case in such a way that it is declared to be a contest between the rapacity of the landholder on the one hand and the returned soldier on the other. It is thoroughly unjust, and a wholly illogical way of putting the case. It is the obligation of the community to bear any loss occasioned by returned-soldier settlement. The loss should not be imposed on any section of the community alone. If the Government force an owner or lessee to accept the 1942 market value of his land, then it is nothing more or less than sheer confiscation. If the Minister wishes to dispossess Mr. Pietsch or any other landholder of his land below its market level, he is advocating sheer confiscation of the equity in that land.

Mr. Jones: We are offering its market value. That is what we contend.

Mr. MAHER: He contends that the Crown are offering a price less than what he was able to get for part of his property sold on the open market. He is not willing to take a smaller price than he is able to get by private treaty. The Minister merely wants to dispossess Mr. Pietsch, and men similarly situated, of their land at a price less than they can get on the open market today.

I say that is unsound and unjust. Land is worth what it will produce. The productive earning capacity of land is undoubtedly much higher today in money values than in 1942, and it is wrong to consider dispossessing men of their land for anything less than the true market value of land in the Dalby district today. The Dalby district is a favoured district; it is regarded as being in a safe rainfall area. I qualify that by saying that, as this drought illustrates, no district is really safe, and Dalby is suffering today in common with many other parts; but speaking of the normal basis, of the average over the years, Dalby is regarded as a safe district, and it has been proved in recent

times to be suitable for the successful cultivation of wheat; and because good wheat returns have been got from that district its productive value has increased, but the Minister refuses to face the facts and recognise that if he wishes to resume land in the Dalby district he must be willing to pay what the ordinary man is willing to pay—what the wheat man is willing to pay.

Mr. Jones: And what the Land Court determines on resumption. Are you opposed to that?

Mr. MAHER: It has been enacted that the Land Court must have regard to 1942 values.

Mr. Jones: What are 1942 values?

Mr. MAHER: There you are! Who is going to decide it?

Mr. Jones: The Land Court.

Mr. MAHER: Is the Land Court free and untrammelled in its decision?

Mr. Jones: I do not interfere with it; I know that.

Mr. MAHER: If the Land Court is free to make a fair determination there need not be any worry. The Land Court no doubt will be guided by the market values and it will ascertain the true value. The basis on which we have debated this matter in the past is that such land as this is frozen to prevent it from being sold by the vendor at present-day prices, to hold that land back by a freezing order to values that obtained in 1942. That is the whole purpose of the National Security Regulations—the freezing of that land to tie it back to the 1942 values; therefore I am particularly suspicious of any suggestion of the Minister's, having regard to the nature of the National Security order and past debates in this Chamber. I do not know whether there is any change of attitude or whether the Land Court is to be free and untrammelled in its decisions as to the value of the land the Government propose to resume in the Dalby and other areas.

Mr. Jones: Are you suggesting that we would instruct the Land Court?

Mr. MAHER: No, not at all. To the extent that the Land Court is governed by the National Security order instructing it that the 1942 values must be taken into account, to that extent it is instructed. There is the whole position, and the result remains to be seen. If, as the Minister suggested, the Land Court might be free to make a decision based on true market values, that would alter the whole position. Otherwise a severe handicap is going to be placed on the shoulders of the landowner who is dispossessed of part or the whole of his property. If his compensation is to be anchored down to the 1942 values he will not be able to find land anywhere else in Queensland at the same price per acre as he is compelled to sell his land at.

Mr. Jones: That is a contradictory statement.

Mr. MAHER: No.

Mr. Jones: Of course it is.

Mr. MAHER: It is not. Previous debates in this Chamber have been governed by the assumption that the landholder would give up his land on the basis of 1942 values. If the Land Court determines the compensation on that basis the landowner will be indeed in a very sorry position because he will not be able to buy anywhere else in Queensland land at a price per acre equivalent to that for which he is being obliged to yield his own land to the Crown for the purpose of returned-soldier settlement. That is unfair. That burden should not fall on the shoulders of the landowners only. An obligation rests on the whole of the Australian community to make up any loss caused by difference between 1942 and 1946 values where the resumption of land for returned-soldier settlement is concerned.

I can understand the unsettlement in the Dalby district that resulted in the public meeting to which the Minister referred this morning. If everything was running as smoothly as the Minister suggested by interjection this morning, why would all these landowners in the Dalby district be so concerned as to convene a public meeting to protest against their lands being resumed on 1942 values? These men are actuated by the fear that they will be subject to very heavy losses by the Government's policy in this matter, and have taken the only step open to them, that is, to convene a public meeting and raise a fund from which they can defend their common-law right against being plundered of a substantial portion of the property they own and have the right to quietly enjoy today.

Mr. Jones: That does not say much for the Land Court.

Mr. MAHER: That is a new slant. The Minister is introducing something entirely new.

Mr. Jones: No, it is not.

Mr. MAHER: He is willing now to leave this matter to the Land Court's determination. I hope it is a change of heart, and I hope it represents a change of policy from everything previously expressed in this Chamber.

Mr. Jones: That is rot.

Mr. MAHER: If the Minister takes that attitude, what I want to be sure of is that the Land Court is free to make a decision: that the National Security order freezing the land on 1942 values is not going to affect the Land Court's judgment. If the Minister can give that assurance to the Committee this morning I feel sure it will be welcomed by landholders whose land is tied up today by the freezing order.

Mr. Jones: I think it is an insult to put that up, anyhow. It is the condition of your dirty mind to suggest that—that I would interfere with the Land Court.

Mr. MAHER: I am not suggesting that the Minister personally would interfere with the Land Court.

Mr. Jones: Of course you are.

Mr. MAHER: Not at all. That is very remote from my mind indeed, but I am pointing out that there is a National Security order. The Minister is not responsible for that order. It was issued by the Commonwealth Government, and as a result 4,000,000 acres of land in Queensland were frozen and the owners were prevented from selling their land and improving their country. Their position is uncertain indeed. They do not know where they stand. How far will the existence of that National Security order affect the decision of the Land Court as to value? I assure the Minister that I did not make any reference to him personally or suggest that he would interfere with any decision of the Land Court. I assure him of that. But that is the position as it stands.

I wish to refer to the unwisdom of resuming part of an existing small holding in many districts. I hold that in the grazing districts in which mixed farming would be carried on, properties up to 5,000 acres should be left severely alone. There is no justification, in a country of vast areas like Queensland, to interfere with the man who is rearing a family on a 5,000-acre block.

Mr. Jones: That is the old story—send the soldiers out to the backblocks.

Mr. MAHER: There is no “backblocks” about it. There are vast areas of fertile country between the southern border and the railway from Townsville to Hughenden and it is in a reasonably safe rainfall belt. There are great areas of what might be termed undeveloped land there, now held under pastoral leases. There is an opportunity there for the Minister to come to terms with many pastoral lessees for the voluntary surrender of part of those leases for soldier settlement for either pastoral or agricultural purposes.

Mr. Jones: If you have watched the legislation that has passed through this Assembly you know very well that the War Service Land Settlement Act does not apply to grazing or pastoral areas.

Mr. MAHER: There is nothing to prevent the Minister from amending that Act to cover a wider field. Here in the report we learn that the Minister has resumed property at Nanango containing an area of 2,560 acres for £11,500-odd. This represents approximately £5 an acre, and it is going to run into a tremendous sum if the Government propose to buy small areas like that in these closely-settled districts. A certain amount of soldier settlement can be carried out in districts such as that at high costs of resumption but there is a much wider field at a much reduced cost where areas could be got by the Crown by way of voluntary surrender. I am certain many pastoral lessees in the reasonably safe rainfall belt over a wide area of Queensland would be willing to surrender portion of their properties voluntarily in return for a proportionate extension

of lease on the balance they continue to hold. A deal could be made for those lands at no cost to the Crown. All that would be necessary then would be to finance the returned men into occupancy of these voluntarily surrendered areas and to help them, whether they desire to take up mixed farming, pastoral or other land pursuits. Why should we confine ourselves to helping the service men into farming areas, limited as they are to extent and costly as to resumption? I think, too, that many pastoral leases could be bought outright by the Crown at reasonable cost and subdivided into suitable areas of from 3,000 to 10,000 acres and thus the Minister could embark on a really sound, vigorous and progressive policy of land settlement in the undeveloped areas in Queensland with ex-Service men and so meet much of the criticism that we hear today as well as develop the State.

Sooner or later these undeveloped areas in Queensland must be tackled. It could be done not only by helping returned service men to get established on such land but also by rail and road construction, which would open up opportunities and associated activities for many people not coming within the term “returned Service men.” There is tremendous scope for the Minister there. It is not necessary to be tied down to settling men on mixed-farming blocks in districts already reasonably closely settled.

Mr. Jones: It is in the agreement between all States and the Commonwealth. You know that.

Mr. MAHER: Yes, but the policy is wrong. The Minister can see that we are moving too slowly in this matter, that bitter criticism is coming from landowners because of the methods that they believe will be used against them to acquire their land at less than its value.

There is much criticism from returned soldiers' associations as to the delay in settling returned men on the land and the time it will take to get a substantial number on the land. It is the obligation of the Minister and his Government and of Parliament to see that the returned man is justly dealt with. We have to deal fairly with the landholder about to be dispossessed of his land. A number of returned soldiers are looking for the chance of becoming established on the land—men who believed the promises made to them during the war, and since, that there would be opportunities for them in the post-war period. I say that the Minister has a very great chance if he adopts this method and widens the scope for the absorption of returned men on the land. Hundreds of smaller properties now frozen could be released and the State would be undertaking the development of now backward areas, which we have to do if this country is to be populated and we are to use it to the full. The Minister has the chance of a lifetime to develop this brigalow and belah scrub and forest country that lies through the millions of square miles of territory in Queensland now held as pastoral leases. If he likes to tackle the job by negotiating with the men established on these areas he will get the development and the settlement more rapidly

than under the present restricted method of resumption of expensive properties in the closely settled areas.

(Time expired.)

Hon. A. JONES (Charters Towers—Secretary for Public Lands) (12.17 p.m.): I cannot let the remarks made by the hon. member who has just resumed his seat go without comment. To sum up his remarks, this is what he says in essence, "Get out of the Dalby district and the areas having a better type of land that you are now acquiring, and go to the backblocks and take the soldiers into the brigalow country." He went so far as to say that the soldiers should be settled between Townsville and Hughenden

Mr. Maher: I merely used that as a geographical expression, and I said between the southern border and the line from Townsville to Hughenden.

Mr. JONES: I accept his explanation but I know what he said. I say that such a statement could not have come from any man with any knowledge of Queensland, because apart from little pockets such as Major's Creek, Broughton, and other little places, very little land there is suitable for settlement. The land is mainly fairly good cattle land; in the Hughenden area there is some good sheep land. By way of interjection I said that under the War Service Land Settlement Act provision is not made for placing men on pastoral properties. I have mentioned time and time again—the hon. member knows it—that in Queensland to-day we have approximately 5,500,000 acres of good sheep country that is reverting to the Crown—the leases have expired. We have to deal with that. The hon. member suggested that we take the soldiers to the backblocks.

Mr. Maher: No.

Mr. JONES: That is actually what he is saying. He is saying that we should take them away from areas we are investigating. I am astounded. He has come here this morning with a brief from this body in Dalby that is objecting to the action of the Government in acquiring suitable good land for land settlement.

We know what happened after the first World War; we do not want to repeat that mistake. The hon. member has apparently no great regard for the returned soldier in land settlement; he is concerned only to preserve the land to the owners in the areas we have under investigation. He went so far as to suggest that areas of more than 5,000 acres should not be interfered with at all.

Would the hon. member suggest that a man in the Dalby district should be allowed to have 5,000 acres of country when farmers can carry on successfully there in wheat-production on 600 acres and this land is required for soldier settlement and is capable of providing for six to eight farmers? Do hon. members think that under such a policy the State of Victoria would have developed as it has or some of the other closely settled States and countries would have progressed? The hon. member suggests that one man should be allowed to hold 5,000 acres in the

closely settled Dalby district when it is required and is suitable for soldier settlement on smaller areas. Such a statement is absurd.

I referred to a Mr. Pietsch and the hon. member for West Moreton implied that we were taking the whole of his property. That is not so. We are acquiring 800 acres but that still leaves him with 1,600 acres, a jolly good living area in the Dalby district. This man bought the property in 1941, and after selling half of it in 1946 he was able to recoup himself for the whole cost of the property, still leaving himself half the property, and if anyone calls that a bad deal it will require a great deal of explaining to me. The hon. member for West Moreton went to a great deal of trouble to make a case for this man and he rather cast reflections upon the Land Court. If we negotiate with a person for the purchase of his property and he says that the price is too low and he will not accept it, we take action to resume it, and the only course left is for the Land Court to make a decision. I think it is obvious to any hon. member that the suggestion that the Government are likely to tell the Land Court its job is a reflection on the Land Court, just as similar remarks about judges of the Supreme Court would be a reflection upon the Supreme Court. After all, these gentlemen are acting in a judicial capacity, and any reflection on the Land Court is a reflection on the integrity of the Land Court judges.

I was rather disappointed and surprised to hear the remarks of the hon. member today, because, after all, he is a practical man with a knowledge of land matters. He has had a long experience, and for that reason I was very disappointed that he should have made those remarks. The Land Court is very fair, and it is respected by 95 per cent. of the landholders of the State. The Land Court does a very good job and the veiled insinuation by the hon. member for West Moreton today that if not I as Secretary for Public Lands then someone else was likely to give certain instructions not to go over a certain price is totally unfair. It is all right for the hon. member to make those statements, but it is not right that they should go out in cold print in "Hansard."

Mr. Brand: He did not say so.

Mr. JONES: I heard his statement, and if I am making a statement that is not right, any hon. member can get up and object. I heard his statement, and I took it to be a reflection on the Land Court.

Mr. MAHER: Mr. Mann, as the Minister has put it that way. I feel that I must rise to a point of order. I did not reflect on the Land Court at all. I have the utmost confidence in the Land Court. I made no reflection upon the Minister personally either. I was merely connecting the Land Court with the freezing order and I was pointing out that the 1942 prices had been the basis for resumption.

The CHAIRMAN: I ask the Minister to accept the hon. member's explanation.

Mr. JONES: I accept his explanation and apology. I heard what the hon. member said, and I shall certainly peruse his speech in "Hansard" tomorrow with a fair amount of interest. He made some rather alarming statements, statements that I did not expect to come from the other side of the Chamber.

Mr. O'SHEA (Warrego) (12.24 p.m.): I listened to the statement made by the hon. member for West Moreton, and I heard him say that soldiers could be settled on pastoral areas of 3,000 to 5,000 acres, and it appears to me that my advocacy in this Chamber for sufficient land for all our people to live on in pastoral areas has gone for naught.

In my opinion the safest district in which soldier settlement can be established is the Dalby district, and through the area extending back to Pittsworth. That land ranks far ahead of anything that I have seen in my travels. Anyone seeking to settle soldiers successfully would therefore be compelled to anchor at Dalby. Such a person must be impressed by the results achieved in the Dalby district over a number of years. It is one of our proved districts where soldiers cannot fail.

We hear hon. members opposite talk about placing soldiers in the brigalow country. The other day I heard the hon. member for Stanley accuse the Government of destroying some of the brigalow country. I know the area that he referred to. It is from Meandarra and in from Tara. I have no doubt that hon. members opposite would shove the soldiers back into that wilderness and allow them to work out their own salvation. Any war experience or privation that they may have had would be dwarfed in comparison with the experience that would be theirs if they attempted to carve out a selection or farm in that area.

It is no use our trying to kid ourselves that every acre in Queensland is fertile land. We have in this State a great area of unproductive land and we have also some land whose conditions border very closely on those of a desert. If we settle soldiers on the land at a cost of, say, £6 an acre, their difficulties will begin immediately. But the hon. member for West Moreton said that there should be no restriction on the price, that the sky was to be the limit. Probably if competition was set up for our wheat-growing land it might bring £10 or £12 an acre. I could take hon. members to that part of New South Wales in the Gilgandra district which in 1904 was bought for 2s. 6d. an acre and was sold in 1916 for £17 an acre. That was because there was competition and because it was permitted to be sold without any restriction as to price.

Dalby is the greatest wheat-producing country in Australia. There is no area in Australia that can produce to the same extent as the Dalby district. For that reason it offers facilities not only for mixed farming but for dairying and all associated classes of agriculture. That is the reason why I say it is the safest district in Queensland for the purpose of settling soldiers. It is new land in the sense that is not worn out to the extent that land is farther up on the

Downs. There is no possibility that settlers in the Dalby district will be compelled to use fertilisers for the next 35 or 40 years. In fact, no other district in Australia, that has been farmed for a great number of years, with the exception of the Warwick, Pittsworth and Brookstead districts, can be exploited to the same extent.

One of the things we must be concerned about when settling soldiers on the land is to see that the price they pay is not going to cripple them. If we take land at £8 an acre, and allow for interest at 5 per cent.—and when conditions get back to normal I suppose it will be 5 per cent.—that represents 8s. an acre a year; yet we find people arguing against an assessment of 6d. an acre a year. It is evident that at that price you are setting the ex-soldier a mighty task. I have in mind country that was settled in the Riverina at £4 10s. an acre, and today virtually every settler owes from £8 to £9 an acre on that land. All of them are in a bad way, and so are the people on Lake Cowal and the people on Oakey Creek, and Liverpool Plains, where inflated values have been allowed to run on and people have foolishly attempted to carry on at those values.

The settling of soldiers on pastoral areas is a very wide subject. It covers an area from the southern border to the railway line between Townsville and Hughenden. The position today is that ruination is staring the people in the face owing to the drought conditions that prevail. I have never experienced anything like it. The most deplorable conditions that ever existed in the South-West exist at the present time. Just imagine settling soldiers up there at the moment, when people who have been settled for 20, 30 and 40 years are right up against it! Imagine sending ex-soldiers out there with all the financial aid that could be given to them through the Agricultural Bank! Imagine them going on to 30,000 or 40,000 acres of country with limited capital of about £5,000! How can you visualise a prosperous condition for them in a few years? It is no use talking of settling soldiers there unless very liberal provision is made for them. The Government have very wisely refrained, until the drought conditions have passed, from throwing open blocks of land in the West and putting soldiers on the land. There are people who say that no progress is being made and that the soldiers are not settled. That is all some people want to see done with the soldiers—they want to see them "settled." I want to see something different: I want to see soldiers put on the land and make a success of it. I do not want them to be "settled" at all.

However, the Minister dealt adequately with land issues this morning and I will deal now with irrigation, which comes under this vote. The majority of members who speak of irrigation in this Chamber do so without giving much consideration to the subject. We find that where it has been practicable to carry out some experiments, as at St. George and Cunnamulla, already progressive councils have put forward their plans and these are being considered very favourably, and I

believe the works will be under construction within a few months. But let us examine the difference between Cunnamulla and the Balonne River at St. George. The Warrego River, which flows past Charleville, has its source in the Carnarvon Ranges with a 20-inch rainfall. The Balonne comes through a district with a 40-inch rainfall. How much more favourably situated would be St. George than Cunnamulla? But Cunnamulla lends itself more readily to irrigation because of the nature of the deep black soil and the flat surface. Cunnamulla is one of the best sites for irrigation that I have seen in the State to date.

Some four years ago I advocated in this Chamber experimenting with various sites mentioned in the Carnarvon Ranges. The other day the hon. member for West Moreton endeavoured to steal my thunder. I made this statement four years ago and I think my suggestion should be exploited to the full. If it was possible to impound water in certain gorges in the Carnarvon Ranges there would be a much better supply than could be obtained by constructing these miniature dams so generally spoken about. One would imagine that in the western country one had only to throw a concrete dam across a river and have water conservation for irrigation purposes, but I do not know that much improvement could be made on some of the existing waterholes in the Barecoo, Paroo, and Warrego Rivers at the present time. Wherever it is possible to construct dams for the purpose of a local domestic supply no effort should be spared to do this, but when people speak of irrigation as being the salvation of this State they should realise that Queensland is in very different circumstances from the remainder of the Commonwealth, except Western Australia.

In the Murrumbidgee and Murray the water pours down from snow-capped mountains and is impounded in the Hume and Burrinjuck Dams. The water in the Hume weir comes from the snow on Mount Buffalo, and Burrinjuck holds more water than is contained in Sydney Harbour. The Hume weir impounds 1,250,000 acre feet of water. We must consider these things when we talk about conserving water in this State.

We have heard about the Bradfield scheme. The Minister has told us that Dr. Bradfield worked out that scheme on the data supplied to him by the various shire councils, and in many cases it was supplied not by engineers but by overseers. People thought that something might be done to bring water across into Cooper Creek and take it down to Lake Eyre. This sounds a grand scheme. People visualise growing vegetables out there, but they do not realise that they would be 850 miles from the market. That would be only one of the obstacles to be overcome. It is like the present obstacle confronting us—the closing of the stock route from the Cooper to Quilpie, with the consequent threat to Brisbane's meat supply shortly. If we could get vegetables down to the market we should be able to bring down cattle, but no provision has been made even for that.

Mr. Sparkes: Whom would you blame for that?

Mr. O'SHEA: I am not blaming anyone—I am not in that frame of mind this morning—but I do blame people when they come into this Chamber and paint rosy pictures of vast irrigator schemes throughout a State that does not lend itself to irrigation except, perhaps, for a few small plots in the Lockyer Valley, on the Warrego, possibly at St. George, and in a few places along the Condamine.

It must be remembered that you cannot irrigate without water. There was much talk about Wallum Creek, but few people realise that that stream holds only enough water for the domestic supply. Someone suggested to the people up there that they should agitate for the Government to install irrigation there, but I think Mr. Cameron, from Bullen Plains, who has just completed a 31,000-yard tank, would be able to do just as well with that as they could do with irrigation from Wallum Creek.

I should like to see an end of all this talk about irrigation. Let us be frank and tell the people that at the most they can only conserve water in certain places for small irrigation plots, that they must forget such things as a general irrigation scheme for the State. You cannot do it.

Mr. Plunkett: We can do much more than we are doing.

Mr. O'SHEA: And the people who have been in occupation of the land for the last 70 and 80 years should have done something, too, for themselves. They have been dependent, more or less, on the natural water-courses flowing through their properties; and with the opening of artesian and sub-artesian supplies they said, "Here is our problem solved; we have no further trouble; the Government will put down artesian bores galore." We must keep an eye, too, on the diminution of the artesian water supply. It is almost frightening, when you come to think of it, to realise how that source of water has diminished over a short period.

I believe that the Government are doing a good job; I believe that the Minister is doing an excellent job in moving cautiously with regard to the resumption of land for the settlement of soldiers, and in adopting the attitude that the soldiers should not be forced into the western country to fight another war, perhaps as hard as the one they have been through. He is to be complimented on the attitude he has adopted on this very important matter. I am pleased to know of the action he has taken in protecting soldiers against the ravages of the people who would exploit them in the areas where it is intended they should be settled.

Mr. SPARKES (Aubigny) (12.48 p.m.): I think the Committee will agree that the vote we are discussing is a very important one. As a matter of fact, probably everything we eat and wear comes from the land, and that in itself shows the great importance of the soil in this State. I appreciate the position of the Minister; he has a very difficult task ahead of him. I was rather amused when he said that he was glad the soldiers had not been settled on the land, because

they would have run into this drought. I realise that on the Government side there is a rainmaker, but I did not know they had some one who could forecast what would happen. There is a drought in the Dalby district today, and it should serve as a guide to the Minister when he is making areas available for selection—he should see that a sufficient area is given to each person so that he will be able to overcome the obstacles that lie ahead. Many people think it is only a matter of the soldier's going on a 600-acre block at Dalby, and everything in the garden will be lovely. This year is proving conclusively that that is not so, and the Minister knows that many of the soldiers in the Dalby district who are now share-farming are in a horrible position. There is no doubt about that.

Mr. Aikens: Will irrigation overcome the drought problem?

Mr. SPARKES: There are no potentialities for irrigation in this area. There are two factors against it, one being the lack of natural water, and the second that the soil itself would require an enormous amount of water on it. I am not throwing cold water on the interjection—it is a sound one—but in that district it does not apply.

I speak rather feelingly of the Dalby district, having lived there since 1910. I have acquired some knowledge of it. I should like to draw the attention of the Minister to the debate on the War Service Land Settlement Acquisition Bill passed last year, which is to be found in "Hansard" No. 20 at page 1069. The Minister said on that occasion—

"We do not want to hold up that phase of our policy any longer than is possible. That is why it is necessary that this measure should be brought down and action taken straight away."

That was in reply to my interjection that it was important to be in a position to tell the landholders what the Government intended to do.

Mr. Jones: What is the point you are trying to make?

Mr. SPARKES: At that time the hon. gentleman said that the idea in bringing down the Bill was to act promptly.

Mr. Jones: It was, too.

Mr. SPARKES: I am not trying to score off the hon. gentleman. I am merely pointing that out. Twelve months have elapsed. I understand all his difficulties. Last year the Minister said we were to get this settlement this year and now, this year, he says next year.

Mr. Jones: I did not say that last year; be fair. I did not say that we were going to ballot immediately.

Mr. SPARKES: No, but the hon. gentleman took the hon. member for West Moreton to task for something that he said today. When the hon. member for West Moreton said that there were good areas in other parts of Queensland the Minister said that

the hon. member for West Moreton had said in effect, "Push the soldiers right out into the West."

Mr. Jones: I shall get 1,000 copies of his speech printed and sent to the returned soldiers.

Mr. SPARKES: What did the present Secretary for Agriculture and Stock, Mr. Collins, have to say on this subject before he got his portfolio? He said that we had plenty of first-class land from one end of Queensland to the other. He was not taken to task.

Mr. Jones: He did not say how much.

Mr. SPARKES: I am only quoting what he said.

Mr. Hilton: Quote the whole of it.

Mr. SPARKES: "Quote the whole of it," says the hon. member for Carnarvon. I have been here too long for that. My time will not permit. The present Secretary for Agriculture and Stock went on to say that he agreed with me or that he had no reason to disagree with me, as I was a practical man on land matters. I had pointed out that it would cost £10,000 to put a soldier on land in the Dalby area and the present Secretary for Agriculture and Stock went on to refer to land in the North. My point is that he made remarks similar to those made today by the hon. member for West Moreton. The hon. member for West Moreton suggested that other land might be available for soldier settlement as well and he was accused of wanting to push the soldiers out West. He was howled down for that but when the present Secretary for Agriculture and Stock expressed a similar view on another occasion, was he howled down? No, he was listened to with attention.

Mr. Jones: In the North he said.

Mr. SPARKES: Every time the Secretary for Health and Home Affairs gets on his feet to speak about land matters he tells of the wonderful country in the Springsure district. He refers to Peak Downs and its wonderful possibilities and its being the best wheat-growing country in Australia. The Secretary for Health and Home Affairs represents that district. He then went on to speak of the great possibilities of closer settlement in that area. Yet when the hon. member for West Moreton makes a suggestion the Minister looks upon him as one who wants to get a nulla nulla and knock the poor unfortunate soldiers. The hon. member for West Moreton is a practical man, and has as much right to air his views on this subject as the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock and the Secretary for Health and Home Affairs.

We know that much of this cheap land exists in the State.

Mr. Jones: There is a lot in the North.

Mr. SPARKES: I am pleased the Minister agrees with me. The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock mentioned how entirely suitable this land was for soldier settlement and gave its rainfall.

Mr. Jones: That is round the Daintree.

Mr. SPARKES: He described it as some of the best dairying land in the Commonwealth. Let me get back to the Dalby district.

Mr. Jones: You are moving about fairly fast.

Mr. SPARKES: I have not got much time, and consequently have to move as quickly as possible.

In the Dalby district a large number of landholders have had their land frozen for the past two years. You, Mr. Mann, would not like to have your business tied up for over two years, not knowing whether you would be left with it or that it would be taken away from you. It is unfair of the Minister to condemn all the landholders in the Dalby district because of the statements of one man. The Minister should not have quoted one man; he should have quoted a number of people. He is fair and reasonable, but it was unfair of him to say that one man was behind the whole opposition to the Government scheme.

Mr. Jones: You must be fair.

Mr. SPARKES: I am as fair as the Minister was in condemning the hon. member for West Moreton. If what he said is so—and I accept the hon. gentleman's explanation—why condemn the rest of the landholders in that district? Why blame them all because of what one man does? I know of a gentleman in the Dalby district who made application in order to place returned soldiers on it. The Minister said that no landholder in that district had put a returned soldier on his land. This man said he would put returned soldiers on the land. He was prepared to do so.

It is high time that the Government said, "We are going to acquire your land," or "We are not going to acquire it." That is only fair and reasonable. Take the point of view of the soldier. I appreciate the Minister's difficulties, but the soldier is saying, "One year is gone, two years have gone, and still not a block of land."

Mr. Jones: Why did you not rush in and give us some of your land? You have a lot of land up there.

Mr. SPARKES: My land is there. It could be frozen and taken tomorrow.

Mr. Jones: The hon. member for Isis asked why I had not taken it.

Mr. SPARKES: I presume some sound reason must exist why the Government did not take it. I would say that it was because of his generosity that the Minister did not do so. He is too good a business man. He knows that the stud on the land is probably too valuable.

Mr. Power: It is not too late to take it yet.

Mr. SPARKES: We find in New South Wales that studs have been exempted—

Mr. Power: It is not too late to take it yet.

Mr. SPARKES: I think that is the lowest form of controversy that man can get down to. To try to stop me from speaking he keeps interjecting, "He may take it yet."

Mr. POWER: Mr. Mann, I rise to a point of order. I never made that statement attributed to me by the hon. member for Aubigny.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. SPARKES: I will accept the hon. member's explanation.

Let me say at once that I think it is a great pity that soldier settlement should not have been discussed more as a national than a political question. That is why I was sorry to hear the Minister make an attack on the hon. member for West Moreton. I believe that every member is sincere and honest enough to put forward suggestions that might make for successful settlement. But it does not always follow that if you put two people where there was one before that is successful settlement. You may remove a successful practical settler and put two problematically successful settlers in his place. That type of settlement is not to the benefit of this State or of the settler.

I wish to quote again the remarks of the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock and I do so because I think he is a practical man. During the lunch-hour I went to great pains to peruse the whole of his speech, and I see that in it he mentioned certain areas of land. I suggest to the Minister that he consider carefully the suggestions of the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock and the Secretary for Health and Home Affairs as to settlement in the areas mentioned by those gentlemen. It should be worth while giving those districts a trial.

Mr. Jones: Why try them out on the soldiers?

Mr. SPARKES: I am putting it this way: why try the district you are trying out on the soldier?

Mr. Jones: Is not Dalby a proved district?

At 2.17 p.m.,

Mr. DUGGAN (Toowoomba) relieved the Chairman in the chair.

Mr. SPARKES: Dalby is quite a good district; there is no doubt about that. The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock said, "The hon. member for Aubigny said that it would cost £10,000 to put a soldier on a block. If that is the cost, then the soldier will start very much behind scratch."

Mr. Jones: That is your figure; you said £10,000.

Mr. SPARKES: I am quoting now the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock. He is agreeing with me.

Mr. Jones: No.

Mr. SPARKES: All right. He went on to say, "And I see no reason to doubt the hon. member for Aubigny."

There are possibilities for settlement in the Dalby district. I have never doubted it. In this Chamber I said that the plain country was more suitable for farming, for example, wheat-growing, and the brigalow country for dairying, and the forest country was the worst country in the district. I will defy anybody who has a knowledge of the district to contradict me.

Mr. Jones: Why do you want us to get out of the Dalby area?

Mr. SPARKES: I cannot understand the attitude of the Minister. I have never suggested that he get out of the Dalby area. I never made that statement in this Chamber nor did anybody else, but I did say—

Mr. Jones: The hon. member for Isis—

Mr. SPARKES: The hon. gentleman is dealing with the hon. member for Aubigny. I pointed out the cost that would be entailed. I have stated that the people in that area whose lands are frozen are entitled to some intimation whether or not the Minister is going to take their country. That is the point, and I think the Minister will admit he would not like to be on a property there for two years and not know whether he was going to stay on it or have to go off it. I make no apologies. I appreciate the position in which these men are placed and I contend that at least 50 per cent. of the cost of settling a soldier in the Dalby area will have to be written off. As a business man, Mr. Mann, you will agree that that is a large amount to have to write off. I still hold to my figure that the cost will be round about £10,000 if they are given 1,000 acres of the best Dalby country—and the Minister says he wants the best country. As a matter of fact, I said 640 acres of the best brigalow country and the Minister by way of interjection said, "That is small enough, God knows."

Mr. Jones: I think it would be.

Mr. SPARKES: I am not disagreeing with the hon. gentleman. The Minister will know that my speeches in this Chamber are made in an effort to help settle the returned soldier.

Mr. Jones: I understand.

Mr. SPARKES: For that reason I am endeavouring to put forward something that will be helpful. If the Minister settles them there he will have to write off 50 per cent. In other words, the soldier will be left with a debt of £5,000 round his neck. I do not know whether the Minister has been there lately, but would he like to be there today with a debt of £5,000 on his property? It would be plenty big enough. I should not like to see my boys on 1,000 acres there with a £5,000 debt.

Mr. Jones: If there is such a big demand for this land in the Dalby area, why not put the soldiers there?

Mr. SPARKES: I am only suggesting the things that they will bump up against. After all, not one soldier has been settled anywhere yet.

Mr. Jones: Yes.

Mr. SPARKES: I am only suggesting the things the Minister will run into. In 1945, I said in this Chamber, as reported in "Hansard," "I think there is no industry with a better or brighter outlook in Australia than the production of merino wool." Events have borne that out. I still maintain, as I said then, that the most successful settlement will come through merino wool. But I know the Minister's hands are tied. So far as the Commonwealth Government are concerned, it must be a farming undertaking.

Mr. Jones: We settled a certain number of soldiers on grazing selections.

Mr. SPARKES: I realise that. While I am standing in this Chamber a block is being balloted for entirely by soldiers—today.

Mr. Jones: Two.

Mr. SPARKES: I appreciate that. I believe that had Queensland been told when this soldier settlement was first mooted that Queensland must handle it in Queensland the men would have been in a better position than they are. The Minister knows the conditions and I think his hands should be entirely free. Of course, the Commonwealth Government would have to pay. The Commonwealth Government's interference, with their ready-made farms and that sort of thing, has to a certain extent tied the hands of the Minister, but I think we could have made a better job of soldier settlement if Queensland only had handled it. We find—I ask the Minister to contradict me if I am incorrect—that the only soldiers who will be settled on this land this year will be soldiers settled directly by this Government on land that has fallen in on the expiration of leases. Much of the land is still frozen and if the Minister was honest he would tell the Committee that the land is frozen because of the Commonwealth Government. The Minister and his officers must know that a great deal of this land is not wanted. If so, for heaven's sake let them tell the holders.

I believe that Queensland offers many possibilities for small irrigation schemes such as the Lockyer Valley scheme. They could develop a good deal of country. A great deal of the irrigation in the Lockyer today is done from underground water. The Cooyar Valley is much the same; it has Cooyar Creek running through it and the water is very shallow. But I will admit that I do not think Western Queensland offers any great scope for irrigation when we consider the soil, the rate of evaporation, and the amount of water available.

Mr. Smith: What part of Queensland? It is a big area.

Mr. SPARKES: Take the country from Winton to the border of New South Wales. There is very little scope for irrigation anywhere in that area.

Mr. Jones: As you say, it is governed by the amount of water available.

Mr. SPARKES: And the evaporation rate, and the soil. In much of that western country you probably could not irrigate one acre with thousands of gallons of water.

Mr. Aikens: In some parts of that area the evaporation rate is 7 feet a year.

Mr. SPARKES: Although the Minister has embarked upon a big irrigation undertaking on the border of New South Wales, I ask him still to give consideration to any smaller schemes that would be of great value to practical farmers.

The Cooyar Valley is similar to the Lockyer Valley. Water is obtainable there at from 15 to 30 feet underground. Such thickly populated areas as that might have possibilities, and I hope the Minister will not confine his attention to this £1,000,000 scheme on the border and shut his eyes to what might be valuable small schemes in such places as the Lockyer and Cooyar Valleys.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (2.27 p.m.): I cannot congratulate the Minister, as others have done, on the presentation of his departmental reports, because they are very confusing indeed. We find that on 28 October, 1946, the members of the Land Administration Board presented to the Minister a report purporting to be for the year 1945-46, but when we turn over the page we find that it is a report of the Department of Public Lands for the year ended 31 December, 1945. And when we go through this report for the year ended 31 December, 1945, we find that it deals with matters as late as October of this year. If it were a report for the year ended June, 1946, I could understand it, but not when it purports to be a report for the year ended 31 December, 1945. Of course, I can see the reason for this. If these matters relating to events as late as October had not been included, this section of the report would have had a very sorry tale indeed to present, especially with regard to war-service land settlement. Actually, there would have been nothing in that section if the report concluded with matters pertaining to the year ended 31 December, 1945.

Mr. Jones: You are attacking the officials of the department now.

Mr. DECKER: I am attacking the Minister. I do not want to be misunderstood on that.

Mr. Jones: Do not get that into your head. This is not my report; it is a report to me.

Mr. DECKER: The war has been used as an excuse for not making earlier arrangements for settling soldiers on the land. We find on going through "Hansard" over the years that hon. members in Opposition were continually bringing to the Govern-

ment's notice the need for planning ahead, so that when the war ended we should be in a position to settle some of these soldiers on the land. We find that New Zealand is on the right track and we are getting a lead from that Dominion in what should be done for the settlement of returned men. Although the population of New Zealand is 75 per cent. in excess of the population of Queensland, from their reports to 30 June, 1946—a definite date, by the way—we find that that Dominion claims to have settled more than 2,000 ex-Service men on farms and 16,000 ex-Service men in war-service homes. Had we progressed in the same proportion as New Zealand, having regard to population, we should be able to say that we had settled 1,143 ex-Service men on farms and put 9,143 ex-Service men into war-service homes.

Instead, what do we find? We find that on 12 March last the Queensland People's Party moved the adjournment of the House to discuss soldier rehabilitation and the Minister said that he could say definitely that 25 grazing selections would be available to returned men within the next two or three months.

Mr. Jones: Do you suggest that we could open grazing selections in the Cunnamulla district with this drought prevailing?

Mr. DECKER: I am going on the evidence contained in "Hansard." I am pointing out that the statement was not lightly made but was a definite statement after the Minister had been criticised on the settlement of returned soldiers on the land. At the end of June, instead of having 25 men settled on grazing selections, he had settled no more than three. Seven months later we find that the grand total is 14. What a wonderful thing the Government have done, to settle 14 returned soldiers on areas ballotted for in this State!

This annual report says that areas have been selected in the Hughenden, Blackall, Longreach and Winton districts. I am pointing out that it is no use making excuses of the drought, lack of staff, and other things. The whole trouble is that there has been no previous planning. It is all very well to say that staff has been reduced and so on; the fact remains that practically nothing has been done.

Let us see what the ex-Secretary for Public Lands had to say. Three years ago the hon. member for Mirani made the statement to this Chamber that no further selections or new leases would be granted or old leases renewed because we were holding this land for soldier settlement after the war.

Mr. Jones: It was not stated three years ago that we were making pastoral areas available for soldier settlement.

Mr. DECKER: I can bring "Hansard" to bear on my statement, and the hon. gentleman cannot go back on that. These are the facts. If we had been in Government we should have made some attempt to open the land for settlement, and should

have been in the happy position of having done something to settle the men on the land.

Mr. Jones: You would have "settled" them all right.

Mr. DECKER: Today the Minister is "settling" them. Already 1,435 applications have been received from ex-Service men for land, but only 14 have been satisfied.

Mr. Jones: If you knew your job at all you would know that those 14 do not come in that class.

Mr. DECKER: These applications have been received and they have been before the Classification Committee, which includes three returned soldiers. Of the number dealt with 34 have been cancelled and 14 rejected, 740 have been examined by the committee, 481 were judged suitable, 54 were unsuitable, 11 were deferred, 146 were recommended for subsidised training, and 596 are still to be examined. Numbers of applications are still coming in. Here are applications from ex-Service men for land that is almost non-existent, and the financial resources of the applicants are dwindling all the time. Both the returned soldiers' organisations and the returned Service men who want to settle on the land under the scheme are absolutely disappointed.

Mr. Jones: I shall tell you in a few moments what the return soldier organisations have to say.

Mr. DECKER: The Federal elections are over. Before the elections the State Government were not game to criticise the Commonwealth Government as to their War Service Land Settlement Scheme, but now that the elections are over it is the duty of the State Government to rectify the faults in the Commonwealth legislation. Even when we pointed out the fallacy of making ready-made farms available to returned-soldier settlers, the Minister said that he did not agree with them and that he had his own opinion about them.

Mr. Jones: The Act is left open on that point.

Mr. DECKER: What action has been taken to remedy the position, and what steps have been taken to induce the Commonwealth Government to alter the Act?

Mr. Jones: There is no need to alter it.

Mr. DECKER: The whole thing is farcical in the extreme. Although the war has been over for some time not one soldier has been placed on the land as a mixed farmer. What a tragedy. Can the Government be pleased with a land-settlement scheme that gives such meagre results? It is a complete farce. On the one hand they talk of what they will do for the returned soldiers, and on the other there are no tangible results, months and months after the war has ended, and it would appear from all the indications that nothing will be done for many long months yet. I think the only way to alter the position is to change the Minister or to change the Government, to appoint a

returned soldier to the position of Secretary for Public Lands, someone with the sympathy of the returned soldier at heart, someone who will not look for excuses, but rather will look for a way of overcoming the difficulties so that returned soldiers will be settled on the land. What we want is someone with action, not excuses. It is all very well for the Minister to blame everything but himself and his party.

Mr. Jones: I blame nobody; do not put that over me.

At 2.40 p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

Mr. DECKER: No Government months after the cessation of hostilities should crow about what they have done when they have placed 14 soldiers on balloted blocks and not one on a mixed farm. To show the Government's disregard for facts and how they have failed to make it appear in the report that they have done something praiseworthy we have only to observe that clause in the report that states that in 94 cases action had been taken which had facilitated the direct purchase of both leasehold and freehold land. What does that mean? It means that these men, in areas that have not been blanketed by the Government, have obtained properties privately and the Government have merely consented to the sale or transfer. Here is a Government taking credit for having settled these 94 soldiers, in addition to the 14 previously mentioned! It is absolutely wrong and misrepresents the position, particularly when all that the Government did was to approve the sale—nothing more and nothing else. It is all right for the Minister to go outside his department to other departments, such as the Treasury, for information to boost his report, and to make use of advances made by the Commonwealth Bank to help soldier settlers. These soldiers have settled on the land bought privately and all they asked the Government for was finance. They have been helped to settle on the land by financial assistance through the various Acts, such as the Agricultural Bank Act, enacted for that purpose. While these soldiers have had advances made to them others have been aided by private financial institutions because they could not get satisfaction from the Agricultural Bank. There is nothing so aggravating to a purchaser than the red tape that has to be cut before he can get help from the Agricultural Bank to buy land privately. We know of soldiers who have made applications for loans to buy machinery.

Mr. Jones: That does not come under this vote.

Mr. DECKER: Neither did the help given by the Commonwealth Bank come under this vote, nevertheless the Minister included it to bolster up his report. After these men had made application for machinery loans a delay up to three months occurred before they were appraised as to whether the loans were approved or disapproved, and by that time the use of the machinery was probably not required.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member is getting away from the vote before the Committee.

Mr. DECKER: I was just following the Minister's lead.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. DECKER: I will not trespass any further on that point. I have made it fairly forcibly.

I want to refer now to the delay of the department in acquiring suitable land for resumption for mixed farms for ex-Service men. It is all very well for the Minister to say that his department has already acquired 2,560 acres in the Nanango district and 1,038½ acres in the Kilkivan district, in addition to compulsorily acquiring 795 acres in the Dalby district, in which case litigation concerning the purchase price was pending. While the department says that it has been energetically acquiring land, look at what the report of the Sub-Department of Forestry states has been done up to the end of December as against what this department has done up to date. We find that this sub-department resumed last year 82 properties, totalling 53,000 acres, for the sum of £18,969.

One department, looking to its own interests, can make these resumptions but the Department of Public Lands, when soldier settlement is at stake, is making all sorts of excuses for the delay. And the latest excuse put forward by the Minister for the delay was that in the Dalby district one man who had 795 acres wanted an exorbitant price for it.

Mr. Jones: Don't misquote me; tell the truth.

Mr. DECKER: It is all very well to acquire property—and nobody wants to acquire property more than I do for returned-soldier settlement—but we do not want to delay soldier settlement in the Dalby area because the Government are fighting the owners of the properties by forcefully acquiring them. I believe when the matter comes before the Land Court you will find that this man will be paid in the vicinity of £5 an acre, on the evidence of sales in the district and offers that have been made to him.

Mr. Jones: The Land Court will determine that.

Mr. DECKER: Why depend on your own value, on the evidence of what the man bought the land for. It is a matter of the saleable value. You have reliable men in the Dalby district and why not ask their opinion and get a check valuation; and then on the evidence before you you could make a compromise agreement and get the land at a reasonable rate instead of being niggardly and insisting on a figure that would amount to squeezing down the value of the land. There will also be delay in deciding this matter before the Land Court, and then possibly before the Land Appeal Court. This is a serious position, not only in Dalby, but in Millmerran, where the people are getting together to form a committee of protection; and I do not blame them. I say that no

greater sin has been perpetrated than that perpetrated by the Government who have blanketed that area in the Dalby electorate. In that electorate returned soldiers of the last war and this war have their properties blanketed by this clause ostensibly in the interests of the settlement of returned men. When the question was brought up before, the Minister told us he had no intention of doing any injury to the returned men on land in those areas.

Mr. Jones: That is true, too.

Mr. DECKER: Yet those areas are still blanketed and returned men's properties are situated there.

Mr. Jones: Of course they are, till we have finished our investigations.

Mr. DECKER: And they have no opportunity of dealing with their land in any way. If the Minister's assurance is worth anything he should at least have the blanketing clause taken off their properties. The returned soldiers of this war and the last war whose properties have been blanketed in that district cannot move to sell or transfer. That condition of affairs has existed for 12 months and it looks as though it would be another 12 or 18 months before finality will be reached. If the Government think those people are going to deal with them amicably after they have had this injustice inflicted on them they are mistaken. Nobody can negotiate with another person when the actions of that person have upset him. I think it is a criminal shame for the department to delay so long in making up its mind what areas it will resume and what areas it will let alone. They say that there are pads all through the properties where officials have gone through the fences and made examinations of these places over and over again. You can follow the tracks through the district. (Government interjections.)

Mr. DECKER: I am giving the picture as forcibly as I can, to show how absurd it is to have a number of useless inspectors on this land and to show how these people have been irritated by having officials come on to their properties, and being left in suspense. The whole thing is tragic in the extreme, and this Government must move or else somebody will move when the ballot box is approached in March or April next.

There is no possible doubt that there will be a protest from the people in that area. I know some of them. I do not know of any greater affliction that can be placed on these settlers than the freezing of these areas by the Government. Contrary to what the Minister has said, most of the people in the area would welcome the opportunity of settling soldiers on the land. I know quite a lot of them.

Mr. Jones: Why do they not come along and offer to negotiate?

Mr. DECKER: What is the use of offering to negotiate with the Government when their valuations are so low as to be stupid for that area? If the Minister took the value of comparable land in the area, which is the

just value, he would find these people only too ready and willing to co-operate. But the Government take a niggardly view and try to cut down the value of these lands. This naturally engenders resentment among the people, who otherwise would be only too willing to be amicable and treat fairly with the Government. But their backs are up, and they want what is their just right for the land compulsorily resumed. There are such things as fair dealing and dishonest dealing, and there are fair and honest land agents. If a valuation is in doubt, the Government, rather than have the settlement postponed, should get the opinion of reliable valuers in the area, and then compromise with the owners. If that was done, the Government would get ready help and it would tend to quick settlement, whereas at the present time settlement is stationary. This morning the Minister said that it was a good job he had not done much as the drought had come along. That is a stupid way of looking at it.

(Time expired.)

Hon. A. JONES (Charters Towers—Secretary for Public Lands) (2.53 p.m.): I expected that the hon. member for Sandgate, in his usual boisterous style, would offer this criticism. As a matter of fact, the speech he has just made is a repetition of the one he made when he moved the adjournment of the House to discuss this question towards the end of last session. The hon. member said that returned-soldier organisations throughout the State were indignant and critical of the Government's alleged inactivity in soldier settlements. I want the hon. member to listen to this letter that I received, dated 15 October and signed G. J. Angell, State Secretary of the R.S.S.A.I.L. of Australia—

“Dear Sir,

“Re Royal Sugar Industry Commission.

“The State Council at its meeting held on Monday the 14th instant endorsed the recommendations of our Committee which deals with Soldier Land Settlement and I have been directed to request that you accept our sincere appreciation of your many courtesies extended to our representatives with particular reference to the above.

“It is realised that arising out of your kindly interest, the Honourable the Premier, with the approval of the Governor in Council, brought about the formation of the Commission with its objective of considering the advisability of settling ex-servicemen in the sugar industry.”

This letter puts the hon. member in the position which he so often occupies, of having made a false statement. He does not know anything at all about it, and he could easily be referred to as the old lady from Sandgate.

Why, his statement this afternoon did not even make common sense in many respects. First of all, he cast reflections on the departmental officers. Then he goes on to say that if you go out to Dalby you will find tracks through the

properties made by public servants inspecting the various areas. Would anybody take that statement seriously for a moment? We know it is coming from a fool, a man who must have taken leave of his senses. Hon. members know the difficulty the department has had in connection with surveyors. The hon. member for Aubigny knows that.

Mr. Decker: That is all rot.

Mr. JONES: It is all right for the hon. member to say that this planning should have gone on during the war. Has he not got any brains? Does he not know that 40 per cent. of the officers of the department were in the forces and we had difficulty in carrying out our ordinary activities during the war years? If he had any common sense these facts should appeal to him. He is not concerned for the returned soldier. I say that emphatically. There is no sentiment or sympathy about him. He is mainly concerned to criticise. As a matter of fact, it would suit him down to the ground if not one soldier was settled on the land.

The hon. member gets up in this Chamber and talks about making this a political issue. He is making it a political issue, he and his party. He is merely concerned to make it a political issue, and the same thing applies to every member of his party. Generally speaking, the members of the Country Party, who know something about the land, do attempt a practical approach to this question. I am prepared to say that they do attempt to be helpful, but the hon. member for Sandgate indulges in a long tirade of carping criticism. He starts off by saying that we should have cut up big areas of land in Queensland during the war years and we should have had them ready for the soldiers immediately the war ended. Anyone who has a smattering of brains knows very well that that was impossible. I have told him previously that during the war years 5,500,000 acres reverted to the Crown. Does he think we are not anxious to deal with that land as soon as we can get on it? Of course we are. If we could obtain the surveyors to send to these western areas, does he think we should not send them there? Of course we should. We want to get this land off our hands and the soldiers settled as quickly as possible, but it is very difficult to argue against a man who just gets up and makes wild, bald statements without anything at all to support his suggestions.

Mr. Morris: He quoted what you said in March.

Mr. JONES: He referred to a statement I made in March in connection with 25 grazing selections that were to be opened for returned Service men. I admit that I made that statement, and those 25 selections were surveyed and made ready to be opened, but, as I said this morning, we have opened only 13 of them and refrained from opening the balance because they are in the drought-stricken area of south-western Queensland. Would anyone suggest that we should open these other blocks at a time like this? I ask the hon. member for Sandgate or any

member of his party whether he would suggest that we should open those other 12 blocks in that drought-stricken area.

Mr. Decker: Yes.

Mr. JONES: The hon. member would?

Mr. Decker: Yes.

Mr. JONES: I am pleased to have that admission from the hon. member. I can see the smiles on the faces of hon. members of the Country Party who realise what a stupid admission the hon. member for Sandgate is making. Can anyone for a moment expect that we should throw open 12 blocks in this drought-stricken area?

Mr. Decker: Why not?

Mr. JONES: It does not make sense.

Mr. Decker: You need not charge them rent.

Mr. JONES: I am rather pleased at that interjection. The hon. member says that we could put these men on the land and charge them rent.

Mr. DECKER: I rise to a point of order. I want that misrepresentation withdrawn. I said the Government need not charge them rent.

Mr. JONES: I understood the hon. member to say that we could charge them rent, and I think that is what he did say. I am not blaming the hon. member for Sandgate because he knows nothing about the matter—I excuse him for his statements—but I cannot allow his remarks to go without replying to them. The hon. member implied that we had 25 blocks available but deliberately withheld at least 12 of them for some reason unknown to him. I am giving this Committee the reason, and anybody who knows anything at all about the matter would know that it would be sheer stupidity to put men on the land with this drought prevailing.

Mr. Morris: The hon. member for Toowoomba said there was no drought in that area.

Mr. JONES: That statement goes to show the hon. member's ignorance on the subject, and that he is in the same category as the hon. member for Sandgate. Mr. Mann, I regard this matter seriously, because such criticism, if it was left without effective reply, would indicate that the Department of Public Lands was not interested, that it was more or less sitting down on the job. It would not indicate that the department has for the last 18 months or more been investigating some 2,000,000 or 3,000,000 acres of land and classifying it. The hon. member with a cattish grin on his face, is trying to evade the real issue, but anybody with common sense knows that the work involved in these things cannot be done in five minutes. What is the position in South Australia, where members of his party are in control? Mr. Playford, the Premier, made the statement that no soldier would be settled in that State for another two years. Why do not hon. members of that party in this Committee ask

the members of their party down there for information? The fact remains that we are all working under the Commonwealth agreement, and what is happening here in Queensland is happening in the other States. We had ballots in Queensland before the other States.

The hon. member made referenee also to the acquisition of certain forest country where he said we acquired certain land. Has anybody ever heard such a stupid statement? The land is suitable for forest purposes, including regeneration, and we have been able to negotiate a settlement in a short time, but when it comes to settling men on the land, which necessitates investigations and examinations, much longer time is involved. He said also that I said we could not settle returned men on ready-made farms, and I repeat that I do not think that soldiers will be settled on ready-made farms. When we ballot, soldiers will go on farms before houses are built and before many of the improvements contained in the Commonwealth-States Agreement are provided.

I have replied to many of the remarks made by the hon. member for Sandgate. After all, he made no genuine criticism pointing out our faults in the present system. He gave us no idea as to how we could do better than we are doing. Had he done so we could have taken notice of him. His criticism was based on the idea of pulling the question of soldier settlement into the political arena.

Mr. Morris: You know that is not true.

Mr. JONES: You know it is true. The hon. member is the same as the hon. member for Sandgate.

Mr. Morris: You are always casting that statement at us and it is not true. You are making the statement, knowing it not to be true.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. JONES: When an hon. member is prepared to make statements that he knows are not true, I am prepared to question him.

Mr. Morris: You would question anybody! You think you are the only person who is sincere.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member for Enoggera must obey my call to order. If he persists in disobeying it I shall have to name him.

Mr. JONES: I have not much more to say in the matter. I think I have covered the main points of criticism from hon. members opposite.

Mr. BRAND (Isis) (3.6 p.m.): There is no doubt that the Minister has a pretty big job on his hands, but it is not going to help him to get touchy, as he has to-day. It is customary for a Minister to accept criticism without allowing it to get under his skin, but the Secretary for Public Lands is getting very touchy on the question of soldier settle-

ment. We discussed this very subject on the same vote last session and the Minister said the very same things as he has said to-day.

I should not like to say that he is bogged down in this soldier-settlement matter. I realise that there has been a drought and I understand the difficulties associated with land settlement under those conditions. I recognise that he has a very big job to do but the bigger the job the quicker it should be tackled. It is now going on for two years since the boys returned and many of them require land on which to settle so as to make a home and have an assured living and we have passed legislation for the special purpose of helping them. I hope that we shall not be faced with the fact that finance will not be available for this form of settlement—I hope that the Commonwealth Government are recognising their responsibilities in the matter and that they are not stultifying Queensland's administration by failing to make funds available, because they are needed for successful settlement.

No-one will criticise the Minister for desiring to place soldier settlers on the best land. He said last year that that was his desire and he repeated it to-day, and I trust that when the boys are settled on the land in Queensland it will be on good land and if it is suitable for irrigation I hope that water will be available. The greatest difficulty in connection with land settlement in Queensland arises from the fact that the most important sub-department, the one that could make it a success, has been financially starved for years. I refer to the Sub-Department of Water Supply and Irrigation, about which I shall have something to say later.

I am satisfied that farmers of all kinds feel that we should have these lands settled as soon as possible. About this time last year the Returned Soldiers' League approached the Minister and asked him to make opportunities for the settlement of returned soldiers in the sugar industry. No matter what criticism may be levelled against the Minister in charge of the vote, no-one can rightly charge him with being discourteous. He has always been courteous as a Minister, both in this Chamber and in his department, and I can well understand that the returned soldiers should respond courteously to his courtesy and commend him for it. The Government appointed a royal commission to investigate the possibility of settling returned soldiers in the sugar industry and in February this year the commission carried out its investigation. The Government made no mistake in the gentlemen appointed to that commission. They were men of experience, men who understood the peculiarities of the sugar industry, men who were likely to present a practical report, one that could be given effect to. It was headed by Mr. J. S. Hutecheon, a King's Counsel, with Mr. Hunter Freeman and Mr. Frederick John Wheeler, millers' and cane-growers' representatives respectively on the Central Sugar-cane Prices Board.

They are men who understand the sugar industry and are capable of presenting a report. They took evidence in all the sugar

districts and on 14 June last, exactly five months ago, they presented their report to the Government. Yet the only action the Government have taken on it is to table it in this Chamber!

This commission was appointed by the Government on the Minister's recommendation, and it came within the jurisdiction of the Premier. It has made recommendations to the Government providing for the settlement of 744 returned soldiers in the sugar industry, 344 of whom are to be settled on new land and the remaining 400 on properties acquired from existing farmers. The commission went to a great deal of pains to indicate to the Government how these men should be settled. It recommended that the help of local committees be sought. It knew that the industry has local control in its sugar mills and growers' organisations. It recognised that men with practical experience could be used to see these soldiers properly settled. The report is one of the best that have ever been presented from the sugar industry. It is a well-completed document.

Mr. Jones: It is a good document.

Mr. BRAND: It indicated how easily this difficult question could be solved. As the Minister knows, a recommendation was made that two surveyors be put to work, one to survey the areas round Babinda and the other survey areas round Goondi. Hon. members know that the land proposed to be surveyed is among the best of our sugar lands. Sixty-one soldiers have been assigned for settlement in those areas. If the Minister will do something about that report and if the Government will do something by way of legislation immediately we shall have settlement of returned soldiers right along the northern seaboard of our coast and on land capable of providing them with an excellent living. The land in the Goondi area would quickly settle these men satisfactorily.

I hope that full effect will be given to the plan. In this way the industry would be enabled to do its duty in seeing that the men who fought for their country are satisfactorily settled right along our seaboard. If, as indicated by the Minister, there is difficulty in other settlement because of drought that is not so with respect to settlement within the sugar industry. The quicker those lands are made available for settling our returned soldiers the better, because the planting season is coming on and the land must be prepared for the planting to assure these boys a good crop. I know that the Returned Soldiers' League had only 533 returned soldiers for settlement in the sugar industry, and the commission recommended that provision be made for 744 returned-soldier sugar farms, but we must take into consideration that there are other soldiers for whom a place in this industry must be found. As this is an important settlement, I strongly recommend that the Minister get on with the job as quickly as possible. If he brings down legislation specifically for that purpose I hope he will not forget that the commission suggested the establishment of local committees.

Mr. Jones: They put up two or three alternate schemes.

Mr. BRAND: They were not alternate; they are almost definite in every respect. For instance, they say that it would not be long before two surveyors could finish the Goondi and Babinda lands, and they could then be transferred to the Gin Gin and Hambledon mill areas, where another 42 soldiers could be settled. So that very quickly we could have over 100 returned soldiers settled by that means alone.

There are other means of settling soldiers in other areas where they have acquired land, that is, by granting assignments to enable them to become cane-growers. That would be decided simultaneously with the putting into effect of the proposals recommended by the commission. I should like the Minister, in dealing with this report, to understand that areas differ. One of the peculiarities of the sugar industry is that almost every district differs in some respect from the others, so that the methods by which soldiers can be settled differ also.

I hope the Minister will give urgent attention to this very important matter. Let us get on with the job. If it is a big one we can get it finished only by tackling it quickly and resolutely. I am satisfied that there should not have been the five months' lag that has taken place from the presentation of the report till to-day. Some action should have been taken.

The Sub-Department of Water Supply and Irrigation, which was mentioned by the Minister in his opening remarks on this vote, is one of the most important in the Department of Public Lands and one of the most important in successful settlement. The Minister agreed with another hon. member that not all land could be irrigated. Not one area in Queensland that has been irrigated has been a failure. Any lands that have been watered, either by the spray system or by the flooding system, have responded well and have generally been a great success. The Inkerman irrigation scheme was one of the largest we have had, and in that area the farmers have been able to produce their full crop and always have a surplus, whereas throughout the whole of the non-irrigated areas most frequently there has been a lack of rain that has resulted in a reduced crop and a smaller production than the assignments warranted. In the southern areas the Burnett waters have proved excellent for irrigation. In the Bingera area, which is devoted to sugarcane, there has never been a year when the crops have not been full and prolific, and that is due to the advantages of irrigation.

The cost of conserving the water in the Burnett River and irrigating some 800 acres of cane land was very small. Again, in the Gayndah area in the Burnett Valley, where irrigation is used, we have the finest citrus industry in Australia.

The citrus lands of the Gayndah area are known throughout Australia for the quality and vitamin content of their fruit. It is on record that the fruit of the Burnett area will

maintain its freshness longer than that from any other part of Australia. That is due to the scientific application of water to the citrus groves. Wherever irrigation has been used along the Burnett River it has been a success.

It has been said that the Lockyer Valley scheme has been a great success. There is no doubt about that. The drought period through which we are going has shown the wisdom of the expenditure of money in that area. The cost of damming the Lockyer Creek has been more than repaid in the last six months of drought through which Queensland has passed, by the production of crops for starving stock in the drought-stricken areas. I have not the slightest doubt that there are other areas in Queensland which by the scientific application of water will be able to help the country in the droughts that periodically occur in this State with devastating effect. Yet it is a fact that in those areas where irrigation is practised the Government have not yet come to the aid of the primary producers. They have been able to carry on without having recourse to the Government for financial help. That is an important fact—and they are not in the position in which so many thousands of others today find themselves because of the terrible drought that is raging throughout the country. I believe that the more money expended in this direction the better for settlement in Queensland. Lands developed with water conservation in our rivers and creeks would not only settle soldiers on the land satisfactorily and permanently and give them an assured income for life but would provide for tens of thousands additional people who will come here to settle on the land. As hon. members well know, a settler can make a living on a very small area if he has the aid of irrigation much more easily than he could without irrigation and consequently we must do anything within our power to provide water for the successful settlement of this State.

There is another aspect of the matter that cannot be discussed under this vote. Along with the successful development of our land should go the development of our towns and cities to provide markets for our primary industries. Secondary industries must be developed for this purpose. We must be able to manufacture our primary products into the finished article where necessary. This would provide work for the people and in turn bring population and create a market for the primary produce. I hope that the Minister will spend some millions of pounds on water conservation and irrigation in Queensland. He cannot do better than follow the example set by those countries that have achieved great results by the expenditure of money on irrigation. This morning the Minister spoke of America.

Mr. Jones: Not this morning.

Mr. BRAND: The hon. gentleman did by way of interjection when the hon. member for West Moreton was speaking. America has practised irrigation very widely. The success attending the ventures over there has been of great value to the nation. We notice in this morning's Press that in our own

State the town of Clermont is suffering from a water shortage, and is likely to be in a desperate plight and that the Government are rushing water there to relieve the position. We notice also that the world is likely to be confronted with a famine, but there can be no famine in this country if water conservation and irrigation are put into practice. There can be no famine in the world if the food-growing lands of the world are helped by the scientific application of water.

The officers of the Sub-Department of Irrigation and Water Supply have done excellent work in drawing up schemes and carrying out investigations with a view to ensuring a plentiful supply of water for the irrigation of many thousands of acres. The Minister deserves every encouragement to go ahead and spend millions of pounds on this work. We are told that £200,000,000 will be spent on a uniform railway gauge throughout the Commonwealth. I suggest that that money could be better spent on water conservation in this State alone, for it is my firm belief that any money spent on irrigation and water conservation will be more than repaid in 10 years by increased national income; and we should consider this matter from the point of view of the increased national income. I have no doubt the Minister has plans for going ahead with extensive schemes of weir construction with a view to irrigating suitable areas. Indeed, his administration has been very busy choosing suitable sites, and he is to be commended for that. He can afford to ignore whatever criticism may be hurled at him, because he is endeavouring to do something of importance to the State. We as a Parliament should give the Sub-Department of Irrigation and Water Supply—it has been starved over the years—enough money to enable it to do something great. It has shown what can be done in the Lockyer Valley.

Much has been said about the great Tennessee Valley scheme in America, and I believe that if it is properly financed we can have just as great a scheme in the Dawson Valley. We should do everything possible to conserve water for irrigation and so be in a position to supply the world with all necessary foodstuffs. It should be possible also to erect canneries for the processing of gluts. I know it is proposed to erect some canneries in the State, and no doubt they will be of tremendous benefit in the marketing of surplus primary products.

At 3.30 p.m.,

Mr. DEVRIES (Gregory) relieved the Chairman in the chair.

Mr. GRAHAM (Maekay) (3.30 p.m.): It is rather refreshing to hear hon. members in Opposition congratulating the Minister and the Government on their activities, and I join with the hon. member for Isis in congratulating the Minister and the officers of the Department of Public Lands on the work performed over the last three years. It will be admitted that owing to the war the activities of the department and in fact all Government departments were somewhat curtailed, but we can look forward to

increased activities, particularly in the Department of Public Lands, in the years that lie ahead of us. As previous speakers have said, the department is a very important one because from the land all wealth is produced; all industries are more or less dependent on land activities or land production to create the national wealth that is essential to the well-being of this country.

Much has been said of the delay in the settlement of returned soldiers on the land, but anybody with a reasonable outlook will agree that the problem is a big one and must of necessity take time. Of all our problems land settlement is one that will perhaps take more time than any other, because of the many difficulties that present themselves. The selection of the land in the first place is of great importance, and I contend that because of past mistakes the Government are wise in going along slowly. It must be remembered that after the 1914-1918 war the settlement of returned soldiers on the land met with disaster. If the job is to be done properly this time the Government must in the first place go slowly and warily and select the best land. There must be delay. The Government are showing a degree of sense in going slowly and selecting only the most suitable land.

One of the main difficulties encountered in the selection of land for the settlement of returned soldiers is the shortage of trained staff. So long as there are many officers of the department still in the forces the work of surveying and cutting up land for soldier settlement must be delayed, but I am hopeful when men are released that the department will be able to undertake the work more expeditiously.

It is to be hoped that in the next place the Government will give the settlers the best land so that they can go into production as early as possible. I said in a previous speech that it is no use putting men on the land and expecting them to undertake the clearing and grubbing work in order to reach the production stage. Too much help cannot be given to men who go on the land, and money spent in this way will be spent in the right way. If that help is given it will not only minimise the risk of failure but will help the settler, whether a returned man or not, in getting his land under production earlier than he would be able to if he had to do the pioneering work as was done in the past.

I believe that the success of any Government is dependent upon their land policy. Labour Governments over the last 30 years have shown a progressive policy in land administration. Queensland has the largest area of unalienated land of any State in the Commonwealth, 90 per cent of its being held under Crown leases. That shows that the Labour Government in this State have a thorough realisation of their responsibilities to the coming generation in holding the land for the people and thus preventing its exploitation by private owners. That policy will be continued in the future and the Government will endeavour to make only the best land

available for grazing and agriculture on terms and conditions that will be congenial and beneficial for the selectors.

The Government have acted in the interests of returned soldiers in having all land classified, as far too many people are prone to take up land that is quite unsuitable for the class of production that they propose to undertake. In Mackay, for instance, people have tried to grow vegetables on land entirely unsuited for that purpose and so the scheme of classification gives protection to the new settler and ensures his success. Vast areas of land in this State are suitable for agricultural and pastoral pursuits. In connection with agriculture: I think it is necessary to have large-scale irrigation, otherwise many people who take up land will be condemned to failure. A very serious drought has raged throughout various parts of the State during past months and while irrigation may not be possible in all areas it is possible in some of them and so the responsibility devolves not only on the Government but also on the settler to undertake whatever irrigation measures are suitable to each area. Much good can come from irrigation because if a water supply is assured production can be maintained even in the face of drought. The Government have undertaken irrigation in various parts of the State but there are many other areas where it could be carried out as well and even if they were to spend £10,000,000 to £15,000,000 on irrigation the return would justify the expenditure.

Mr. Turner: It is the best insurance we could have.

Mr. GRAHAM: I quite agree and the proof is to be found in the value of irrigation in other countries of the world. Look at the tremendous wealth that has been created by the grand water-conservation scheme in the Tennessee Valley in the United States of America! While it may not be possible to undertake water conservation and irrigation on such a grand scale in this country, still certain areas in Queensland are eminently suited for irrigation. The Government will undertake the responsibility of launching quite ambitious irrigation schemes in Queensland and so assure to the settler a good deal of protection in creating a continued water supply.

The Government would do well to give a good deal of attention to reforestation. The reports submitted to the Minister on this subject are not very encouraging and the difficulties arise largely from the serious onslaughts that have been made on our timber reserves.

The report of the Sub-Department of Forestry indicates that our supplies of hardwoods and softwoods are likely to cut out in the next few years unless some effort is made to replenish supplies.

Mr. Jones: Not hardwoods but softwoods.

Mr. GRAHAM: Softwoods are an important commodity. We have not embarked on a really vigorous reforestation policy in the past because we have been under the impression that a plentiful supply

of timber was available. There always comes a time when you cannot have your cake and eat it too. Because of the onslaught on our timber supplies we are reaching a stage when they are threatened with exhaustion, and if the Government do not embark upon an active reforestation policy, in 20 years' time we shall be scratching for timber and have to import our requirements.

Mr. Sparkes: We are not able to supply all the timber needed at the moment.

Mr. GRAHAM: That is so. Whilst the Government have done something in the last two decades in reforestation work the time has come when they must embark on a more active reforestation policy to provide our timber supplies of the future. It takes from 10 to 15 years for trees to mature.

The Government should also encourage landholders to plant trees. If help in some small way could be given these men to undertake to plant reforestation plots, material assistance would be afforded in the work of securing our future supplies. The Sub-Department of Forestry could grow the seedlings and make them available to people holding long-term leaseholds or owners of land. In that way we should not only increase our timber supplies but enhance our national wealth. Timber is a very important item in a nation's economy. Sweden, Denmark and Canada draw much of their national wealth from timber exports. There is no reason why Queensland, with her vast territory and possessing some of the finest territory in the world, could not also develop valuable timber resources.

The Mackay district is one where reforestation work could be undertaken. At Eungella is a vast area that could be utilised more than it has been for building up our forestry reserves. Work on reforestation was begun there years ago, but not much has been done in that area in the last few years. The trees grew and made good progress, but neglect and fire have damaged them and, as a result, only isolated trees remain. Consequently we are not getting that benefit from the original plantings that was desired. That should not deter the Government from embarking on reforestation work in other parts of the State. Good results would accrue and future supplies of timber be assured. Recently I had the pleasure of attending a gathering at Andergrove State School in the Mackay district, organised by the local headmaster, at which he and his pupils planted over 200 pine trees.

I thought that it was a very wise move as it would engender in the minds of the younger people a love of trees. I saw that plot after three months and those trees were growing to perfection. I believe that if suitable areas were set aside in country schools for tree-planting and if the children were encouraged to plant trees and care for trees they would develop a love of trees and these small forests would give good results later on.

I ask the Minister, in view of its importance as a tourist resort, to give some consideration to the tracking of the Eungella Tableland.

Requests for this work have been made to the Minister through the Chamber of Commerce and the local authorities in Mackay. I read in the report that tracking had been carried out in other national parks. I believe in view of the importance of the Eungella Tableland from the point of view of the tourist traffic in Mackay such tracking would be of great benefit in that area. It would be an added inducement to tourists to visit that area, which is a particularly beautiful one and is spoken of very highly by visitors. But it is not much use taking people to these areas unless they can be taken down to the gorges, where they can see the palms and the other beautiful vegetation.

Reverting to the land policy of the Government, I believe it is necessary for them to co-ordinate it with reforestation and irrigation policy. It is also necessary for the Government to give aid in all possible ways to settlers, irrespective of the industry in which they are engaged. The hon. member for Isis mentioned the sugar industry. I believe that it is necessary that this should be done, not only from the point of view of the man on the land but from that of the Government. Many men who have taken up land on short-term leases and who have developed it should be given some security by being allowed to change their leases from special to perpetual so that they may retain that land in perpetuity. In many areas men have taken up land under special leases for 10 or 15 years, and I believe that if they have developed it they should be allowed to convert to perpetual lease, which I believe has an advantage over a special lease.

Mr. Jones: There is usually a reason for a special lease.

Mr. GRAHAM: Yes. I believe that consideration should be given to that aspect of the problem and men who have improved their land should be given the right to convert to perpetual lease, which really amounts to holding it in perpetuity.

Mr. McINTYRE (Cunningham) (3.49 p.m.): The debate has revolved round the question of soldier settlement, and I shall touch briefly on that aspect. I believe that the delay in putting soldiers on the land is a very serious matter, and that it will react to the detriment of the whole scheme. Practical men generally agree that in settlement the most important factor is the man himself; and as I move about amongst the returned men I find many of the most promising settlers are drifting into other avenues.

When the day of the ballot arrives our best settlers will be no longer available; because of the delay in settling ex-soldiers on the land, we shall not get the settler of that high standard that we could get if the scheme was expedited. The desire of these ex-soldiers to get on with the work is amply demonstrated by the figures given by the Minister this morning, when he informed the Committee of the advances made to ex-soldiers by the Agricultural Bank. I find a number of men who are anxious and willing to enter

the Government's land-settlement scheme have been able by straining their finances and getting every assistance to settle themselves on the land by means of the advances from the Agricultural Bank. The Minister should do everything in his power to expedite the scheme. I realise the difficulty he is up against and the problems he has to overcome, but I think he could do so. The suggestion that the drought is perhaps a reason for delaying the scheme is not a very strong argument, because the general experience, particularly on the Darling Downs, is that after a major drought we have a run of good seasons, and it is advisable that these settlers should have control of the land to avail themselves of the good seasons that will no doubt follow a drought such as this.

As to the value of resumed land, I believe a landowner who has land that he is not able to work effectively should be willing to surrender that land to the Crown for the use of soldier settlers, but the disturbance in his farming activities as the result of that surrender is sufficient for the land owner to bear, and I think the department in its resumptions should take over the land on values comparable with those approved by the Sub-Treasury, which represent the value that the holder could get by selling his land on the open market. We must admit that if loss accrues it should not be cast on the man whose land is resumed, but should be a public responsibility.

I was very pleased to hear the Minister say this morning that the department inclines to getting away from ready-prepared farms. I do not think they would ever be the success that we should like to see. The farmer or the selector is the one who should pioneer and prepare his own farm. There is no rule of thumb for preparing farms for agricultural activities. Every farm has its peculiarities and every settler has ideas entirely his own. Consequently I think that when the land is obtained the soldier should be given the opportunity of developing it as he wishes.

In the resumption of land the Minister should have some regard for farmers' sons. In a number of instances land has been frozen, where the farmer, looking ahead, has acquired enough to give opportunity to his sons. Many such sons did not go to the war; they were perhaps not old enough or were prevented because of the serious food position. Where a farmer has a limited acreage and has sons anxious to occupy and develop that land consideration should be given to them in the resumption of the land, otherwise it will be necessary for those farm-born and farm-reared men to drift into other avenues of life, perhaps drift to the cities. That would be very undesirable. The Minister should as quickly as possible lift the ban on properties that are not required by the department. Production is being impaired and farm activities are disorganised because of the uncertainty associated with the intention of the Government as to the resumption of these lands.

I come now to that important subject dealt with in the last pages of the report. I refer to soil erosion. The report tells us that some

40,000 acres on the Darling Downs that was fertile country has been withdrawn from production as a result of soil erosion. I cannot agree with that. While I realise that a far greater acreage than that has been affected by soil and water erosion I do not think 40,000 acres has been withdrawn from production because of it. On the Darling Downs we have 40 per cent. of the crop acreage of the State, which in itself shows how important that area is to Queensland's production. Outside the Darling Downs one-third of the crop area is represented by sugar, therefore the Darling Downs is responsible for a big percentage of our production. Because this important area has been affected so seriously—in fact I think it has been affected more than any other part of the State—it is essential that we get on with the job of counteracting this danger to our State. We have reports and investigations aplenty, but we need action. The farmers, realising the seriousness of the position, are ready to take action. I appreciate that if they are to hand on to posterity a fertile land it is essential that something should be done to prevent wastage by erosion. They are looking to the Government for a lead and investigations and reports will get us nowhere; we must have some practical approach to the question. I suggest to the Minister that the time has now arrived when he might choose suitable farms on which to demonstrate the best methods of conserving the soil against erosion. Much has been said in this and other debates about irrigation but I think the prevention of soil erosion is the first important step towards conserving water in our streams.

Another important question is the area of grazing farms. From time to time station properties are resumed and ballots conducted for grazing farms. Experience has taught us that in most instances these grazing farms have been too small and I urge upon the Minister the need for a complete review of the question of a desirable living area for grazing farms.

Mr. PATERSON (Bowen) (3.59 p.m.): The report of the Land Administration Board is obviously too big to deal with in the short space of 25 minutes. I propose, therefore, to confine my remarks to the second annual report of the Bureau of Investigation appointed under the Land and Water Resources Development Act, and I wish in particular to deal with that part of the report headed "Soil Erosion."

I regret very much that fewer than two pages in the whole report are devoted to this important subject.

Mr. Jones: Actually soil erosion is dealt with by the Department of Agriculture and Stock. Our department deals with stream erosion only.

Mr. PATERSON: I realise that and I am pleased with the Minister's interjection because I am referring particularly to the kind of soil erosion that arises from flooded streams, or river-bank erosion, as it is known in the North.

I want, however, to quote a part of the report of the activities of the bureau appointed under the Land and Water Resources Development Act of 1943. It states—

"The Act envisages and provides for the planning of co-ordinated development of the land and water resources of the State with a view to increasing and stabilising production. The duties and objects of the bureau were fully described in the bureau's first annual report.

"The work of the bureau has been carried on under conditions of difficulty due not only to the shortage of technical staff available to the bureau itself, but more particularly owing to acute shortage of staff prevailing in the departments with which the bureau is most closely associated. The investigations to date have been confined mainly to an examination of land and water resources where the establishment of irrigation works may be possible, a survey of the channel country in South-west Queensland, and the initiation of a State-wide survey of areas of the State affected by soil erosion."

I stress the importance of the last words of that paragraph—namely, "the initiation of a State-wide survey of areas of the State affected by soil erosion." I believe that the department is acting on right lines in tackling this problem from the State point of view, because it is impossible to deal with soil erosion by piecemeal methods. There has to be a State-wide plan, and a long-range plan at that.

The report goes on to deal with soil erosion itself and it gives extracts from survey reports on the Darling Downs and South Burnett areas to emphasise the conclusion the report draws that soil erosion is a very menacing feature of our national life. This is what the report says of the Darling Downs—

"However, in this area erosion damage has not been limited to the land. Deposits of eroded soil have seriously reduced the capacity of most watercourses in the area and this has not only adversely affected the permanence of the available surface water supply but has tended to increase the spread of flood waters and to force streams to meander and gouge out new channels, often through valuable agricultural land. In one such instance a new channel, approximately 1 mile long and up to 55 feet wide and 10 feet deep, was eroded through highly valuable farm land in a period of four years, and has destroyed over 200 acres of land."

I think that paragraph can be applied with greater force to the position that exists in some of the rivers in North Queensland. It is necessary to emphasise this because there is a tendency for many people to think that soil erosion is only a matter of washing away surface soil on a farm. Experience has shown that if there is a heavy flooding, river-bank erosion can cause a greater amount of soil erosion in a few days than that caused by ordinary surface erosion on hundreds of farms.

Let me examine the experience we have had in three rivers in my electorate—I am not selecting those rivers because they are in my electorate but because they suffered most from disastrous floods in North Queensland in March of this year. I personally visited the Don River immediately after the flood. This river is flooded by sudden, heavy falls of rain and not by water from snow or from regular rainfalls throughout the year. It comes up over-night and goes down within 24 hours. I saw the disaster that overcame the farmers in that river valley in March of this year when four lives were lost through drowning and one indirectly as the result of the flood. Four members of the Ness family were washed away in the flooded waters; houses were washed away, including the strongly-built police station at Merinda. Hundreds of cattle, pigs, and horses were destroyed and furniture and other household possessions were strewn along the path of the flood. I saw one home that had been washed away from its stumps and shifted bodily a distance of over 300 yards. I suppose the floor space of that house would be well over 1,400 or 1,500 square feet. The Thormahlen family sought refuge with Mrs. Thormahlen, senior, in that house. They went into this big house, thinking it would provide a safe refuge, but, as I have said, it was washed away some 300 yards. It is a remarkable thing that no matter how careful the people in that area had been in guarding against flood danger, they would never have thought that the flood waters would have covered the area they did on that occasion.

This is supposed to be what happened: the flood waters came down so swiftly and so strongly that they were unable to take the turn, unable to take the bend, and instead of doing what flood waters normally do, overflow the low banks, they smashed their way through the high banks, and washed these houses away. That was actually the cause of the main disaster on the Don River this year. When I was speaking to one of the older settlers of the district, the late Major Potts—he has died since the flood—he pointed out to me that in his opinion part of the trouble was that stock were allowed to water indiscriminately at the river—that they beat down tracks into the river, the grass was eaten up, and, as a result, the banks were an easy mark for the flood waters.

A similar state of affairs exists in the Burdekin River valley. That is another river where flood waters can wreak tremendous damage and will wreak far greater damage in the future if something drastic is not done to prevent it. In the Don valley we had the unique spectacle of the river actually smashing its way over the high banks instead of flowing back over the low banks. In the Burdekin, where we luckily had no loss of life, we had a tremendous amount of river-bank erosion. I saw one farm on the Burdekin owned by a man named Harry Ramsden in which a hole was washed so big that you could have put the whole of Parliament House into it. That was washed out in one night of flooding. There were other places along

the river bank, such as at McDowell's and Tapiolas's, where the washout was almost as severe.

Not only is this river-bank erosion a menace to the farms themselves in that it washes away acres of very valuable soil, but it is also a menace to the lives of the people who live in the vicinity and even to the existence of townships. Take the Burdekin right bank, on which is situated the town of Home Hill. A part of one farm belonging to a man named Lagos was washed away by the flood water coming over the banks at his farm. It washed out a big channel. Luckily this was the first occasion where serious erosion had taken place there, but if something is not done immediately to repair the damage, this channel may become the main channel of the next flood waters of the Burdekin. If that happens, the flood waters from the Burdekin will go through that channel and then on through the town itself. Then it will be a case not simply of so many hundreds of acres of valuable land being washed away but there will be the tragic loss of perhaps hundreds of lives.

We have a similar situation on the Proserpine River. This river overflowed its banks at the farm owned by Mr. Brachen notwithstanding the fact that he had built a concrete wall to prevent the flood water from coming over the banks. The waters smashed the concrete wall down, and washed out a huge channel through the farm. If that channel is deepened in the next flooding, the water may menace the railway line on the northern side of Proserpine.

This question of river-bank erosion is, therefore, very important not only from the point of view of the damage done to agricultural land, not only from the point of view of the menace it is to the lives of people living near by, but from the point of view also of menace to valuable Government property, in this case the Queensland railways. It is because of its importance that I stress it today, and it is because of its seriousness that I am sorry that actually fewer than two pages are allotted to the matter in this report. However, the report does stress the fact that when the department is considering the erection of dams and weirs in the Burdekin River it will bear in mind the need for protection against flood disaster. That is important, because water conservation in these rivers must be considered, not only from the point of view of the value of conserving water, but also from the point of view of the value of mitigating flood disaster.

Further, I want to stress this point, that the organisation of proper measures to deal with flood control is far too great to be dealt with by any local authority, or even by any appointed body such as the Burdekin River Trust.

The Government must be prepared to spend much more in order to avoid the increasing river-bank erosion and to cope with the menace of flood disasters. The report recognises that the plan must be a State-wide one, and must also be a long-range plan, visua-

lising the control of the rivers as a whole. If we are to have an effective plan for dealing with river-bank erosion it must include the following points:—

- (1) The best use to which the land can be put;
- (2) The growing and development of forests on the river banks;
- (3) The development of local industries;
- (4) The generation of electrical power;
- (5) The protection from flood disasters;
- (6) The maximum use of the water of the rivers;
- (7) The element of erosion of soil in the near-by areas; and
- (8) The prevention of silt accumulation.

The last item is very important because it is a contributing factor in the actual flooding of rivers in the North. Old residents have informed me that the Burdekin River bed has risen by several feet in the last 25 years. The same is true of portions of the Don River and the Proserpine River. Siltation in the gullies and tributaries means that the increased amount of sand and gravel raises the main bed of the river. In fact there is one portion of the Don River near Bowen where the bed of the river has risen almost to the level of the bank, which is practically on the same level now as the railway which runs within 20 or 30 yards of the bank. The siltation of gullies and tributaries has to be dealt with if we are to deal effectively with river-bank erosion. At the same time the following points must be borne in mind, and I urge the Government to give serious consideration to them.

The Government will have to resume a strip of land along all river banks in the areas where river-bank erosion is a great menace. That will prevent a practice that has already arisen among some careless farmers who actually cultivate the land right up to the bank of the stream. The result is that when the river breaks its banks it has loose soil to work on, and it is not surprising that the banks are washed away and a deep channel formed in a very short time. I suggest, therefore, that the Government give serious consideration to the need to resume all land on these banks up to a certain width in areas that are subject to bank erosion or menaced by disastrous floods. It is true that a few individual farmers will suffer because some of their best land will be taken from them, but in these matters we must consider the interests of the majority as opposed to the interests of the minority. The farmer who has part of his farm resumed on a river bank must be given adequate compensation for any losses he may suffer. If the Government do give consideration to such a plan then it will be possible for them to implement further measures such as the planting of trees and suitable grasses along the river banks, which will firmly hold and bind the soil together.

My third point is one that has already been stressed by the report of the department. It is that when building dams and working out other schemes of water conservation, whether in the North or elsewhere, the

Government should plan those not only for conserving water but also for mitigating flood damages. I urge this this afternoon because my experience leads me to believe that unless some flood control measures are vigorously adopted in a very short space of time we shall not only have the spectacle we had on the Darling Downs, of acres of valuable agricultural land being destroyed, but we shall also witness in North Queensland a flood disaster that, in the loss of human lives, will be unparalleled in the history of this country.

Mr. HILTON (Carnarvon) (4.16 p.m.): I take this opportunity of making a few observations on this very important vote. Since the debate began there has been no real criticism of the Department of Public Lands. Most members who are interested in the great question of land settlement have no doubt perused the excellent report that has been furnished to all members, and on the compilation of that report I wish to compliment the Minister and his officers very sincerely. It furnishes a great deal of valuable information and is a document that could be read with benefit by all the citizens of this State, because it would reveal to them what a great State Queensland is, how extensive are the ramifications of this department, and the great progress that has been made in successful settlement in Queensland since she became a separate State.

I wish to say a few words on soldier settlement, because that was the only subject on which criticism was levelled by members of the Opposition against the Government. I regret very much the attitude they adopted in their approach to this very important and topical subject. I was amused to hear members of the Country Party and the hon. member for Sandgate, who represented the Queensland People's Party in this debate, take the attitude that lands should be acquired by the Government at the price requested by the present holders of the lands, irrespective of the real price and irrespective of the final effect that would have on the soldier or soldiers who would be finally settled on that land.

Mr. Sparkes: Who said that?

Mr. HILTON: The hon. member for West Moreton made remarks that in no uncertain manner conveyed that impression, and the hon. member for Aubigny stood up in defence of the hon. member for West Moreton; likewise the hon. member for Sandgate used the same kind of argument.

Mr. SPARKES: I rise to a point of order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member—I think he is sincerely mistaken—but I at no time made the statement attributed to me, that I did not care what was paid for the land. I ask that that be withdrawn.

Mr. DECKER: I rise to a point of order. I never said any such thing as the hon. member suggests.

Mr. HILTON: I think I have very good hearing, and no intelligent person could place any other construction on the remarks made by those hon. members that the Govern-

ment should not be quibbling about the price the present holders were asking for the land.

Mr. SPARKES: I maintain that there is a point of order, and when a member gets up—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: It was only a denial; there was no point of order.

Mr. SPARKES: I did not make those statements.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: The hon. member mentioned a denial.

Mr. SPARKES: I ask that it be accepted.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member for Aubigny denies the statement referred to by the hon. member for Carnarvon, and I suggest that the hon. member accept the denial.

Mr. HILTON: I accept the hon. member's denial, but he must admit that he stood here and spoke in defence of the attitude taken up by the hon. member for West Moreton. We are very certain that the hon. member for West Moreton definitely stated that the Government should resume land at present market value and we all know that present values are highly inflated. If the Government were to accede to this very unsound advice offered by hon. members opposite, who should know better, what would be the final effect on the success of soldier settlement?

Mr. Nicklin: At the value settled by the Commonwealth Sub-Treasury.

Mr. HILTON: We know that pegging expires at the end of this year, and there is a great diversity of opinion as to Commonwealth values. I have seen valuations made by approved valuers and they have varied considerably. The hon. member for West Moreton this morning quoted a specific instance, and in my opinion, and I think in the opinion of any person who has given thought to the subject, it would be absurd to resume land for mixed farming for agricultural purposes at the price asked at present by some of the landholders and settle soldiers on it, expecting them to make a success.

Mr. Plunkett: On what basis do you suggest that it be valued?

Mr. HILTON: The Land Court is a judicial and competent body appointed for the purpose of determining the amount of compensation if negotiations between the department and landholders fail.

Mr. Plunkett: On what basis?

Mr. HILTON: The Land Court determines that. It has always determined valuations.

Mr. Plunkett: On the evidence given before it.

Mr. HILTON: We contend that the Land Court should be the body, but hon. members opposite have been asking that we do not

delay the matter by submitting it to the Land Court. The hon. member for Sandgate said that there should be no quibbling about the price. He said, "Let us get on with the job. Let us acquire this land. Give the people what they are asking for it and give it to the soldiers." What an absurd proposal!

Mr. Decker: I refer the hon. member to my speech. He is misrepresenting me all the time.

Mr. HILTON: I listened very intently to the debate because I am very deeply interested. We know that soldier settlement in Queensland presents many problems. No good land is available for selection in the South. There is some land in the remote parts of the North that after a tremendous amount of developmental work would be suitable for soldier settlement, but why should hearken to the pleadings of certain members opposite and deny good lands in the South to returned soldiers, asking them to go into the vigin forests and scrubs of the North, there to do very heartbreaking pioneer work after their years of soldier service? No Government with a sense of their responsibility would ask those men to do that. They would be shirking their responsibilities if they pursued that course.

When negotiations fail on a question of valuation between the Government and a landholder delay is inevitable. The issue must be submitted to the court. I know that the Minister and his officers have been doing everything possible to expedite soldier settlement in this State. The trouble is that many people, for political reasons, are trying to inflame soldier organisations and ex-Service men in general on this point and I feel sure that the department would welcome an open inquiry on the whole question. When the full story is presented to people who are at all reasonable, they appreciate the difficulties to be overcome in the matter and they are convinced that everything possible is being done. I repeat that it would be tragic if the Government resumed land at inflated prices and asked the soldiers to carry those inflated prices in the years that lie ahead.

The Government have done a great deal in this connection. I know that the entire question of assistance to returned soldiers does not come under this vote, but hon. members opposite, knowing that a good deal has been achieved by other Government departments, try to make out a false case. Because settlement under the Commonwealth-States scheme has not yet advanced to the extent that we should like, they argue that nothing has been done at all, and they are ably assisted in this by the Press, which on many occasions appears to be very ill-informed on the subject. When we realise that approximately 1,000 or more returned Service men have been helped by the Agricultural Bank to acquire their properties, when we know that 94 others have been helped by the Department of Public Lands to acquire land, when we know that a number of other returned Service men have received loans under the Commonwealth's Re-establish-

ment and Employment Act, we must admit that a substantial amount has been done to help these men on the land.

Mr. Jones: The loans total approximately £1,250,000.

Mr. HILTON: That is so. Because of the favourable conditions under which this finance has been made available to these men, they are in a position to make good, and that is important. We know that most of Queensland is suffering from the ravages of a severe drought at present, but because of the wise action by this Government in making that money available to these men on favourable conditions, they will have an opportunity of offsetting the financial ravages of the drought and making good in a year or two when better seasons come round.

I have perused the report of this department and I realise the difficulty with which it is faced through lack of qualified surveyors to carry out the necessary subdivision work. This is a very real problem. I notice from the report furnished by the Surveyor-General that only nine candidates submitted themselves for examination last year. Up to date three of them have qualified as surveyors. We read also that eight deceased men have been removed from the roll and this indicates to me that the difficulty we are experiencing in obtaining authorised surveyors will remain with us for a considerable time. Knowing that the services of these professional men are essential if we are to expedite soldier settlement, I suggest that some special effort should be made to augment the small numbers engaged in that profession at present. I know there are many highly qualified civil engineers who are not registered as authorised surveyors.

I feel sure that these men could, at least, undertake a certain amount of survey work, and help considerably in the required direction if some arrangement could be made whereby qualified engineers could be authorised to practise the profession of surveyor. I make that suggestion to the Minister and hope he will examine it. The services of, say, half a dozen such men would help considerably indeed.

We all know that the Commonwealth-States War Service Settlement Scheme envisages agricultural farms only, but I feel that if the men are available to make the necessary surveys and appreciation of the position it might be found that there is quite a large area of good grazing land that is not developed at all at the present time; or some of it only poorly developed and not in production. Some men hold substantial areas in southern Queensland—mainly scrub country—but because of war conditions and financial obligations have not been able to improve their properties fully. I believe that many of these properties could very reasonably be subdivided and thrown open for selection. I know that the Government in recent times have been very generous in the question of areas when new lands have been thrown open for selection. It is better to have an area too large than too small. Bitter experience in the past has indicated that to

us. In recent times the Government have thrown open large areas of land, most of which is only partly improved. I suggest that a full survey be made of the position in that direction. Large areas are held by men, large enough for subdivision, many on absolutely unimproved virgin land, and if the circumstances warrant it, that land could be resumed or some arrangements made with the lessees, and I think much of it could be made available for selection. In my own electorate there is a good deal of land within that class, and I know there are many ex-Service men, highly experienced in the grazing industry, who possess some finance, who would be happy to obtain areas of 5,000 or 6,000 acres and do the developmental work associated with them. I hope that the Minister will make some appreciation of that position, and I feel sure that it will result in the settlement of a greater number of men on the land in the near future.

We listened this afternoon to some comment on the very important question of soil erosion. We have all read a good deal about it in the Press of late and the report of the department conveys some very valuable information on the problem. I agree to a certain extent with the hon. member for Cunningham that the report that 40,000 acres had been rendered useless on the Darling Downs is rather exaggerated, nevertheless erosion does take place year in, year out. The time has come when the Government will have to take very definite action and make it an offence for a man to adopt faulty methods of cultivation by ploughing on the slope and allowing the summer rains to wash away thousands of tons of rich surface soil. Travelling through the Darling Downs one can see land recently cultivated by farmers in a way that betrayed an absolute disregard of advice tendered to them on this question.

At 4.35 p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

Mr. HILTON: They are continuing their faulty methods and I venture to say that if we get a few more heavy summer storms in the next month or two thousands of tons of rich soil will again be swept down on the roadway and into the gullies and creeks and so further clutter up our already badly cluttered up watercourses. I repeat that this is a national question and if we are to cure it the Government will have to take very definite and very drastic measures. I realise that many men have a sense of their responsibility in this connection and are prepared to do the right thing. Many of them have now adopted the correct practice in cultivation but unfortunately quite a number still disregard the advice tendered to them and continue these faulty practices. If the Government will consider bringing down legislation that will impose a penalty for these faulty practices, which are really undermining our national wealth, I think their action will be fully justified. Perhaps a conference of all the parties concerned and a greater measure of publicity to this problem may bring results. It is increasing every year. A good deal of very valuable land has been rendered useless

on this account and I agreed with the statement in the Press that the area is growing every year. The watercourses on the Downs are being silted up each year, and these faulty practices are accentuating the position.

I repeat that the Government should give very serious consideration to this question now and take action accordingly. I think a great deal of work could be done in regenerating the streams, so to speak. If the problem of soil erosion is successfully solved we can set about cleansing the streams and planting suitable trees and binding grasses along the banks. In doing that we shall be doing something very substantial towards conserving water. Years ago, before closer settlement took place, many of the Darling Downs streams contained deep holes of water. Where these holes were 20 feet deep 30 to 40 years ago you can walk across them today and for most of the year they are merely dry watercourses. This has been brought about by the gradual silting up of the streams but I think some action can be taken to restore them to their original depth. I repeat that a great deal can be done by planting suitable binding grasses along their banks and suitable trees. It is a national problem and one well worthy of consideration. It would provide also a great deal of useful employment, although I know at the present time not enough labour is available to tackle all the urgent work that awaits us. However, the proposals could be mapped out and tackled as soon as circumstances permit. If we did that, it would bring big results to the State.

Mr. KERR (Oxley) (4.39 p.m.): In a financial report delivered during the early part of the session one was impressed by the great wealth production of this State. That report states that the net value of production for the year 1944-45 was £87,000,000, much of which came from the land, the rest coming from various sources too numerous to mention. That is by the way, but it demonstrates the importance of the vote under discussion. It is very important to this State, therefore, that the greatest attention that can be given should be given to these Estimates and all matters affected by them.

I was very glad to hear the hon. member for Isis commend the Government for appointing the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement on Sugar Lands. Probably that was prompted by the Agent-General for Queensland in London, who in one of his reports pointed to the need for something along the lines which the Government put into operation. The commission's report is an exceptionally fine one, and I am very hopeful of seeing some of the 744 men that it recommended should be put to growing of sugar placed on the land in a very short time. As far as I can gather, no land has been frozen in this connection, but on that point I stand to be corrected. It is time we took action. Apparently our sugar production this season is going to be very poor indeed. Consequently something should be done straightaway. I hope there

will be no delay in the acquisition and surveying of sugar lands, such as we have experienced in other soldier-settlement schemes.

I should commiserate with the Minister in this regard. I know he has been handicapped on several scores, first by the dearth of surveyors, secondly by the need for deciding on which areas of the land frozen for the purpose of soldier settlement should be taken, and thirdly through the drought, which also comes into the picture. We stressed the position as to surveyors on a previous occasion and suggested that the Minister should go further afield in search of them to carry out this work. I know he went south without any great results. It is apparently the Government's own fault. They should take steps to pay surveyors, whether on the contract system or on a straightout salary, so attractively that they will engage in this work. I know from my own experience that a great deal of surveying work is going on with respect to seaside and suburban lands: The first call on all these professional men should be for the surveying of land for returned soldiers. I do not know whether the Government have exploited all possibilities. If private enterprise were handling this question there would be no question about it, it would get the surveyors. The obligation is on the Government to see that surveyors are forthcoming.

Mr. Jones: How is it that private enterprise in the country has been asking the Government to make surveyors available, as it cannot get them?

Mr. KERR: That is news to me, but I accept the Minister's word for it. The only thing for the Minister to do is to make the calling attractive.

The Government's obligation is to subdivide the areas that have been frozen for soldier settlement and put soldiers on them. The Minister has explained that he has experienced a great deal of difficulty in reaching a settlement on the price to be paid for this frozen land. I am not going to advocate for one moment that the price asked by owners of land in all cases should be accepted. In the final analysis you have the Land Court to settle the question.

Mr. Jones: Hear, hear! I agree with you.

Mr. KERR: I do not agree with the hon. member for Aubigny that the Minister is the sole arbiter on what price should be paid for that land. Nor should he be.

Mr. Jones: We are not.

Mr. KERR: I am glad to hear that is not so. In the final analysis the Land Court should be the arbiter as to price. It is not restricted by National Security Regulations in any way. The regulations do not apply to the fixation of prices for lands. The private deals have to go through the delegate to the Commonwealth Treasurer, and if he is satisfied with the price everything is well and the vendor must accept that price or not sell.

The Minister raised the question of drought as an excuse, partly, for not getting on with this job.

Mr. Jones: Not an excuse.

Mr. KERR: He raised the point that the drought was rather a blessing in disguise.

Mr. Jones: That is so.

Mr. KERR: And that was the reason for not putting these men on the land.

Mr. Jones: No, I said that if we had men on the land they would have had no chance of making a success because of the drought.

Mr. KERR: The hon. member for Sandgate made it clear that he could have put those men on the land without charging them any rent. I am positive that many of those men would have liked to go on the land if they could have gone on under that condition, because, not being burdened by rent or interest, they would have a period to look round and decide what they wanted to do. I think it is a matter to which the Minister should give further consideration.

I agree with previous speakers, particularly the hon. member for Isis, that the expenditure of £200,000,000 for sensible irrigation in this State would be recovered in 10 years. It would be interesting to know whether any land is available for settlement in the area where the big Dumaresq Dam scheme is going to be established. I know it will take several years to build that dam and the Government will probably go ahead with a series of weirs in the meantime, but I suggest to the Minister that some investigation be made as to the resumption of land in that area so that the returned soldiers will have the benefit of irrigation at first-hand.

There is one other subject that you, Mr. Mann, may not permit me to discuss. The Federal Government have a preference clause in their income-tax law in regard to settlers in different zones in Queensland. They have two zones: Zone A, in which they give every resident a special allowance of £40, and Zone B, in which they give every resident an allowance of £20. That applies to men on the land and not to companies or trustees. In my opinion that allowance is totally inadequate. If we are bent on decentralisation, there is only one thing to do—to make the outback areas as attractive as possible. That allowance should not be by way of reduction of income tax but it should be on the basis of a credit, and when those men have served 20 years in the back areas they would be entitled to collect that amount. They are entitled to some consideration above those in the closer settled areas in proximity to towns and cities where the amenities are much greater.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I do not think that has much to do with the Department of Public Lands.

Mr. KERR: I wish to commend the Government for appointing the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement on Sugar Lands. I take this opportunity of commend-

ing the personnel of the commission for their very impartial findings and saying that the Government should not lose any time in implementing it.

Mr. POWER (Baroona) (4.51 p.m.): The report of the Department of Public Lands is very comprehensive and reflects very great credit on the officers for their work during the year. It contains a wealth of information that can be readily absorbed by any hon. member who takes the time to study it.

In the brief time at my disposal I intend to deal with soldier settlement, but before doing so I desire to make some observation as to what has been done by the Government in granting concessions to members of the fighting forces. I do not want to be misunderstood. Men in the fighting forces are justly entitled to these concessions, but members of the Opposition endeavour to lead the people of Queensland to the belief that this Government had no interest in the soldier and had done nothing for him while he was away fighting in the defence of his country. It is well that the figures I propose to give should appear in "Hansard" so that readers will have an opportunity of studying what the Government have done.

The War Service Land Settlement Act of 1946 made provision for the granting of certain concessions to holders of land leased from the Crown. These were:—

- (1) Relief from payment of rent that accrued during the period of service;
- (2) Postponement of instalments of survey fees payable during the period of service;
- (3) Extension of lease for a period equivalent to the period of service in the cases of those holdings having a defined term of lease;
- (4) Suspension of the condition of personal residence or occupation during the period of service and for six months thereafter; and
- (5) The non-enforcement during the period of service and for six months thereafter of the penalties provided for non-compliance with the conditions of development, improvement, and clearing of noxious weeds.

This gave those men who had returned and were discharged from the forces an opportunity of recuperating and recovering their health before taking over their properties. It will be interesting to note that the total number of Crown tenants who received the benefit and who were recorded as eligible for concessions was 1,775, who between them had 2,378 holdings. Of these 789 have been discharged or released from the forces; 64 have been killed in action or died on service; the holdings of 104 enlisted tenants have been transferred; and the holdings of 49 have been surrendered or have reverted to the Crown. The rent remitted amounted to £72,898 and the purchase money postponed to £3,780, making a total of £76,678. The number of Crown tenants whose concessions have still to be determined is 769 and the total annual rent of their holdings is £9,888.

In addition, the department has received notification from various sources of the engagement on war service of a further 32 Crown tenants. Confirmation is awaited from the military authorities before applying the concession in these cases. There is definite evidence of what this Government have done for the fighting man while he has been away in the service of his country.

Now we are concerned with what is going to be done for him on his return. I have some recollection of what took place after the last war at Beerburum, because for a period I was engaged in clearing that land there and I have no desire to see any member of the fighting forces put on that type of land. We hear complaints about the delay in settling soldiers on the land. Is it not wise to hasten slowly rather than make the mistakes we made last time? Is it not wise to survey carefully the whole of the land that is to be made available for soldier settlement so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past? I commend the Minister and his officers for the very fine work they are doing in investigating these lands. Prior to 1929, 93 per cent. of the land in this State was held on the leasehold system, but in 1929 the Moore Government amended the Land Act and gave people the right to convert their holdings from leasehold to freehold. On 5 December, 1929, that legislation received the Royal Assent and 4,262 leaseholds were converted to freehold. I do not believe that the freehold system should operate because we have evidence that leasehold is in the best interests of the State.

A careful survey must be made of all lands to be allocated for soldier settlement, and I repeat that I have no desire to see a recurrence of what took place after the last war. Men were put on land that had absolutely no value whatever. They invested their deferred pay in it. When I was at Beerburum I did not put a pick into the soil once; all that was necessary for me to do was to shovel it, because it was pure sand and totally unsuitable for anything. Many of the men went broke, drifted back to the cities, and later found employment in other callings.

A complete and careful survey has been made of 457,720 acres to determine their suitability for soldier settlement. Much of that land was rejected as being unsuitable. In addition, 2,560 acres have been acquired in the Nanango district, 1,030 acres in the Kilkivan district, and, according to the report, the Government expended approximately £16,000 in acquiring those lands. Then, 795 acres have been resumed in the Dalby district. An attempt was made there to arrive at a price to be paid by the Crown to the owner of this land. No settlement could be arrived at and the matter is now in the hands of the Land Court.

Mr. Sparkes: What is wrong with that?

Mr. POWER: Nothing, but it brings me to this point; members of the Opposition—or should I say certain of them—have said that if we resume land today the present-day valuation should be paid for it. With that

I do not agree. Today the people of Queensland are land-hungry and values are inflated beyond the reach of the average worker. As a matter of fact, the National Security Regulations were proclaimed for the purpose of preventing the sale of land at inflated values. Certain members of the Opposition are opposed to that. They believe that the present-day value should be paid for land. If that was done there would be no need whatever for the National Security Regulations.

Mr. Sparkes: If you wanted to buy a piece of land would you not bring along the regulations?

Mr. POWER: I should be fair and honest and not try to exploit anybody. Today quite a number of people are complaining that their transfers are being held up because the Sub-Treasury is endeavouring to get the correct value of the land and not the inflated value. The utter disregard of hon. members opposite for the interests of members of the fighting forces is shown by the speeches made in this Chamber today. Hon. members opposite are willing to allow this Government to buy land at an inflated value and hand it over to the returned soldier and handicap him from the start.

Mr. Maher: The market value.

Mr. POWER: The inflated value. The hon. member for West Moreton knows very well that values are inflated. He was willing to handicap the returned soldier by asking him to pay the inflated value. I say that the statements of certain members of the Opposition with regard to the determination of land values by the court have cast a grave reflection upon the members of the court. It was very unfair to imply that the Minister or any member of the Government has control or a say in the determination of values by the Land Court.

An Opposition Member: Who said that?

Mr. POWER: The hon. member for West Moreton made the statement this morning and he said, "I hope that the Land Court is not going to be influenced or dictated to by the Minister for Lands." There is no doubt about the statement he made and I say it is very unfair and unjust for the hon. member for West Moreton to suggest that the Minister would dictate to the members of the Land Court; it is unfair to the members of the court for the suggestion to go out that they would allow themselves to be subjected to dictation by the Minister or any member of the Government Party. If it is not possible by peaceful negotiation to arrive at the purchase price to be paid for land there is only one place for the determination of that value and that is the Land Court. I believe that it would be wise for the Minister or the Crown never to accept by peaceful settlement any price submitted by any vendor. The Land Court is the proper authority to determine such a matter. That would obviate any suggestion that the Minister was getting a rake-off, which has been suggested in these matters. Determinations of land value should be made by the Land Court and the Land Court alone.

Mr. Sparkes: You will admit—

Mr. POWER: I am not admitting anything that the hon. member says. I am making a speech, and I do not want any help from the hon. member.

Mr. Sparkes: I thought it might help you.

Mr. POWER: The hon. member cannot help me in anything.

A man may have a large area of land and he may be willing to take a certain price an acre for it, but an unsuspecting person might examine only a part of it and say that he is willing to pay that price, whereas upon a complete examination of the entire area the fact may be disclosed that it is of no value for the purpose for which it is required. Therefore, it is important that the Crown should make a careful survey and investigation of the whole of the area and its suitability before deciding to resume it, and the Land Court, in determining its value, should take into account its productivity amongst other things. Idle land has no value whatever. It is only when labour is applied to it that it becomes valuable. That is why the Land Court should take all circumstances into consideration. I do not agree for one moment with the implied assertion by hon. members opposite that the Crown, simply because it is the Crown, should pay an inflated value for land. Everyone knows that when a house in the city, for instance, is offered at auction, it immediately reaches its pegged price and the buyer has to be determined by ballot. That shows the eager demand that exists for land today, and not only in the city but throughout the State.

I propose to have something to say about the provision of proper access to land used for farming pursuits, and I know that the hon. member for Stanley will endorse what I have to say about a position that obtained in the Conondale district where a farmer on the other side of the river has to drive over two logs before he can get into his property.

Mr. Macdonald: I believe the Main Roads Commission is working there now.

Mr. POWER: I am glad to know that. There have already been a number of accidents there and it is time the position was altered. Proper access should be given to all people on the land and I am not confining my remarks to any one district.

Mr. Macdonald: You are quite right.

Mr. POWER: The time for making proper access in the district to which I refer is long overdue and as the Estimates of the Department of Public Lands provide for the construction of access roads I hope that consideration will be given to the matter promptly.

I shall reserve any further comment on the other votes of the department until they come up for consideration.

Mr. PLUNKETT (Albert) (5.9 p.m.): The Estimates of the Department of Public Lands have a very important bearing indeed on the wealth production of the State, and in considering them the most important subject

that looms up for consideration is soldier settlement. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the soldiers for their services to this country, and as the law provides that they shall be given preference in all activities that they undertake I think everyone agrees that soldier settlement should take priority over all other forms of settlement. The obligation devolves upon us to rehabilitate the soldier by settling him on the land so that he can make a living for himself.

When we examine that position very carefully we find that there are so many ramifications of land settlement that it is one of the most difficult tasks for any Government to administer it. It is easy to give soldiers land, but it is not easy to give them land on which they will succeed. Unless the soldier is successful on the land he is "settled," and instead of being an asset he becomes a liability both to himself and to the State. Therefore we should exercise very great care in settling people on the land.

When I talk of settling people on the land I mean successfully settling them on the land. That is the important point.

Mr. Jones: Hear, hear! I agree with you.

Mr. PLUNKETT: A dozen and one difficulties surround land settlement that it is almost impossible for either a Government or an individual to foresee. We have before us the experience gained in settling soldiers on the land during the last war, and no hon. member wants to see again what happened then. Rather must we look upon the difficulties we met with as a guide to our future policy. We must not think of just giving a man a few thousand acres of land and allowing him to work out his own destiny. We must see that he has a fair chance of success, which will be bound up in the returns to be got from the products of whatever activity he engages in. In the past we have even provided water for new settlers, but we found that when they were ready to harvest their products they were so far from markets that by the time their products arrived there little of their value was left for them. Therefore we do not want to settle people on the land so far from markets that the cost of the transport of their products will eat up all their profits. They should be settled close to markets so that they can obtain the full reward of their industry.

There is another matter to which some consideration should be given. War difficulties and shortages have increased values of land products to a level higher than in normal times. That impels people to believe that land is more valuable than it really is; consequently they are willing to pay a higher price for it than otherwise. If the Government are forced into settling people on land the price of which has become enhanced because of these factors they court failure of their soldier settlements when normal conditions return. That is an aspect of the problem we must consider.

Mr. Jones: We shall court failure if we pay inflated values for land.

Mr. PLUNKETT: There will always be arguments between vendor and purchaser on the question of values, and if people want to fight on values there is only one place for them to go and that is to the Land Court.

We have a vast area suitable for this class of settlement, and I believe that negotiation between the parties is a better method of arriving at its price than litigation in the Land Court.

I do not know whether the National Security Regulations, which govern the fixation of land values, will go by the board at the end of the year. If it does that will put another aspect on the question. If we are to settle people on the land with money advanced by the community we must see that they are settled in the most economical way and the most economical way is to give them good land and give them every facility to enable them to make a success of it; if we do that we shall be doing something for Queensland. If we put them on land that is far removed from good roads and other facilities we are courting failure; and I do not want to court failure in soldier settlement.

I think the department should make a decision promptly in regard to frozen land so that the owners will know whether it is going to be taken or not. Some of this land has been frozen for two years and the result is that there has been no development of it in that time. If the Minister could decide that certain land was not wanted it would be helpful. Let the people know as soon as possible whether it is to be held or not. I think, however, that generally it would be better to hasten slowly in soldier settlement and make a success of it than to rush in and court failure. It is a burning question with many returned men.

The Land and Water Resources Development Act of 1943 was passed with the object of developing the water resources of the State and increasing stability in production. As far as I can see, in the development of this country one of the most essential things for any Government to do is to make greater provision for irrigation or water conservation. We hear of erosion, but in my opinion a great deal of it is caused because we have not the necessary water facilities. If we had the water facilities we could grow something and we should not have the erosion that we have had in the past. The planting of trees along watercourses is not the solution of erosion. The greatest erosion takes place on areas that are filled ready to plant but owing to drought are not planted; tropical storms occur and the loose soil is washed away. If irrigation was available as soon as the land was ploughed up and planted, a crop would soon be grown and the soil would not run away when the tropical storms came.

We have heard of the difficulties caused by the shortage of technical staff and of labour in four or five of the departments associated with the development of this State, for instance, the Department of Public Lands, the Main Roads Commission, the Department of the Co-ordinator-General of Public Works, the Department of Agriculture

and Stock, the Department of Mines, and the Stanley River Dam. These departments are all involved more or less in the development of Queensland and the conservation of water. I think there are very good men on the Land Administration Board, but they are in charge of very important activities, some of the most important in the State, but irrigation and conservation of fodder are just beyond their direct province. This needs a special board. Certainly some of these men can be on this special board, but the board must not be asked to do a thousand and one things. That is the cause of delay. After all, members of boards are only human beings and should not be expected to give attention to too many details. They should deal directly with their own problem, day after day, so that something will be done. I do not care who they are, so long as they possess the ability to do the job. Give them the job to do, let them know what is wanted of them, and they will then get the work done.

In the Lockyer Valley we have already a wonderful example of what can be done by water conservation and irrigation. That scheme was not started by the Government but by individuals. Because of it many landholders there have been able to save their stock during this drought period, but they have their disabilities. Originally there is water sufficient for irrigation, but when a drought occurs the quantity is depleted to such an extent that they are forbidden to irrigate only on certain days of the week or at times only on certain hours on certain days. If we had looked ahead far enough a system of weirs would have been provided on all our rivers. I am not speaking in this respect of Queensland generally, but of the south-eastern portion in particular. The greatest cause of our loss in this drought is that it is so widespread that nobody has feed. Usually people suffering from a drought have been able to get feed for their stock from other areas. If some of these areas now affected had the benefit of water conservation and irrigation, they would be in a position to supply feed to those less fortunate and at a reasonable cost. At present fodder has to be brought from the southern States at high cost and it is dependent on a dislocated transport system. The Government own the water and own the banks of the rivers and creeks, and they should spend a few million pounds weiring the creeks in the southern part of Queensland, where the demand is, and from the experience gained there could extend the operations further afield.

It may be said that I am always suggesting irrigation, but I do it because I know the value of irrigation. This State is lagging a good way behind in this respect, despite the fact that we suffer from drought more often than other States, and have a hotter climate and feel its effects more severely and more quickly than other States. In New South Wales they are spending £20,000,000 on water conservation and irrigation; in Victoria they are spending £10,000,000; how much have we in Queensland put aside for this work? Although we have periodic droughts with heavy losses in production we have not said

that we intend to avoid them by weiring all our rivers and creeks. If we do, the men who use the water will be willing to pay for it, so that no cost will be involved. It is only a question of constructing the weirs and they will submit to a levy if the Government choose to impose it.

In discussing these matters we are a little too prone to be vindictive towards one another. It must be remembered that this is our State, that it is our land that creates its wealth, and this thought alone should stand to promote harmony between us in our efforts to improve and develop our land. We seem to go out of our way here to say nasty things about one another and that gets us nowhere. If we all helped to develop the country by increasing production and giving the people who want to settle on the land an opportunity to do so with a reasonable chance of making a living for their wives and families we should be doing something of real worth.

Mr. CLARK (Fitzroy) (5.28 p.m.): At the outset I congratulate the Minister and his staff on the comprehensive report presented to us. It gives a clear indication of what the department has been doing and what it intends to do.

Hon. members opposite blame the Government for not moving faster in soldier settlement. It is something that will require the best brains of the Government and their departments if it is to be carried out effectively. The Government should see to it that the best lands available are provided for soldier settlers because, when all is said and done, if it had not been for the soldiers we might not have had any land here at all. I agree with the hon. member for Albert that we should see to it that the soldiers are not merely settled on the land but settled on it successfully.

The land is our means of production, and if we do not give them a fair start in life by giving them reasonably good land they will have an up-hill fight for a long time. I do not want to see that. It has been said that most of the soldier settlements established in various parts of the State after the 1914-18 war proved failures. No member of this Committee wants to see the same thing happen again; we all want to see the soldier successfully settled.

The hon. member for Sandgate said that the Government should have prepared for soldier settlement during the war period. I should like to ask him this: how could we prepare for soldier settlement during the war and freeze areas of land and at the same time keep production at the highest level while the war was being carried on? That would have been impossible. At the end of the war the time came for the Government to acquire land; if they had acquired it during the war they would have been curtailing production. I think that the Government are on the right track, and I believe that they should not be hasty in settling soldiers on the land.

We should see to it that all the necessaries for successful selection are given to the soldier when he takes up his land. For instance, we

should see that water is handy, because an adequate supply of water is essential. I believe that if the problem is tackled on the right lines there cannot be many failures. It is better for the Government to settle 500 soldiers on the land and have 90 per cent of them make a success, than give 2,000 soldiers each a piece of land and have perhaps 50 per cent. of them failures; and if 50 per cent. of 2,000 were failures they would fall back on the Government for financial assistance. We should all like to see every soldier make a success of his venture.

I believe that the committee to select the settlers are doing a good job. All things considered, I believe the Government are doing the best that possibly can be done. They grant loans to soldiers and for the first three years neither interest nor principal is to be repaid, and for the next five years no interest is paid. That will give them an opportunity to become established before they are asked to repay their indebtedness to the Government.

Mr. Sparkes: Even admitting that the conditions are favourable, we do not want the soldier settler to carry a big mortgage.

Mr. CLARK: I admit that freely. Once a soldier's block is over-capitalised the task of the settler becomes a heavy one and so the Government and the committee I refer to must see that they are not over-capitalised—that would dishearten the settler and cause him to walk off his property. That would be no benefit either to the settler or to the State.

It is important that water conservation and irrigation should be carried out in conjunction with land settlement, because wherever irrigation schemes have been established farmers have been able to maintain production even in dry belts. For example, a number of farmers are growing fodder by irrigation in my electorate—they each have their own small plant—and not once during the 11 years that I have been a member of Parliament have they found it necessary to apply to the Government for financial aid. They have been able to grow fodder each year irrespective of climatic conditions and have been able to get fairly good prices for their products.

Mr. Sparkes: All the better for them.

Mr. CLARK: All the better for them and all the better for the Government. Another little settlement in my electorate is engaged in the production of citrus fruits with the aid of irrigation. Most of the growers have their own small plants and they too have never had to apply to the Government for any financial help since I have been a member of Parliament. That proves that if we are to have greater and continued production it is necessary to have water conservation and irrigation wherever possible.

A good deal of money has been spent on the Theodore irrigation settlement—it is not in my electorate—and it will be extended sooner or later. It is a scheme that is worthy

of the fullest investigation by the Government. The settlement is capable of growing virtually anything. Indeed, I actually saw rice growing there shortly after it was first established. It has been proved at that settlement that four times the quantity of cotton can be produced from an acre of land by means of irrigation than can be produced by natural rainfall. That again proves that it is essential that we should not only embark on water conservation schemes wherever possible but should combine them with irrigation in suitable areas.

There are several rivers in Central Queensland that lend themselves to weiring. For instance, the Dee River could be weired in certain places and be made of great assistance to the farmers in the vicinity. Both the Don and Dawson Rivers also could be weired with advantage to the settlers. The Mackenzie and Nogoia Rivers, which flow into the Fitzroy River, also lend themselves to the construction of weirs. A great deal of beautiful land is to be found on the banks of the Fitzroy River and such schemes as these would encourage settlement in those areas and bring about a greater population in Rockhampton.

I will reserve my other remarks to the succeeding Estimates.

Hon. A. JONES (Charters Towers—Secretary for Public Lands) (5.42 p.m.): I wish to reply to several points made by various hon. members.

The hon. member for Aubigny was rather inconsistent. He contended that the Crown should pay the current or economic value of land resumed for settlement, but later on he gave the opinion that the Crown would be compelled ultimately to write down the value of soldier-settlement blocks, which might originally be valued at £10,000, to £5,000. My point is that if the current price—that is, the economic price—is paid for the land when it is resumed, there should be no occasion to write down its value subsequently. The two statements are not consistent.

Mr. Sparkes: Yes, they are.

Mr. JONES: If the hon. member desires to write down the values from £10,000 to £5,000, that in itself indicates that the price paid in the first instance was not the market or economic value.

Considerable discussion has taken place on the resumption of suitable land for soldier settlement. Personally, I do not think it presents any great difficulties. The usual procedure after departmental officers have inspected and classified the land is for a valuation to be made by these officers. Then check valuations are made. A decision is then arrived at as to what price shall be offered to the owner. Perhaps interviews take place with him. That is a function not of the Minister but a function of departmental officials. After negotiation, those officials make a recommendation to the departmental head. If those negotiations fail the obvious course is for the owner to go to the Land Court. That is the fair and reasonable approach to this matter.

The view of the hon. member for Albert on this subject was a very common-sense one. He spoke as a practical man who knows the problems associated with settlement. I know it is possible that there may have been moves by the department that perhaps were not in the best interests of the scheme and that occasionally it was thought that something other than what was done should have been done but, generally speaking, there has been a desire on the part of the departmental officers to accelerate the completion of the details of the scheme in order to get returned soldiers settled on the land.

Mr. Sparkes: Do you not realise that when you erect a dwelling-house and other essential buildings on a small part of the land that capital value is spread over the whole of it?

Mr. JONES: I appreciate that, too. The hon. member made that point when he was speaking. He said that it may not be to the best advantage to settle two people where one is settled at the present time. If he intended to imply that it was not desirable that those areas should be subdivided for closer settlement, I do not agree with him. I believe that subdivision is necessary in areas where the land is of good quality and suitable for closer settlement. I think that is the correct and obvious policy for any Government to follow.

As to land values, hon. members will remember that last year it was necessary for me to bring down an amendment of the Land Acts to enable us to put a ceiling price on building blocks. That gives an idea of the inflation of land values throughout the State. We had the example of a block of land at Holland Park below the tram terminus towards a gully. I think it had an upset value of about £60 or £70, yet when it was put up for auction before the ceiling price legislation was passed, someone bid £650.

Mr. Nicklin interjected.

Mr. JONES: You could not prevent it; they actually did that. The same thing applied to Julia Creek. Any member would know that there are thousands of acres of flat country there but not many buildings, yet a building block was put up and £650 was bid for it. That was absolutely absurd. I was talking to a gentleman—and he is well-known to hon. members opposite—who wanted to acquire a building allotment at Surfers' Paradise. He told me that in order to acquire this building allotment he was willing to pay £1,000. He wanted a block, and if there was any way by which he could get one for £1,000 he would pay it.

Mr. Aikens: Would he want a quarter of an acre?

Mr. JONES: He wanted an ordinary building block of 24 perches—something like that. If we had not put a ceiling price on those blocks of land at Southport and the other seaside resorts, people would have paid anything from £1,000 to £1,500 for some of them. If people are prepared to pay £650 at Julia Creek, what are they prepared to pay

at Surfers' Paradise? That is the way to look at it. It is very clear that there is inflation of values, and if that will happen in the case of building allotments, it will happen in the case of farm lands.

I went to Dalby some time ago to meet the returned soldiers and discuss soldier settlement with them. While I was there a land agent brought along a young Victorian returned soldier, who said that we had refused to allow a transfer to go through of a perpetual lease. He said the price the Victorian was prepared to pay was £5 15s. an acre. I was able to prove to the land agent and to the intending purchaser that the owner of this land was prepared to sell that land at £2 15s. an acre two years previously. I told him in no uncertain manner that we had no intention of allowing the transfer to go through. Had we allowed it to go through it would have immediately established a system of values that could be accepted by the Land Court. I quote this incident as an illustration of the tendency towards inflation of land values in those areas. You can understand the difficulty of negotiating with landowners when they know—I am prepared to admit—that they can obtain in some instances double the economic value of the land. Unfortunately that makes it difficult for departmental officers to negotiate for the acquisition of those lands. In the circumstances I think the fair and reasonable thing is to go to the court and allow it to determine the question.

Mr. Sparkes: They must take into consideration sales that have been permitted.

Mr. JONES: The Land Court hears evidence and takes into consideration sales that have taken place in the district recently and of course other considerations. The Land Court is in a position to call evidence as to what the vendor actually paid for the land. For those reasons it is in a very good position to make a fair valuation. I think the Land Court in every instance has given general satisfaction. I have not heard any criticism of it until this debate, when the hon. member for West Moreton suggested that it might do something questionable on the instruction of myself or some other members of the Government. I rather resented that statement. It certainly was said. The actual words were something like these, "I hope the Minister will give an assurance to this Committee that neither he nor any member of the Government will interfere with the Land Court in connection with the fixation of prices." Something along those lines was said this morning and naturally I took exception to it. Obviously I am not likely to interfere with the Land Court or make any suggestion to it. The Land Court is a judicial body composed of three men who thoroughly understand the job and it would ill become me to make any suggestions to the members of that court. If I was silly enough to do it, I know very well that it would put me in a very bad position, and rightly so.

The hon. member for Mackay made some reference to the programme of reforestation and suggested that the Government get busy

and implement their policy as soon as possible. I do not want to be continually accused of making excuses but hon. members should read the report of the Director of Forests, which gives some idea of the number of men engaged last year and the number that were actually retained. It has been difficult to get men to go to the forest areas. We have in mind the employment of some thousands of men on reforestation and other activities of this sub-department.

Mr. Pie: Are you prepared to improve their conditions of living?

Mr. JONES: We have recently entered into an agreement with the A.W.U., after a conference, as to living and general conditions of forestry employees, which I think it will be agreed are equal to any in Queensland.

Mr. Pie: When do you hope to carry out the plan?

Mr. JONES: It is laid down that the conditions of living must comply with the Workers' Accommodation Act but there are a number of other conditions not to be found in that Act. That agreement has been registered in the Industrial Court, which has the effect of an industrial award.

Mr. Pie: When will that agreement operate?

Mr. JONES: We are already building accommodation. We have bought a certain amount of equipment from the Commonwealth Disposals Commission and in addition a very large amount of furnishings, for instance, 3,000 wire stretchers. I could give the Committee a list of the material we have acquired through the Commonwealth Disposals Commission and other avenues for the purpose of bringing accommodation in the forestry areas up to a very high standard. During the war it was very difficult to get what we needed. We could not even obtain tents. Those we had were rotten. Consequently we have had to do something to build the accommodation up to something worth while.

Mr. Aikens: Will you be able to give them food and other conditions at least equal to those of the C.C.C. during the war?

Mr. JONES: The forestry employees are employed on a different basis from the men of the C.C.C. The forestry employees receive so much each week. The C.C.C. men received a wage and their food was supplied. The agreement we have entered into with the A.W.U. lays it down that cooking accommodation, safes and all other equipment necessary for keeping food must be supplied. We are providing the buildings necessary to accommodate them, together with such equipment as mattresses and wire stretchers.

If hon. members refer to the Estimates for the Sub-Department of Forestry, they will notice that provision is made for—

	£
Plantations	96,000
Nurseries	15,000
Natural regeneration	45,600

and so on. There is quite a list of items under which money is made available for the Sub-Department of Forestry. We are thoroughly alive to the importance of getting ahead with our Forestry policy. Until 1914 little or nothing was done in Queensland by way of reforestation work, and that can be attributed largely to the fact that in the early days the settlers were more concerned with getting the timber out of the way so that they could make a living from the land than with conserving a valuable asset. Even today there is a tendency for the average Australian to get rid of the timber, because he has been accustomed to getting it out of the way when clearing his land. There is not the attitude to forestry that we should have in this State. In Victoria they set up an organisation similar to the Save Your Trees campaign that was started in Brisbane some time ago. In the country towns of Victoria tree-planting campaigns were conducted some years ago. A family might have a tree to look after. If it was a young tree they would put a guard round it, and so on, so that from 300 to 600 families in a small town might each have the responsibility of looking after a tree, with the result that over the years they have beautified their towns.

The hon. member for Bowen referred to soil erosion. I am not suggesting that soil erosion should not be discussed on this vote, but for the information of hon. members I might say that soil erosion, that is, erosion from wind and sheet erosion, is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Stock. It was agreed some time ago, however, that the administration of the Burdekin River Trust Act, dealing with the banks and beds of rivers, should be transferred to the Department of Public Lands.

Mr. HILEY (Logan) (7.15 p.m.): The part of the administration of the Chief Office on which I want to spend my time this evening is the administration of the Sub-Department of Forestry. The section of the report to the Secretary for Public Lands that reviews the operations of the sub-department states its outlook is refreshing if rather frightening in its candour. I should like to remind hon. members of some of the clear statements contained in that report and I suggest that they present the most abundant food for our immediate thought.

We are told in the clearest of language that the pine supplies of the private holders of timber throughout this State are so near to exhaustion that no longer can any real count be made of what remains. What remains that is owned by the Crown is only sufficient to keep pace with the present cutting rate for six more years. That, I suggest, is something that should give Queensland, a big wood-user, cause for thought. When you study also the further thought of the director concerning the hardwood position and you realise that the percentage of hardwood supplies now becoming available from State sources is at last exceeding those available from private sources, you come to the irresistible conclusion that our experiences in hardwoods will follow similar

lines to those in softwoods. Going still further, I think we should have the profoundest respect for an observation of the director, expressed in a few words, when he says that practically none of the privately-owned hardwood forests is being managed on sound forestry principles.

I suggest that this Committee, observing those three observations, so fundamental in character and so important in their influence in this community in the years that lie ahead, must direct their attention not so much to the spilt milk of the past as to what limited opportunity remains to correct in the future some of the worst mistakes of the past. The history of our forestry administration in this State, over the last 40 years, in spite of some bright spots, shows that we have been living upon our natural capital and exploiting our natural resources and have been truly blind to what must follow in the years to come. The inevitable results of what we did in those 40 years are now, according to the director's report, almost in the realm of tomorrow. I suggest that we should take some time to examine what might contribute to repairing this deficiency.

Let me say that I am prepared to concede to the Sub-Department of Forestry in this State a greater measure of enlightenment and a greater measure of practical work than can be credited to any such sub-department in any other State of Australia. When I say that I still reserve the right to say that when you examine the figures the activities of the Queensland sub-department are the best of a bad lot.

In those circumstances we should not, therefore, fall into a state of smug complacency and say that we are better off than any other State in the Commonwealth and so Queensland has nothing to worry about. On the contrary, there is the clear indication in the report that Queensland has everything to worry about, and worry about very quickly.

I have given some thought as to how Queensland might at this late stage best battle itself out of the difficulties that have emerged from the last two or three generations. I think that perhaps one of the boldest approaches we may make to this question is to ask ourselves whether we are best serving the interests of forest development in the future by continuing to have a Sub-Department of Forestry attached to the Department of Public Lands. I personally feel that the Department of Public Lands has other interests more dominant than those of forestry and that at best all that forestry can hope for is to share with the other important interests of grazing and agriculture in the years that lie ahead.

Mr. Foley: If you carry out that principle you would have a million departments.

Mr. HILEY: I quite agree with the hon. gentleman but I suggest that the remedy is to have a particular department only to accord to what is clearly a great problem the attention it should certainly have. I am suggesting that the forestry position in this

State has drifted in such a way as to claim special consideration. I am not in any way blaming any one generation or any one administration because the trouble arises from a succession of administrations and a succession of generations. I suggest that we now, today, face the problem and remedy the misdeeds of the past by giving the problem a specialised and peculiar consideration. I suggest that we might do well to ask ourselves whether the needs of forestry in the years that lie ahead do not call for a separate Department of Forestry. There are some possible advantages in this connection that I propose to suggest and upon which I should like the Minister to give an expression of opinion.

Take for example the question of using forestry land for grazing purposes. I should like the Minister to tell the Committee what are his views on the letting of Crown forest areas for grazing. First of all, I should like him to tell the Committee whether the return obtained is sufficient to make the practice worth while when measured against the risks of occupation; and the risks of occupation of forestry land for grazing purposes, as you well know, Mr. Mann, are very great when one has regard to the burning hazards to which the Minister made such eloquent reference in introducing his Rural Fires Bill the other day. I should like the Minister, therefore, to tell us whether he feels that the revenue to the department justifies the letting of land in forest areas for grazing, and generally, whether it is worth while when measured against the extra fire hazards that I am informed do attach to such use.

There is another direction in which I think there is some advantage or some merit in a separate Department for Forestry. My concept of the salary range paid in a sub-department is that it is always under that paid to the head of the principal department and that very rarely is there in any State sub-department a range of salary equal to, let alone in excess of, the level that obtains for the principal office of that department. We have in the Sub-Department of Forestry something that is going to present such a very serious challenge to our future existence of this State as to impinge on the life of every citizen of each generation ahead and we can well ask ourselves whether we can be content with a position where the salaries to be paid to the highly skilled and highly qualified people in that sub-department are in any way restricted by the fact that their salary range has been made below that of the top men in the main section of the department.

I know the Minister can very well tell us whether that is so. If it is, I agree that it can easily be overcome, but I say also that it is something very rarely overcome. The tendency is to have a top man and the other officers in the department scaled down from the top. The Minister might tell us whether he is entirely happy with the salary levels in the Sub-Department of Forestry and whether they can attract the top skilled men in this industry to the service of Queensland in the years that lie ahead.

Another direction in which our future can be advantaged in this department is this: it is our habit to vote the requirements of forestry work on a year-to-year basis. I am not going to charge the Administration with being in any way capricious or irregular. On the contrary, the figures I propose to submit will show that there is a tendency to provide a steady annual requirement to this department. But I do suggest that forestry is essentially a project that is long-range in its impact. In forestry we know we have a tomorrow, but we do not think of the tomorrow in the shortest measure—in some cases a generation, in some two generations. The question arises whether it would not be good business to say to the Sub-Department of Forestry: "As a sub-department you bring quite a considerable revenue to the Treasury. Instead of putting you in a position that would make you dependent from year to year on the will of the Administration or the vote in the House, it is good business," as some States have said to their forestry sections, "to guarantee you a certain percentage of the revenue you produce." Where that is done, the Sub-Department of Forestry has the contentment that comes from knowing that it is secured in its finance, not to the end of the year, but in the generation ahead. It must be of value to its Administration.

I mentioned earlier our financial attitude to the operations of the sub-department. There you have some figures that should challenge our consideration and lead us seriously to question whether we should continue to endeavour to live on our capital to the very great extent we have in the past. I have extracted some figures from the Auditor-General's reports for the last five years, but I will not weary this Committee with the individual figures from year to year. Suffice it to say that forestry operations have produced an average net revenue to this State Treasury in excess of £400,000 per annum. Actually, it has produced somewhere in the vicinity of £1,000,000, but after expenses such as haulage, logging, and incidental expenses have been deducted the net gain paid to the Treasury has averaged slightly over £400,000 per annum.

With the Treasury taking a net gain of £400,000 per annum out of the wealth that has been handed down from earlier generations, let us look at what the Treasury has put back into forestry. The figures for the last five years—certainly they were war years when operations on expenditure were restricted—are—

	£
1942	44,000
1943	39,000
1944	47,000
1945	52,000
1946	70,000

In no case does the expenditure from Consolidated Revenue approach one-fifth of the revenue derived from the cutting of our forests—our capital asset. Side by side with this niggardly spending from consolidated revenue you find the extraordinary position that down through past generations the

Administration have been felling its capital assets, its logs, and so on, in the forest, and the proceeds have been paid into consolidated revenue, but when they set out to replace this asset, the costs are paid out of Loan Fund instead of consolidated revenue.

It seems to me to be a very bad financial principle to eat into your capital assets on the one hand and put the proceeds to revenue and when you make a small replacement of the capital assets to charge a slice of that replacement to loan. The loans extended over the last five years have been £40,000, £22,000, £22,000, £35,000 and £52,000.

Mr. Foley interjected.

Mr. HILEY: That is not the principle. The hon. gentleman is 10 minutes behind me. At this stage I am discussing the financial principle of destroying capital on the one hand and putting the proceeds into revenue and when making replacements of the capital asset to charge a big slice of it up to loan. If that is a good financial principle I am a Dutchman.

Mr. Duggan: Do you not agree with the expenditure of loan money to build up a national asset?

Mr. HILEY: I agree; but when you are destroying one national asset and putting the whole of the proceeds into revenue surely it is a fair principle that when you replace it to do it out of revenue and not out of loan?

The other direction in which I think the work of this sub-department could be helped in the future is the widening of that section, and I was glad to see reference made in the report under the heading of "Wood utilisation." I am prepared to acknowledge that the department has begun what I think is the beginning of a major task. I do suggest that our need has become so desperate that a great concentration upon the machinery for the better guiding of wood utilisation of this State is a paramount need. Let me suggest some of the directions in which I think the work of that section of the department could be greatly expanded to the benefit of the State.

In the first place some little has been done in the direction of examining modern saw-milling technique with a view to ascertaining and demonstrating to the sawmillers methods of obtaining the maximum recovery from log timber. You know, Mr. Mann, in the old days when logs were freely available the millers would not care whether the recovery was 55 per cent. or 45 per cent. of its round content; but today each log is of such potential value because of its scarcity that if we can increase the sawn timber recovery by even 2½ per cent. per log it is of great assistance. The Sub-Department of Forestry has made some small commencement on that. I am delighted to see it and I hope that section of its work will be greatly expanded.

The other direction in which we might do something—I do not think we have touched it; New South Wales is commencing—is the question of going into the forests to see what

logs that were rejected at first—logs with big pipes in them—can now be brought into profitable use. New South Wales is trying out an experiment with portable sawmill outfits in an endeavour to salvage some of the usable timber, which, because of this great pipe, it would be uneconomic to take through the ordinary procedure of carting it to a mill.

The third direction in which some work that is at present being carried out could be expanded is the investigation of the methods of treatment such as kiln-drying and borer-prevention, whereby species at present considered valueless would be brought into productive use. During the war period a little has been done under that heading, but I do not think anybody would suggest that we have exhausted its possibilities.

I suggest that the Queensland timber position has reached the point where every log for which some use can be found by some new process should be saved. It is our plain and bounden duty to do so, even to the extent that operated years ago in America, a timber-exporting country, of going through the reject timber and determining whether by reviewing specifications we could make economies in the quantity of timber used.

Most of our timber specifications, drawn at a time when there was an abundance of timber available, called for scantlings in house construction with little regard for the reasonable margin of strength. The feeling was rather "Timber is freely available, let us build solid and heavy."

Mr. Duggan: The Housing Commission is doing that now.

Mr. HILEY: The Housing Commission is doing a little, but it is not sufficient to leave it to the small section of building construction that the Housing Commission represents. There is the wider field of the private erection of houses and such industrial uses as case manufacture and the like. I believe that our potential famine is so imminent and pressing that if that particular section of forestry could economise to the extent of even 10 per cent. in the use of timber to fill our existing needs, it would make a world of difference in the overall timber position.

There is one further direction in which I hope the department is doing something, particularly in the softwoods field. It has taken steps to ensure that the tops of softwoods are not in any way wasted. I suggest that there is still an abundant field for economising and preventing potential waste in this industry. This State is yet without anything in the way of a manufacture of a timber board, such as masonite, although we are a great timber State. We are without a pulping factory, although here again we must have a great amount of waste product that would be suitable for pulping. I suggest that because of their relationship to the forestry programme of this State both these and similar matters should receive very close examination. The department should see whether it cannot contribute to the solution of this difficulty in the years that lie ahead.

This Committee is plainly entitled to be grateful for the very candid way in which the Minister has submitted what have apparently impressed him as the salient weaknesses of the forestry position in this State. If difficulties exist they cannot be overcome by ignoring them, and I am personally grateful to the Minister for presenting to the Committee information that at least leaves us in no fools' paradise as to the timber output in the years that lie ahead. I appreciate the way in which he put the facts and figures before us and I have endeavoured not to offer any criticism of the past but rather to examine how the position can be corrected and assisted in the future.

Hon. T. A. FOLEY (Normanby—Secretary for Health and Home Affairs) (7.38 p.m.): I rise to offer a suggestion or two to the Minister as a result of the knowledge gained by the experience of the drought through which we are passing. Some extra work should be carried out in future for the provision of water to many parts of the State that are not so well favoured as others. I have in mind the many appeals received during this drought from small settlers and farmers who, because of the long drought, have had their water tanks and dams emptied and in many instances had their sub-artesian bores petering out.

Many years ago the Department of Public Lands had what was known as a Water Supply Department. It operated particularly under the Upper Burnett and Callide Land Settlement Acts, which contained a provision whereby the department might put down a water facility for each farmer in the area concerned. Apparently the department read the Act as "shall" and not "may," and gradually there was built up in the department a Water Supply Department with a staff of field men with boring equipment, who eventually sank most of the bores for the settlers in the Callide and Burnett districts under that Act.

As a result of some failures because the cost was too heavy for the farmers concerned, we had to write off something like £40,000 to lighten the load so that the farmers could carry on with these water facilities. Although that would appear to be a large amount, those facilities have proved invaluable during the recent dry period. I do not suggest that the Minister should operate on the same scale as in the past, but there could be attached to his department a boring plant that could be operated in conjunction with some scientific method of water divining.

Mr. Sparkes: Community bores?

Mr. FOLEY: No, individual bores. For instance, the average dairy farmer will start off probably with a 3,000-yard tank and probably find that this supply is not enough to carry him through a drought such as the one experienced recently in this State. We could adopt a method similar to that carried out by the Department of Mines when in the drilling section there was a staff of skilled men operat-

ing small drilling plants in various areas in order to discover such ores that might be present.

Mr. Sparkes: Where would you put down these bores?

Mr. FOLEY: The Callide, Dawson, and Burnett Valleys are a splendid example of how farmers have been enabled to withstand the recent drought. In the Central District the Railway Department has been carrying to farmers and others approximately 800,000 gallons of water a week and these people have had to find ways of transporting it from the railway to the stock. I offer that suggestion for consideration as an addition to the facilities available through the Agricultural Bank in the hope that eventually we shall make the lands controlled by this department more valuable.

I also commend the officers of the department for the splendid report they have presented to Parliament. I have read thoroughly the report on the work of the Bureau of Investigation in connection with irrigation projects. On the Grevillea Plateau, on which it was almost impossible for the average farmer to bore to the depth required to strike water, a water-supply scheme has been planned. Now, under the scheme in operation—and this can be applied to many parts of the State—they have a water supply for stock and domestic purposes covering an area of 28,925 acres of country that would otherwise have to be abandoned. There are 27 farms in the area. The system adopted was first of all to map out a way whereby you could procure an adequate supply of water, and secondly to determine whether it was possible to pump from that point to a central position from which it could be reticulated to the farmers concerned. As a result of the work of departmental officers it has been found that we can pump water from Kariboe Creek to a central position to accommodate 27 dairy farmers on some of the best land in Australia, land from which they would otherwise walk off because of lack of water supply.

At 7.46 p.m.,

Mr. DEVRIES (Gregory) relieved the Chairman in the chair.

Mr. Maher: What district is this?

Mr. FOLEY: Kariboe Flat, at the head of the Callide Valley. A loan has been granted to this body of farmers who are forming themselves into a water trust of £10,600 with a subsidy of 33½ per cent. by the State, the rate of interest being £3 12s. 6d. It is intended that the work shall include a pumping plant to raise water from Kariboe Creek and convey it through a 4-inch cast-iron main to a reservoir on the plateau consisting of a 25,000-gallon tank, from which it will be reticulated to the farmers. A rate will be placed on the area to cover interest and redemption on capital and a further rate will be struck on the volume of water used to cover operating costs. That scheme is well under way, the farmers have voiced their views on it, and an agreement has been arrived at. I quote

that as a typical instance of a practical method of meeting the position as it affected the men at that place.

Mr. Sparkes: That is what I said, a central board.

Mr. FOLEY: In the early part of my speech I was not dealing with a central board. We find that at a place in the Callide Valley by the name of Coreen there are quite a number of farmers who have not been able to get a water supply. The matter has been investigated and a proposal is being examined to provide stock water to farms over an area of approximately 40,000 acres of brigalow and softwood scrub land. The underground waters of the area have been found to be saline and the run-off from natural rainfall insufficient to maintain an adequate supply in excavated tanks of from 1,000- to 5,000-gallons capacity. A scheme to provide an area of 33,627 acres with an estimated carrying capacity of 4,860 head of stock under full development has been drawn up and submitted to the 32 farmers in that area. The idea is to tap the underground water supply some distance away from the area, pump it to a central position and reticulate it to the farmers concerned. It is estimated that that would cost £14,286, with an annual charge of £1,600. Spread over the number of stock that will be watered the charge is very small indeed.

Mr. Maher: How far will you have to pump the water?

Mr. FOLEY: A couple of miles. It is just too far for the stock to travel backwards and forwards to the underground supply and so the water has to be brought to the stock.

Mr. Brand: It will service 30,000 acres?

Mr. FOLEY: There will be 32 farmers on about 32,000 acres.

Those two illustrations are an indication of the splendid investigational work that has been carried out to overcome some of the difficulties of the farmers in various parts of the State, and as time goes on and the schemes work successfully other schemes will be undertaken in other parts of the State where similar circumstances exist.

Mr. Aikens: Are the Government subsidising any of the schemes?

Mr. FOLEY: Yes. I mentioned earlier that in the Grevillea scheme the subsidy was 33½ per cent. of the total cost.

Mr. Brand: Where did that come from?

Mr. FOLEY: That came originally as the result of an investigation carried out by the Department of the Co-ordinator-General of Public Works, associated with officers of the Department of Public Lands, who were co-opted to report upon ways and means of finding water in that area.

Mr. Brand: Did that 33½ per cent. come from Government funds?

Mr. FOLEY: Yes.

Mr. Brand: Not Federal Government funds?

Mr. FOLEY: No, State revenue.

Mr. Brand: Do not the Federal Government make any contribution?

Mr. FOLEY: They are not concerned in the scheme at all. It is purely a State scheme carried out by the Co-ordinator-General's Department in association with the Department of Public Lands.

Mr. Aikens: It is a generous subsidy.

Mr. FOLEY: It is a generous subsidy, but it is only by means of a generous subsidy that such a scheme could be made economical and applied to that district.

Mr. Sparkes: It is the only way in which you could keep those people on the land there.

Mr. FOLEY: Yes. I can assure hon. members that the Grevillea Plateau and the Coreen district consist of some of the best land in Australia. In the Grevillea area the country is so high that the depth through the plateau to the sub-artesian basin would be in the vicinity of 700 to 800 feet. The average farmer could not take the risk of boring or drilling through that depth of country and perhaps getting no water.

I want to touch also upon the splendid investigations that have been carried out during the last 12 months into irrigation projects. It is true that not a great deal of actual construction work has taken place—that is, in the building of dams—but the tremendous amount of investigational work recorded in the report presented to Parliament indicates that much preliminary work has been completed and that now we are not far off the point where construction will begin. I refer, first of all, to the Theodore area, where a levee bank is being constructed at a cost of about £4,330, bringing into cultivation another 600 acres which will be added to the irrigation area.

The quantity of earth works involved in the construction of the bank of the main drain was approximately 50,000 cubic yards. Subsidiary structures include flood-gates and crossings. The installation of new pumping and generating plant that will follow at Theodore will mean that the future of that project is assured.

Although some very fine work in irrigation matters in association with the Theodore scheme has been carried out in the last 12 months, the authorities have been sorely pressed to give to settlers the actual quantity of water required, particularly during recent months. As a result a form of rationing of water has had to be introduced. That has been brought about by the long drought, the effect being that the creeks and tributaries in the catchment area have not run for a considerable period. That indicates the need of further dams in that part of the Dawson River Valley. Hon. members, on examining the Co-ordinator-General's report, will find that he has recommended the setting aside of certain capital sums for the construction of new dams in the Dawson River. Those will not only enlarge the irrigation area but will

give a greater insurance against drought to the farmers already settled there. They will assure those settlers of greater and adequate supplies of water.

It is interesting to note the methods adopted in the reconnaissance survey. The report of the Co-ordinator-General deals with an examination that is at present being made in the Emerald district as to the possibilities of damming the Nogoa River with a view to establishing irrigation in that area. That district has been devoted to pastoral industries principally over the long period for which it has been settled. I find on studying the tentative soil map produced by the Bureau of Investigation that one of the first things it does is to make a survey of the soils in the district. It indicates the amount of alluvium, the black volcanic soils of the open downs that exist, and the various types of sandy soils, such as red, capable of growing citrus and other fruits. The bureau has compiled the fullest information of the area as a prelude to the additional investigation. The next work is to take the levels of the creek beds as well as the cross sections, and traverse the particular creek or river, as the case may be, for a number of miles and locate dam sites. As a result the bureau is able to indicate, before any work is undertaken, the acreage of water that can be stored, together with some rough estimate of the cost, in order to determine whether it is economic or not.

I sincerely hope that the Nogoa River scheme will prove economic. I have represented that area in this Parliament for just on 27 years and I know the sore need of fodder that exists in it. I have seen times when sheep in the Longreach, Barcaldine, and Blackall districts could be bought for 1s. a head because it was uneconomic to transport fodder from southern Queensland, where most of it was produced. On the other hand if, as we are aiming at to-day, water could be conserved in sufficient quantities in this district to enable irrigation to be applied to crops right in the heart of our pastoral districts, we could grow abundant supplies of fodder and conserve it. It would be of vast advantage in times of need, particularly in such times as those we are passing through now.

I have attempted to indicate these few points to the Committee in the hope that the Minister will at least endeavour to further the principle of water-finding for our settlers by providing the necessary drilling plant and staff so that we shall not wait till the drought period to seek water for them. If the attempt is made while we are enjoying reasonably good seasons, we shall not only be in a position to say that we have given a greater insurance to the settlers in the areas concerned, but we have been able to save many head of cattle in a drought. Over some of the areas I have referred to dry grass exists in abundance, even at the present time; the only thing lacking is water, and as hon. members opposite know, stock can carry on with the dry feed for a long period if there is good water. It is almost pitiable to experience the calls made upon members by farmers from those districts

who find their small water supplies will not last. One way to do it would be to put a plant in the field to carry out scientific methods of water-divining directed by a hydraulic engineer.

Mr. DUGGAN (Toowoomba) (8.3 p.m.): It is long recognised that the portfolio of Lands is one of the senior ones in the Cabinet, and it is fitting that it should occupy this important position because the Minister has very important functions to discharge. I think it will be accepted that at the present time the duties attaching to the portfolio are perhaps heavier than at any previous time in the history of the State. We have very many highly controversial policies being determined at the present time, including questions of land settlement, the stabilisation of rural industries, and the housing problem. I propose to spend some time in an examination of these problems in the 25 minutes at my disposal.

I was interested this morning to hear Country Party members launch an attack against the Government, because of their alleged dilatoriness in settling returned soldiers. We heard much from those hon. members about the unfair basis set down by the Commonwealth authorities for the purpose of guiding the relevant tribunals in the matter of determining land values and assessing compensation for the properties acquired. I commend the Minister, not only for his enthusiasm and diligence, but for the very realistic approach he has made to the facts and his attempt to lay down, for the guidance of his officers, a policy that will enable settlement to be followed with easy smoothness, and will not bring about the financial complications that characterised soldier settlement after the first World War. When I heard hon. members opposite charge the Government with undue delay in implementing soldier-settlement policy, I was prompted to read some of the statistics in the Commonwealth Year Book dealing with soldier settlement after that World War.

The last Commonwealth Year Book, 1942-43, shows that the aggregate loss to the State on soldier settlement to 30 June, 1942, was £23,525,000 and in addition there was a sum of £12,333,000 representing the concessions made by the Commonwealth Government as an offset against certain losses incurred by settlers. There was therefore an aggregate loss on soldier settlement of approximately £35,000,000. It can be argued that that is a small sum for the Australian nation to pay in compensation to the men who were willing to go forth and defend this country. I am not prepared at this stage to express any opinion on the merits or demerits of that contention but some very revealing figures are to be found in this Year Book. In New South Wales, which is the only State for which comparable figures are shown, a total of 9,705 soldiers were placed on the land up to 30 June, 1942, and for various causes 5,249 settlers had either transferred or abandoned their properties, leaving 4,456 in occupation. It is obvious that we must avoid the possibility of a repetition of a situation such as the one I have described. It is not only uneconomic but it shatters a man's morale to

be placed on the land with the idea of making him a useful unit in society only to find that because of over-capitalisation by placing him on land that was not fully developed or fully improved or suitable for the pursuits for which he was placed there he becomes involved in financial difficulty and is obliged to relinquish his interest in that holding.

The Government and particularly the Minister and his officers are doing a sensible thing in endeavouring to avoid pitfalls and mistakes that characterised soldier settlement in the years I have mentioned and therefore men who take advantage of their position be it political or be it responsibility in returned soldiers' organisations, are doing a very great disservice to returned soldiers by asking Governments to embark on schemes before those schemes are fully ripe for implementation. Therefore whatever delays there might have been—and there have been some that perhaps were avoidable—they are definitely limited in character and as far as possible steps are being taken by the responsible officers to prevent repetition or unavoidable delays.

I believe that in Australia generally insufficient attention has been given to the question of proper land development over the years, probably because we have been a young country extending our productive capacity and it has not been necessary to scrutinise with the same care as in the older established agricultural countries the proper use of the soil. I believe that the essential use of the soil can be grouped under six headings—

1. For industry to provide work for the people.
2. For housing to provide shelter.
3. For agriculture to provide food.
4. For forestry to provide an important raw material.
5. For open spaces both large and small to provide recreation.
6. For roads, railways, and airports to provide means of communication and transport.

Only in Great Britain can I find any evidence that the Government have been seized of the importance of properly planning the development and utilisation of land. In this country we have made spasmodic and irregular attempts to deal with some aspects of land utilisation. In Great Britain they have attempted by a concerted attack to deal with the problem of land utilisation. A royal commission was appointed in 1942 or 1943 under the chairmanship of Sir Montague Barlow to inquire into the geographical locations of the industrial population of Great Britain. The recommendations were that there must be a dispersal of industry and population and in order to implement these recommendations properly certain subordinate or subsidiary committees were appointed to inquire into the utilisation of rural land, the purpose being principally to define conditions under which building permits would be issued in country areas consistent with the maintenance of an agricultural policy and the pre-

servation of amenities considered necessary for the well-being of people in rural communities.

In addition to that the Rushcliffe Report laid down very important principles concerning a policy for the purpose of enabling this plan to be implemented. Finally, the Town and Country Planning Committee, which superseded all these other committees, was appointed for the purpose of implementing the schemes embraced by those inquiries.

I think the first serious attempt in Australia to emulate what was done in Great Britain occurred with the appointment of the Rural Reconstruction Commission, whose report was published in Australia in January, 1944. I have had the opportunity of reading this report carefully, and it contains many helpful suggestions whereby the proper utilisation of land can take place in Australia. During the course of my speech tonight I am going to recommend that a planned attempt be made by the States and the Commonwealth to follow up some of the major recommendations contained in that commission's report for the more profitable utilisation of land and to see that our agricultural and primary industries in general are developed as economically and efficiently as possible.

My chief purpose in participating in this debate is to draw attention to one striking reference in the report that I believe is particularly appropriate to the State of Queensland. That passage reads:—

“Different individuals approach the study of a rural economy from different points of view. To some the only motive will be the prospect of profit to themselves, irrespective of the wastage of national assets; and to them the moral obligation in relation to lands which are accepted by the average citizen in a civilised state makes no appeal. It may be necessary in the future to devise and exercise stronger public control against such actions than has been customary in the past. There can be no improvement in land utilisation without effective statutory powers to restrain the individual who is not prepared to co-operate in a general scheme designed to prevent erosion and wastage of soil fertility. Further, these powers will need to be enforced carefully but firmly. All progress depends ultimately on the intelligent and co-operative acceptance of the law.”

I believe that in that passage there is a striking message for the Government and the people of Queensland. When we consider that approximately 21 per cent. of our total working population is engaged in rural industries, with a much higher proportion in Queensland, because it is predominantly a primary-producing State—in this State it increased in the 1933 census to 29 per cent.—we must be very deeply concerned at the action being taken at present by irresponsible elements in the community who, because they may possess a freehold tenure, think they

have a right to exploit the land according to their own ideas of its profitable utilisation.

Mr. Plunkett: What is wrong with that?

Mr. DUGGAN: I propose to show that there is a good deal wrong with that. I believe that if we are going to survive as a primary-producing country, if we are going to hold the world markets, we in Australia are committed to a policy of low costs of production. Too often in the past we have emphasised the short-term view instead of the long-term view that we must consider.

In addition to the question of low costs of production, the maintenance of soil fertility is a problem of very great importance. I believe that the nation will have to embody in appropriate legislation some guiding principles on the question of land utilisation in this country if we are not going to be faced with the problems that have caused tremendous worry and necessitated a good deal of financial help by such great countries as the United States of America and some of the European countries.

Before I deal with the embodiment of these principles in statutory enactment, I should like to pay some attention to the question of land values because this morning the hon. member for West Moreton, and later the hon. member for Aubigny, saw fit to challenge Labour Governments, the Federal Government in particular, on the methods laid down for determining land values. Of course, land values depend largely, as hon. members know, upon types of soil, topography, climate, efficiency of the farmer, size of the farm and capitalisation of the farm.

Mr. Plunkett interjected.

Mr. DUGGAN: They are all factors of very great importance. It does not matter how efficient a farmer may be, if the farm is situated in an area where there is an insufficient rainfall it does not matter how industriously he applies himself, he cannot produce profitable crops.

It would be uneconomic and unprofitable for a farmer to grow crops on land that is not suited for the production of those crops. All those factors are self-evident, and the hon. member who interjects should know that.

Land values are enhanced because of the expenditure of large sums of money by the State.

Mr. Sparkes: And by the man who owns the land.

Mr. DUGGAN: That must be so, but obviously the value of land is considerably enhanced by the expenditure of large sums of State money, and no individual farmer is entitled to argue that his industry was responsible for the enhanced value of the land when that value has been brought about by the expenditure of large sums of State money. Lands within the city of Brisbane have had their value enhanced by the expenditure of large sums within that area. The same principle applies to suburban properties and to some of the provincial cities. The

value of a good building allotment in Toowoomba might be £150, but you could buy the same-sized allotment in Clifton for £50, the enhanced value being brought about by the amenities and better social conditions that obtain in Toowoomba.

Mr. Maher interjected.

Mr. DUGGAN: I argue along these lines. I cannot appreciate the logic in the minds of hon. members opposite. I have drawn attention before to the illogical working of the farmer's opposition members' mind. He complains about the stabilisation of prices of commodities he has to buy—

Mr. Sparkes: Why are you tackling the farmers?

Mr. DUGGAN: Because it concerns other people. I propose to show through the actions of people who should remember that they owe an obligation to the State, that 40,000 fertile acres of land on the Darling Downs is becoming useless for cultivation, because they have refused to practise soil conservation.

An Opposition Member: Where?

Mr. DUGGAN: I quote from the report of the Bureau of Investigation under the Land and Water Resources Development Act. The officers appointed by the Minister to inquire into the problem of soil erosion have furnished the information.

Mr. Maher: I do not believe it.

Mr. DUGGAN: The very interjection by the hon. member is responsible for this lethargy and indifference that have operated over the years. There has been a colossal indifference to the problem of soil erosion. I have with me a report by the Premier of New South Wales, Mr. W. J. McKell, who recently returned from America, in which he says that millions have been spent in an effort to regain the loss caused through faulty soil-conservation methods over the years. The report to the Minister by the Land Administration Board draws attention to the fact that of the total area of approximately 800,000 acres of cultivable land on the Darling Downs about 700,000 acres are cropped annually. The importance of the Downs as a centre of agricultural industry will be appreciated by a recognition of the fact that the area under crop is more than 40 per cent. of that cropped annually over the whole State. I say that some action must be taken to prevent the serious soil erosion that is taking place up there. People will not realise their responsibilities. We have too many engaged in land speculation and too many seeking to exploit to the maximum the carrying capacity of their land by depasturing and overstocking and attempting to get from the soil more than it can economically and properly produce. We have the spectacle of those men seeking to sell farms at an inflated value.

Mr. Sparkes interjected.

Mr. DUGGAN: No, but what I am attempting to say is that there must be a realisation of the magnitude of the problem

and in that realisation some action has to be taken. Those who have been responsible have been responsible very often because of ignorance.

As a matter of fact, the whole history of soil erosion shows that the farmer is generally not encouraged to use the information available in Government departments relating to correct soil-conservation practices, and so I argue that officers appointed to the Department of Public Lands should be men of unimpeachable integrity and men whose technical qualifications cannot be questioned in any way, so that farmers will be willing to accept their recommendations. The development of demonstration areas can show the faults that lie in incorrect farming methods.

Mr. Sparkes: Tell me of one large area where there has been this soil erosion on the Darling Downs.

Mr. DUGGAN: I could tell the hon. member. Let me tell this observant hon. member who travels over the country in comfort week after week that in going from Toowoomba to Warwick through those rich wheat lands, especially toward Pratten, Elphinstone, and Pilton, he will see the erosion of considerable magnitude. Because of the up-and-down furrowing in cultivation there has been considerable silting and gullies have eroded to a depth of 10, 15, and 20 ft.

Mr. Maher: That is nature's method.

Mr. DUGGAN: Here we have an hon. member from one of the richest districts in the State saying that one of nature's methods is to render 40,000 acres of land unfit for cultivation because incorrect methods have been employed in farming. I have been in this Chamber for 11 years now and I have always given the hon. member for West Moreton credit for being an intelligent man and one who has made valuable contributions to "Hansard," and, like the Secretary for Public Lands, who was prompted to say today that never since he assumed his ministerial portfolio has he heard a weaker case submitted by the hon. member for West Moreton, I very regretfully and very sorrowfully indeed have to say that the hon. member makes a confession of his ignorance of soil erosion that quite passes my comprehension and understanding. I prefer to accept the recommendation of the officers specially appointed to make the investigation.

However, I propose to clear up some misconception in the minds of hon. members opposite and at the risk of spoiling a speech, in the sense of a speech delivered extemporaneously, by reading extracts from a document. I propose to quote from the report some of the factors contributing to soil erosion on the Darling Downs. They are:—

"1. Bare fallowing unterraced or unprotected wheat lands during the summer months when over 60 per cent. of the annual rainfall of 25 to 29 inches is received largely in the form of monsoonal storms of high intensities.

"2. Undulating topography of the area with highly erosive nature of major soil types.

"3. Common practice of burning crop residue, instead of either using it as a soil or moisture conserving surface mulch.

"4. Absence of suitable crop rotation to cover a grazing and cover crop to follow wheat and grow through stubble.

"5. Advent of the practice of shallow cultivation with modern implements. Land so cultivated is not capable of readily absorbing large volumes of water.

"6. Gradual introduction of progressively steeper slopes to cultivation."

Hon. members will notice that particularly in the Pilton area. Here is another factor—

"7. Disappearance of much of the original cover of soil binding indigenous grasses and the invasion of the same area by hardy annual weeds."

There has been considerable increase in the Darling Downs of the mint weed, which is giving much concern and anxiety to landholders.

Mr. Sparkes: If you did not follow the land you would have it full of weeds.

Mr. DUGGAN: I am concerned about the extension of the mint weed and its menace to this area.

At 8.23 p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN resumed the chair.

Mr. Sparkes interjected.

Mr. DUGGAN: It is frequently suggested by hon. members opposite and again tonight by the hon. member for Aubigny that in order to take part in a discussion of the Estimates of the Department of Public Lands or the Department of Agriculture and Stock one must be a practical farmer. They frequently argue that one cannot have a knowledge of primary industries unless one is actively engaged in those industries. Do we on this side, when an hon. member opposite rises and makes some sarcastic remarks about railway administration, say that he can have no knowledge about the railway system because he is not a railway employee, and do we, when the hon. member for West Moreton rises and speaks about the financial position of this State, say that he can have no knowledge about the subject because he is not a banker or an accountant?

Do we think that because they lack those qualifications they are disqualified to participate in such debates and should be prevented from doing so? I contend that so long as a man has intelligence and application and capacity to observe trends and read literature on the subject, and be able to familiarise himself with the economics of the industry and the requirements of the State, he is not only just as entitled but has a proper right to express his views on subjects touching the advancement of the interests of the State in particular and Australia as a whole. I reject and resent the frequent and quite unworthy interjections of the hon. member

for Aubigny, who takes advantage of a voice of considerable volume to criticise hon. members on this side but offers little help or constructive suggestions for the solution of the land problems of this State.

All I now desire to do is to commend the Minister for the work he is doing and to point out to him that I believe that he is realising with his officers the need for some worthwhile action to be taken in land settlement. Despite the difficulties he is experiencing through lack of technical officers, he is, with the material at his disposal, giving close attention to the problems affecting irrigation, as well as other matters, for he realises that careful planning and research work will help him to solve a problem that in the ultimate would be of great advantage to Queensland and Australia.

Mr. LUCKINS (Maree) (8.26 p.m.): The Estimates of this department are worthy of great attention. We owe much to the land because the whole wealth of the nation comes from it, and so its development is of much concern to us. It is interesting for hon. members to peruse the earlier history of this State and the methods adopted to settle our lands. It was common for Governments in our earlier history to induce people to come to this State by making them land grants, some of large and some of small areas. That was how people were attracted to this State in its early days. We can therefore imagine how interesting is the early history of our lands as written and recorded by the department. It makes good reading.

I know that the Minister is making his best attempt to overcome the difficulties associated with land settlement. As a metropolitan member of this Chamber, I do not profess to know much about the land, but I am going to contribute to the debate what I can in the interests of its development. This State has been endowed with rich lands in parts, but other parts are unfit for cultivation. Would it be possible for the Minister to divide the State into so many districts and classify the land within those districts, in order that visitors to this State, on visiting either the Department of Public Lands or the Tourist Bureau, would at a glance see what land in a district was suitable for grazing, farming or other settlement? Such a soils map would supply a long-felt want to people seeking an opportunity to settle on our land.

Queensland is unfortunately situated as regards water needed for cultivation. After listening to the debates in this Chamber for some years past I have begun to appreciate those difficulties, but we as laymen know what is required for increasing the productivity of our land: essentially it is a water supply. For many years I have heard reasons advanced why we have suffered losses in production and in stock. This is due to the neglect of past Governments in not providing the facilities that will enable a good practical man to settle comfortably on the land. The Government have been in power for the last 30 years and every year they have said they intended to carry out certain irrigation schemes, but up to the present we have seen

little or nothing of them. I hope the Minister will see to it that the western and far western areas will be provided with sufficient water to enable them to preserve their stock.

I wish to refer now to the control of New Guinea and the adjacent islands. I should like to see the Commonwealth Government hand them over to the State because I believe such a transfer would be beneficial to their development. We have some very capable men in the State who know the conditions prevailing in northern Queensland and who would be fitted to advise on the New Guinea area. Administration from Canberra is not conducive to its development. If it was handed over to the State it would show greater development and it would be an asset to the State. That area possesses rich tropical lands and forests. We have heard that the position is going to be serious in Queensland in the years to come because of the shortage of softwoods and hardwoods, and New Guinea is very rich in those timbers.

One or two members who have expert knowledge have pointed out why our lands have not been fully developed. There are many reasons for that. I believe that if an attractive policy of land settlement was pursued whereby farmers from other parts who came here received financial help many would be induced to come. In the early days immigrants were brought here to go on the land and they carried out great development in many areas. If a movement was set on foot whereby the Government supplied farmers with the necessary water, and if necessary implements, good results should be obtained. We should get the same development that took place in Queensland during the early '80s, which nobody will deny was the most progressive period in the history of Queensland. Many districts such as Warwick and Beenleigh were settled then and great success was achieved.

If it were not for the attractive inducements offered by previous Governments, that land would be waste like the lands in North Queensland to-day. That is a very interesting part of Queensland.

Mr. Jesson: You keep in Maree where you belong.

Mr. LUCKINS: I am not parochial like the hon. member, who is always finding fault with other parts of the State than his own. I look to the development of Queensland and go farther north than the hon. member's area, to Cape York if he wishes. There are very rich land, timber and mineral prospects there. The possibilities are very good indeed. Apparently the hon. member has not gone past his own district. One requires to have a mental picture of the map of Queensland to realise that Queensland north of a line from Cairns inland virtually is deserted. Why? Because no real encouragement has been given by Governments to people to settle in these tropical parts of the State. There are some rich lands about the Gulf of Carpentaria and it should be possible to grow the products grown now in the East Indies and China. With the right type of farmer in those areas we should be able to grow the right type of crops there.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The growing of crops comes under the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture and Stock.

Mr. LUCKINS: There should be an inducement for people to develop the wealth in this State. Land is used for many purposes. For instance, the Secretary for Mines is present, but although we are debating the Lands Estimates we are not allowed to debate mining.

Mr. Aikens: And there must be land to put the mine in.

Mr. LUCKINS: That is so. Under this vote we are allowed to discuss only the administration of the department controlling land used for grazing purposes, forestry, and so forth, also surveying and matters incidental thereto. But mining is wrapped up in the development of the land.

It would be an advantage if the Minister had classified the different lands in his department to show the nature and the depth of soil, the best crops to be grown, and water supply. Irrigation is a very important matter. Without a water supply or irrigation, what use is it our asking people to go on the land? I hope the Minister will work in co-operation with other departments. His department controls the Sub-Department of Forestry. In the years that have gone the forests of Queensland produced a wonderful wealth for this State.

They have been destroyed, and this for no other purpose than to clear the land for cultivation and development. I have said previously that if we had preserved our forests in the past we should be in a position today to pay off our national debt with our forest wealth.

Again, we have destroyed many valuable timbers eminently suitable for cabinet-making. If we had preserved them we should have had some of the best cabinet timbers in Australia today. I hope the Minister will consider planting cabinet timbers such as silky oak, maple and others peculiar to North Queensland. I know that we have still a wealth of timber in our forests, but it is our duty to see that our forests are not destroyed wantonly, as they were in the past.

Forests have an attraction for tourists also. In some of the countries I have visited, countries that are thousands of years old, the native forests have been completely destroyed and it is in the nature of a special treat for the people there to come to Australia and see our rich forests. It would be wise to preserve the trees that are indigenous to our State with a view to attracting tourists from other countries.

Then there are many trees that are valuable from an industrial point of view. A few days ago I told hon. members how experts took a species of our eucalyptus tree overseas, planted it and built up a valuable industry from it.

Mr. Aikens: We did the same with the wattle tree. We sent it to South Africa and they have built up a wattle-bark industry with our tree.

Mr. LUCKINS: That is so. We have not fully appreciated the value of the wealth with which nature has endowed us.

Another important matter that is causing concern to many public bodies and the Land Administration Board is the spread of noxious weeds. One of them, groundsel, is doing great damage to our metropolitan lands.

The Brisbane City Council and other local authorities are greatly concerned at its rapid spread, and it is time this Government took an interest in the eradication of this pest. I do not know that groundsel serves any useful purpose, but we have it right in the heart of the city.

Mr. Walsh: I have seen noogoora burr along the roads in the city areas.

Mr. LUCKINS: That is so, and that will have to be tackled sooner or later. The Minister, being in control of our public lands, has some authority over the local authorities, and the time is fast approaching when he will have to exercise that right and compel local authorities to carry out their duty and eradicate noxious weeds. The worst place in the city for rubbish is along the railway line, and that is public land.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! That matter does not come under the vote we are discussing and I ask the hon. member to return to the matter before the Committee.

Mr. LUCKINS: I want to say that I have every confidence in the Land Court in assessing the value of land as compensation for land resumed for public purposes. The Government have exercised the right of resumption of land for other than public use, and I have always heard that the court gave a fair and reasonable verdict when a claim for compensation was put before it. Whatever happens in the resumption of land for soldier settlement or other purposes I am not worried about the results if the determination of value is left to the court. I feel as a Queenslander that the court will give everyone a good hearing and a just decision. I have no complaint to make about decisions given in the past. I pay the court this tribute, that as a Government sub-department it is free from control by the Minister or anybody else.

Mr. Aikens: Have you an appeal pending?

Mr. LUCKINS: No. I exercise the prerogative I have as a citizen to approach the court to get a fair and reasonable compensation.

Mr. Walsh: You have found the department fair and reasonable?

Mr. LUCKINS: Yes. In the administration of resumptions at Kangaroo Point in connection with dock and bridge land I found the court reasonable and just, and I compliment it on the way it settled matters. The easiest and best way to get at a value is to have a round-table conference. My experience shows that if you want to settle a question you should get down and discuss it round the table and you will come off better than by employing lawyers. As an individual I am not permitted to appear before the court,

but my experience of land matters has provided me with an excellent opportunity of putting up a case to the Government in connection with resumptions. Only in connection with one matter did we have to approach the Land Court.

Mr. PLUNKETT (Albert) (8.49 p.m.): I should not have risen to speak again but for the speech made by the hon. member for Toowoomba who suggested that the farmers were to blame for soil erosion and should be told what to plant and what to do to prevent it. Soil erosion has been a great difficulty for the world over and to blame the farmers for it—

Mr. Jesson: Whom do you blame?

Mr. PLUNKETT: We should develop some means of preventing soil erosion. Much is said about soil erosion by people who know nothing about it.

The problem is world-wide wherever farming is carried on. As it is not possible to control the elements—floods, torrential rains and high winds—it is therefore impossible to control erosion. The farmers are just as anxious as anyone to control erosion. Some of them have studied the problem and they have carried out contour ploughing so as to prevent it. The farmers cannot be blamed for soil erosion.

Mr. Hilton: Many of them do not follow the advice given in connection with contour ploughing.

Mr. PLUNKETT: Why blame the farmer for everything that happens in this country? I cannot understand why they are always blamed for every difficulty associated with the land. Soil erosion is one of nature's problems that will have to be overcome, and I hope that at some time or other wise men will be able to evolve a system whereby the farmers may retain the fertility of the soil and its maximum productive capacity.

Progress reported.

The House adjourned at 8.54 p.m.
