

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

FRIDAY, 31 OCTOBER 1947

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Year to 30 June—

1940	7,140	loss
1941	6,419	loss
1942	16,627	profit
1943	65,651	profit
1944	..	..	13,671	loss
1945	..	..	8,881	loss
1946	..	..	16,773	loss
1947	..	..	3,923	profit

“2. £88,464.

“3. Of the total amount of loss for 10 years, £39,042 was waived. Of the balance of £49,422, the sum of £31,212 has been liquidated by the company to date. The residue, £18,210, is to be paid in equal instalments in May, 1948, 1949, and 1950.”

DAIRY CATTLE IMPROVEMENT FUND.

Mr. MULLER (Fassifern) asked the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock—

“In view of the report of the Auditor-General that out of a total expenditure of £6,803 8s. 3d. in 1946-47 from the Dairy Cattle Improvement Fund, only £218 0s. 5d. was spent on rebates of rail freights on pure-bred dairy bulls, £5 9s. 8d. on vaccines, and £93 4s. 1d. on production recording and herd testing, a total of £316 14s. 2d., will he kindly explain why £6,486 14s. 1d. was spent on the administration of this fund?”

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Cook) replied—

“The hon. member has apparently misinterpreted the information supplied in the Report of the Auditor-General. Of the amount of £6,486 14s. 1d. mentioned by the hon. member, £5,355 was spent on the provision of veterinary and herd testing services, while the balance of £1,131 was used to meet the cost of clerical assistance and expenses incidental to the provision of the services mentioned.”

FRIDAY, 31 OCTOBER, 1947.

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

QUESTIONS.

LOSSES AND PROFITS, MT. ISA RAILWAY.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba—Leader of the Opposition) asked the Minister for Transport—

“1. From and including 1930, what have been the yearly losses and profits, respectively, on the Duchess to Mount Isa railway?”

“2. What was the net loss on that line at the end of the tenth year of working?”

“3. What amount has been paid by Mount Isa Mines Ltd. in liquidation of such loss as provided by the Duchess to Mount Isa Railway Act of 1925?”

Hon. J. E. DUGGAN (Toowoomba) replied—

“1. Year to 26 May—

		£	
1930	..	..	29,768 loss
1931	..	..	32,654 loss
1932	..	..	1,224 loss
1933	..	..	5,163 profit
1934	..	..	5,555 loss
1935	..	..	9,904 loss
1936	..	..	5,766 loss
1937	..	..	1,703 profit
1938	..	..	1,538 loss
1939	..	..	8,921 loss

LOSSES AND PROFITS, RAILWAY DEPARTMENT.

Mr. LOW (Cooroora) asked the Minister for Transport—

“What was the net profit or loss on the operations of the Railway Department for each of the last five financial years, including interest on the amount of capital indebtedness written off under the provisions of the Railway (Capital Indebtedness) Reduction Acts?”

Hon. J. E. DUGGAN (Toowoomba) replied—

		£	
“1942-43	..	..	3,485,351 profit
1943-44	..	..	290,661 profit
1944-45	..	..	723,023 loss
1945-46	..	..	1,142,575 loss
1946-47	..	..	1,666,534 loss.”

STOCK DISEASES COMPENSATION FUND.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba—Leader of the Opposition) asked the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock—

“In view of the substantial amount to credit of the Stock Diseases Compensation Fund and the high price of replacement

stock, will he give consideration to an increase in the amount of compensation at present allowed?"

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Cook) replied—

"The credit balance shown in the Stock Diseases Compensation Fund at 30 June is subject to a contingent liability of £5,878 for claims not presented at that date. Moreover, during the current year, tuberculin testing has been, of necessity, confined principally to the retesting of previously tested herds. In these herds, very few reactors have been detected, and consequently compensation claims have been comparatively light. Testing has now been extended to new areas, and the work will be accelerated as further veterinary officers become available. A commensurate increase in compensation claims on the Fund will follow. Although it is impracticable to increase compensation rates at present, the hon. member may be assured that dairymen will be given the benefit of any savings due to a general decline in the incidence of the disease throughout the dairying districts of the State following the control measures being taken by my Department."

JOINT COAL BOARD.

Mr. PATERSON (Bowen) asked the Premier—

"1. Has his attention been drawn to the report in the 'Courier-Mail' of 30th instant regarding the negotiations between the Commonwealth and State Governments for the formation of a Joint Coal Board?"

"2. What truth, if any, is there in that part of the report which states that Queensland has stipulated that certain coal deposits, especially Blair Athol and Callide, are to be exempted from the legislation?"

Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca) replied—

"1. Yes.

"2. There is no truth in the particular allegation in question. No notice should be taken of Press statements of this nature. Certain statements in both Brisbane newspapers yesterday were not true. As I have stated previously, the results of my discussions with the Commonwealth-New South Wales Joint Coal Board have been submitted to the Prime Minister. No reply has yet been received from the Prime Minister, and he is the only high Federal authority of whom I will take any notice."

CITY ELECTRIC LIGHT COMPANY.

Mr. LOW (Cooroora) asked the Secretary for Labour and Industry—

"1. In view of the fact that the City Electric Light Company is the co-ordinating authority to provide electricity in an area of almost 9,000 square miles, extending from the Southern border to Gympie, is it the intention of the Government to acquire this undertaking in 1954 and place it under a regional electricity board?"

"2. With a view to speeding up the reticulation of electric light and power in rural areas and doing away with objectionable guarantees required from primary producers, will he give favourable consideration to the extension to this company of the 33½ per cent. subsidy which is allowed to local authorities and regional electricity boards?"

Hon. V. C. GAIR (South Brisbane) replied—

"1. The intentions of the Government will be disclosed at the appropriate time.

"2. The question of subsidising this private company has never been considered, nor has any application for subsidy ever been made by the company. Even if a subsidy were granted, no more work could be carried out, as the rate of progress is entirely dictated by the availability of materials. Nor could guarantees—the principle of which is universally recognised in the electricity supply industry—be eliminated. The hon. member will find some enlightening information on this matter in the eighth and ninth Annual Reports of the Commission. Furthermore, I commend to him a study of the tenth Annual Report of the Commission, which indicates the great extent to which rural electrification has progressed since the agreement was concluded between the Commission and the Company in 1939."

HARBOUR BOARDS' INDEBTEDNESS.

Mr. LOW (Cooroora) asked the Treasurer—

"What amounts of interest and redemption, respectively, have been written off or waived from the indebtedness of each of the following harbour boards, namely:—Bundaberg, Gladstone, Rockhampton, Mackay, Bowen, Townsville, and Cairns—in each of the years 1943-44 to 1946-47 inclusive?"

Hon. J. LARCOMBE (Rockhampton) replied—

—	Interest Written Off.		Payment of Redemption Waived.	
	£	s. d.	£	s. d.
Rockhampton	—			
1943-44 ..		Nil		(c)
1944-45 ..	(a)	425,305 0 0		(c)
1945-46 ..		15,019 6 8		(c)
1946-47 ..		8,090 13 4		(c)
Bowen—				
1943-44 ..		Nil		Nil
1944-45 ..	(a)	106,755 4 11	(b)	54,115 12 3
1945-46 ..		6,358 13 6		(c)
1946-47 ..		2,328 15 7		(c)

(a) Arrears of interest due as at 30 June, 1945, written off on the recommendation of the Co-ordinator-General of Public Works, following an enquiry into matters relating to Harbour Boards and Ports.

(b) Payment of outstanding redemption as at 30 June, 1945, waived, in accordance with the above-mentioned recommendation.

(c) No redemption charged.

No amounts have been written off or waived in respect of the Harbour Boards at Bundaberg, Gladstone, Mackay, Townsville, or Cairns."

MINORS IN CHARGE OF RAILWAY STATIONS.

Mr. LOW (Coorooora) asked the Minister for Transport—

"What is the number of juniors under the age of twenty-one years, such as lad porters, staff officers, acting night officers, and night officers, who are acting as officers in charge of railway stations on the main line between Brisbane and Cairns and, therefore, responsible for the safe working and passing of through passenger and goods trains?"

Hon. J. E. DUGGAN (Toowoomba) replied—

"Forty."

WORKERS' COMPENSATION LOSSES AND PREMIUMS.

Mr. CHALK (East Toowoomba) asked the Treasurer—

"1. With reference to the loss of £107,911 0s. 3d. disclosed by the Workers' Compensation Department as shown by page 43 of the Auditor-General's Report, is this dominantly the result of (a) an unduly high number of claims, or (b) increased benefits and allowances?"

"2. Does he consider that the results of the past year will lead to a general increase in the rates of workers' compensation premiums?"

Hon. J. LARCOMBE (Rockhampton) replied—

"1. Whilst there was a loss in 1946-47, the profits for the previous five years totalled £695,657, and the office has substantial reserves. In 1946-47 the number of claims increased by 22.15 per cent., as compared with the previous year. This increase was due to greater employment and increased benefits which were granted under the Amending Act of 1945. While claims increased by 22.15 per cent. and payments by 28.16 per cent., there were no increases in premium rates in 1946-47. In 1940 the premium rates were reduced, and as a result the loss to premium revenue was £44,000 in that year, and a greater loss in succeeding years.

"2. The hon. member will be advised in due course of the intention of the State Insurance Commissioner."

PENSIONS OF RAILWAY MEN'S WIDOWS.

Mr. CHALK (East Toowoomba) asked the Minister for Transport—

"With reference to pensions payable under the Railways Superannuation Fund, will the Minister inform the House concerning the scale of pensions to widows which is in force and indicate whether these pensions are supplemental to or alternate from Commonwealth widows' pensions?"

Hon. J. E. DUGGAN (Toowoomba) replied—

"The pensions payable under the Railway Superannuation Act of 1931 (repealed 1933) to widows of railway employees are as follows:—

Age of Employee, Entitled to Provisions of Act, at Date of Retirement.	Annual Pension Payable to Widow.	
	£	s. d.
65	55	0 0
64	52	5 0
63	49	10 0
62	46	15 0
61	44	0 0
60	41	5 0

It may be of interest to point out that contributions by employees to the above-mentioned fund totalled £522,068, and total payments to superannuated employees to 30 June, 1947, was £1,550,409. Subject to their eligibility as prescribed by the regulations promulgated by the Commonwealth authorities, it would be permissible for widows receiving pensions under the Railway Superannuation Act to also receive a Commonwealth widows' pension."

STATE HOUSES, TOOWOOMBA.

Mr. CHALK (East Toowoomba) asked the Secretary for Public Works—

"Will he inform the House—

"1. The area of land acquired by the State Housing Commission for the purpose of erecting dwellings in the (a) electorate of Toowoomba, (b) electorate of East Toowoomba?"

"2. How many houses are at present being constructed by the State Housing Commission in the (a) electorate of Toowoomba, (b) electorate of East Toowoomba?"

"3. What is the combined total number of applications at present with the State Housing Commission for rental homes within the electorates of Toowoomba and East Toowoomba?"

Hon. W. POWER (Baroona) replied—

"1. Toowoomba electorate, 28 acres 3 roods 3 perches (approximately); East Toowoomba electorate, 18 acres 1 rood 13 perches (approximately).

"2. Toowoomba electorate, 19, being the balance of a contract for 34 houses; the other 15 houses have been completed; East Toowoomba electorate, nil.

"3. Two hundred and forty-one."

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.

RETURN TO ORDER.

The following paper was laid on the table—
Return to an Order made by the House on 7 August last, on the motion of Mr. Macdonald, showing the number of Government employees at 30 June, 1947 (all departments), paid from Consolidated Revenue, Trust Fund, and Loan Fund, respectively.

COAL MINING ACTS AMENDMENT
BILL.

INITIATION.

Hon. T. A. FOLEY (Normanby—Secretary for Mines): I move—

“That the House will, at its next sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider of the desirableness of introducing a Bill to amend the Coal Mining Acts, 1925 to 1940, in certain particulars.”

Motion agreed to.

MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT, EXPORT
OF GRAIN SORGHUM.

Mr. SPEAKER: I have received the following letter—

“Government House,
“31 October, 1947.

“The Honourable the Speaker,
“The Legislative Assembly,
“Brisbane.

“Dear Mr. Speaker—

“In accordance with Standing Order No. 137, I hereby give notice that today I shall move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of debating a matter of urgent public importance, as follows:—

That the ban imposed by the Commonwealth Government upon the export of grain sorghum will cause a considerable waste of that product and loss to the growers concerned because of the fact that over 1,000,000 bushels are still held by the growers, merchants in Queensland and New South Wales are holding stocks more than sufficient to meet all Australian requirements, and the government of India has offered to purchase as much of this grain as could be exported at a very satisfactory price, equal to about £500,000, and to supply linseed and jute goods to Australia of an equivalent value.

That unless the ban be lifted immediately, owing to the bumper wheat harvest, transport will not be available for grain sorghum.

“Yours faithfully,
“MALCOLM MCINTYRE.”

Not fewer than five members having risen in their places in support of the motion—

Mr. McIntyre (Cunningham) (11.14 a.m.): I move—

“That this House do now adjourn.”

I move that the House adjourn for the purpose of debating this matter, which is of urgent public importance. I shall briefly give the story of the production of grain sorghum, which is a simple one, and outline the problem that now confronts us, which is equally simple of solution.

Because of the failure of the wheat crop last year the growers planted and harvested a record crop of grain sorghum. Owing to widespread dry conditions at that time it appeared as if the whole crop would be

required in this country, but with a bountiful season a surplus of grain has developed. A profitable market is available overseas for this surplus and the only barrier is that an export licence has consistently and persistently been refused by the relevant Commonwealth department. We appreciate the fact that this is a Federal matter and that this refusal has emanated from the Department of Commerce. I want to pay the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock in this State the compliment of saying that in my opinion, if the matter had been under State control, the correct thing would have been done at the correct time. Unfortunately we have not the authority in Queensland to deal with this important question.

The reason given for the refusal of an export licence was that it was possible to absorb the whole surplus in Australia. I might mention in passing that the approach to the Department of Commerce by the producers was for a restricted licence to export the grain in the hands of the producers themselves for which no market could be found. In the first approach no suggestion was made that an export licence should be granted to export all the surplus that was in Queensland.

As I have said, the application was refused on the ground that this surplus of grain sorghum could be absorbed in Australia. All expert authorities suggest that the very reverse is the fact, and it has been established that a very substantial surplus exists in the market for grain sorghum in the Commonwealth and that a very remunerative market is offering overseas. For the benefit of the House I am going to give a brief account of stocks of grain sorghum held at the present time. It has been established beyond dispute that today there are 1,000,000 bushels of grain sorghum in the hands of the growers. In addition there are some 300,000 bushels in the city of Brisbane alone in the hands of merchants. In Rockhampton there is in the vicinity of 100,000 bushels, and many thousands of bushels are held by other agents throughout the various States. It can be established that in Australia today there are 1,000,000 bushels of grain sorghum in the hands of the producers for which no market can be found and at least another 1,000,000 bushels throughout the whole Commonwealth. All this has been definitely established as an unwanted surplus above the needs of Australia.

A Commonwealth-wide survey has been made by producers to find any market that is likely to exist. We have to bear in mind, first of all, that right throughout the Commonwealth we have a bountiful season and in consequence not only on the farms but everywhere else almost no-one is hand-feeding stock today. Exhaustive inquiries have been made in the Southern States. In Sydney there is no demand for grain sorghum, and at a very early date bran and pollard will be available in that State for the feed market at a price in the vicinity of £7 a ton or a little more. In Melbourne and throughout Victoria there is an abundance of virtually

all types of grain and there is practically no demand there for grain sorghum. South Australia and Western Australia have bountiful harvests of wheat and oats, as well as other cereals, and no grain sorghum is being used. This information was obtained as a result of inquiries made by Gollin & Co., a firm of brokers. They instructed their Mr. Stephenson, one of their senior officers, if not the manager, to make this investigation on behalf of the growers. Therefore that information can confidently be accepted as correct. It has been substantiated by inquiries made by Dalgety & Co., another reputable firm.

In addition, a record grain harvest is about to be garnered in all the States of the Commonwealth. Included in that harvest is not only wheat, which we hear so much about, but some million bushels of oats and barley which must not only be harvested but also marketed. Those grains will ultimately find their way to the feed market.

Moreover, in this State of Queensland there is a great rust scare in the wheat-growing areas, which threatens to do much damage to the crop. If that rust is followed by rain it is within the bounds of possibility that we may have perhaps 1,000,000 bushels of seed wheat that must find its way onto the feed market.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Chifley, has been urging the producers to grow all they can and export all they can in the interests of the Commonwealth. On the other hand, we have the Minister for Commerce saying very definitely that this surplus above local requirements must remain in Queensland, in the faint hope that some time, somewhere a market may turn up. I am going to state that the bulk of this surplus, particularly that part of it which is today in the hands of the growers, will be wasted. I have been guilty of the offence—and it seems to be an offence—of growing some of this variety of grain, and I know the condition of the grain on the farms today is deplorable. Most of the sorghum, because of the difficulty in obtaining the necessary material, is out in the weather. There is also a mice infestation and these things are causing it to be damaged and destroyed. Many dumps of bags are open and torn and the grain is running out everywhere. If we get a wet period—which is likely in this storm half of the year—much damage will be done. While it may be an exaggeration to say that it will be a total loss I suggest that the greater part of it will be valueless after another two or three months. In addition, the weevil is attacking it, and it is a type of grain that attracts the weevil, and the loss on that account will be enormous. So we are justified in saying that the grain is in a wretched condition.

Markets are readily available for the sale of this grain. At the present moment the hungry people of the world are crying out for it. Not only one country, but India, Palestine and countries on the Continent want it, and even in dollar countries there is a potential market at a remunerative price that would give a return to the growers considerably in excess of the ceiling price

established by the Commonwealth control, namely, £10 10s. a ton. I suggest that if the ban is not lifted, if there is not a total loss, the return to the men who grow it will be very poor.

We have the Indian delegates now here crying out for food for their people. Not only were they prepared to buy our surplus at a remunerative price, but they made a proposal that if they could be supplied with grain sorghum they would in return ship to this country 500 tons of linseed oil, which we badly need, and 3,000,000 sacks for our wheat. The sack question is a very serious one in wheat areas. I had a communication sent to me this morning to the effect that the Wheat Board has distributed all the available bags, and there are quite a number of large growers who have not received any, and the position generally is very disquieting. Here we have a country willing to take the surplus and send us these essential requirements and we are ridiculously refusing to allow the transaction to take place. Transport is a major problem, but the Indian representatives have promised that they will send ships to this country, bring out these supplies, and lift the grain. Word has come through that a boat, the "Chupra," owned by the British Steam Navigation Co. Ltd., is leaving Calcutta next week direct for Brisbane; and if a reasonable assurance can be given to the Indian Government that that boat can be loaded with grain they are quite prepared to load on it an equivalent value of linseed oil and wheat sacks. No export licence will be granted by the Indian Government unless they receive an assurance they will get grain in return. The food position over there is so serious they must barter their manufactured goods to get food for their starving people, and Australia is one of the countries from which it will be possible to get it.

Mr. Aikens: Tell us why you are not allowed to export it.

Mr. McINTYRE: We are not allowed to export it because although the fullest representation has been made, not to the State authorities but to the Department of Commerce, the Minister for Commerce has repeatedly said "No." I do not know where that gentleman received his education but I am afraid that "No" is the only word he learned.

Mr. Aikens: Why does he say "No"?

Mr. McINTYRE: He said that in his opinion this grain could be absorbed in this country but that is quite wrong and foolish and shows complete lack of practical knowledge on his part of the whole question.

The representation made by Queensland officially and otherwise was for the restricted export of grain sorghum and maize from the Atherton Tableland. The people on the Atherton Tableland received their permit and were allowed to export 3,000 tons of surplus maize. I suggest to the House that the two positions are comparable. It has been established beyond any shadow of doubt that they are, but a permit was granted for the export of maize and refused for the export of grain

sorghum. The producers have not been idle and the State Minister—I give the hon. gentleman credit for helping us; he has been most co-operative in this regard—suggested that a voluntary pool should be established by the producers themselves so that if the Federal authorities were persuaded to grant a licence it would be a statutory authority to which a licence could be granted. This pool was formed. Everything was arranged to export this grain. Arrangements had been made for grading and re-bagging the grain and for transport. Here I compliment the Minister for Transport on his co-operation. Shipping was arranged. The sale of the grain at a remunerative price was all definitely fixed and the only barrier was that the Department of Commerce refused to lift the ban. I think it is a standing disgrace to the standard of efficiency of the Federal department and shows a lack of consideration for that very important section of this State, the primary producers. The Federal Minister should go to the trouble to acquaint himself with all the circumstances, because if he did he certainly would have no option but to do the correct thing and allow the export of this surplus grain to the starving countries of the world.

Through their organisation the producers made application to the Commonwealth Bank for a loan to finance this grain from the hands of the producers, to get it into condition and into a position where it could be readily exported, but I regret that word has been received that the negotiations with the Commonwealth Bank for a loan to finance the scheme have broken down, the reason given being lack of co-operation by the Department of Commerce. Today the producers are exploiting the possibility of getting money through the private banks and although nothing definite has been established the prospects are reasonably bright. The producers are endeavouring to do something but bear in mind that to take the grain from the farms, grade and bag it, and transport it to port will run into some pounds a ton and without an export licence there does not seem to be a means of recovering that expenditure.

Mr. Aikens: The Commonwealth Government do not object to the export of high-price racehorses.

Mr. McIntyre: That is another question.

I would emphasise that one of the distressing circumstances about the position so far as the producers are concerned is that a number of returned soldiers are involved. After fighting for their country for three, four or more years they returned and last year put their all into preparing land for wheat. However, the rains did not come, so they grew sorghum to redeem the situation and enable them to carry on, but today, because of the stubbornness of the Department of Commerce and its refusal to meet the situation they will experience a complete loss.

It is suggested that the seed-wheat quota that has been available to the industry down through the years will be withdrawn so that a market may be developed for this seed.

I do not believe that that scheme will ever be implemented for the whole of the Commonwealth. We may experience it in Queensland, but I do not believe that it will be possible of implementation, nor do I think it will be attempted in the southern States.

I realise that we on this side of the House have taken drastic action in moving the adjournment to discuss this question, but that action is more than justified because of the injustice that is being done to a very important section of the community. I may be excused for saying in this Chamber, too, that this is part of the price we are called upon to pay for having centralised control in Canberra, because, as I have said previously, if this matter had been under the control of the States the position would have been rectified long ago. Up where I live the land is prepared for the planting of further crops. As hon. members know, there is much land that cannot be sown with wheat, because of black oats and for other reasons. The land is prepared now but the growers are apprehensive. They do not know which way to turn, and it is small wonder, when they have this grain on their hands, a market at their door and, because of inefficient Commonwealth political control and domination, they are not allowed to realise on their assets. I know many farmers who have committed themselves to buying property and other essential requirements on the value of this grain, and it would seem as though they would lose everything. Is that the way to treat the primary producers? I suggest that if we had an injustice comparable with this in the industrial world today we should have an industrial upheaval that would shake the very foundations of the country, but because we are few in number who remain loyal to our country and industry this is the kind of treatment we get.

This loss is suffered not only by the producer but by the State also. If representation is made—and I hope it will be made—to the Department of Commerce, and if the department persists in its foolish attitude that the grain sorghum must be kept here in the interests of the State, it should be a State or Commonwealth responsibility. I do not think the Commonwealth Government should have authority to dictate what may or may not be done with the product of the primary producers and at the same time expect the producers to carry the financial responsibility. The only fair and reasonable thing to do is for the Commonwealth Government to accept the responsibility and pay in full the men who grow it on the basis of what they could realise for it on the available market.

I trust that our Minister, the Premier, and the State in general will make forceful representations to the Commonwealth Department to reconsider the matter. This grain is in the hands of the producers, they are about to harvest their crops, they want all available space and facilities, and we have passed the zero hour when it can be removed in an orderly way without interfering with the harvest, but it is not too late to realise on this valuable asset if the proper thing is done.

In conclusion, let me say that it is my firm belief that the Federal Minister for Commerce has been weighed in the political balance and found wanting.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I am voicing the feelings—and they are very high feelings—of the producers who have been responsible for the production of this grain at the very, very vicious treatment received at the hands of the Department of Commerce. I do hope something will be done to relieve the situation. I believe that with the practical application of common sense and initiative such a course is still possible.

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MADSEN (Warwick) (11.36 a.m.): I rise to second the motion so ably moved by the hon. member for Cunningham. I am fully convinced of the need for this Government to give the sorghum-growers of this State every assistance in the selling of their product, a commodity that was grown in abundance on the Darling Downs particularly during last season. I feel that the sorghum-growers of this State are suffering a very grave injustice as the result of the continuance of the ban on the export of that grain.

It may be interesting to members of the House to know how this position has been brought about—largely by the general grain shortage throughout the Commonwealth. During the war and since it has been necessary to distribute our grain production in the Commonwealth to the best advantage. All Christian people at least believe that whilst people are starving grain suitable for food purposes should be made available to them in preference to being made available as feed for stock. I think, therefore, that the Commonwealth Government's action in having this ban imposed early in the piece whilst the wheat crop of the Commonwealth was rather uncertain had merit in it; as a producer I believe that we should give due weight to this consideration, and I think that action was justified at the time. The wheat position in the Commonwealth was at a low ebb and should anything have happened to the crop about to be harvested we should have found ourselves importing wheat into Australia for flour. Apart from that aspect, we have to give consideration to the need for grain to keep our livestock industries—the dairying, pig and poultry industries—supplied. It is necessary for them to have grain. After the failure of the wheat crop last year every encouragement was given to farmers to produce as much of this other grain as possible so that we should not have to call on the available wheat supplies for the purpose of stock feed.

The present crop of wheat has been in doubt until now, but I say now, with a practical knowledge of the wheat industry, that we have arrived at a stage when, apart from hail storms, we can consider our wheat crop reasonably safe. Therefore, any further restriction on the sale or export of grain sorghum cannot be supported. Furthermore, anybody with a practical knowledge is aware that this grain cannot be kept indefinitely from year to year—as reserve supplies for

drought periods. The grain is gradually deteriorating the whole time, and to say that we might need it in six or nine months' time is too ridiculous for words.

At 11.40 a.m.,

Mr. HILTON (Carnarvon) relieved Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Mr. MADSEN: We have reached the stage when this grain can no longer be kept in a good condition, because every day the infestation of mice and weevils is taking its toll.

I want to say in all fairness to the sorghum-growers that, in my opinion, and I am sure in the opinion of all growers, it would be foolish to export the grain sorghum abroad until we were reasonably sure of harvesting a fair wheat crop. In short, it would be utterly ridiculous to send the grain sorghum out of Australia while there was still a doubt about the success of the wheat crop. However, should it be necessary to hold any grain in this country as an insurance against the failure to produce grain of another kind, such a scheme should be regarded as of national concern and one the burden of which ought not to be borne only by the growers of the grain that was held. The Commonwealth Government have refused to allow the export of grain sorghum in pursuance of what might be called a national insurance scheme against the failure of the wheat crop, but it should be the national responsibility of the Federal Government to see that the growers of the grain sorghum are properly treated.

I should like to remind hon. members again that the growers of grain sorghum are in the main the very people who lost their wheat crop last year because of dry weather. Many of the wheat-growers in the wheat-growing areas were unable to sow their wheat, but they had to go to the expense of working the land in preparation for a wheat crop and to the further expense of keeping that land in good fallow condition and later on to sow it with grain sorghum, many of them more than once. There was difficulty in getting a strike of grain sorghum. I had difficulty myself, and others found it necessary to plant twice and three times before they could get a strike.

The number of growers of grain sorghum this year, I think, was a record for the State. The Commonwealth Government had requested the primary producers to grow as much grain as they possibly could in addition to wheat, such as oats and grain sorghum for the purpose of providing feed for other industries and preventing a heavy drain on the wheat supply, and that I think was sound. However, I think that the people who have suffered through the loss of the wheat crop and through the extra expense incurred in growing and harvesting a sorghum crop should be adequately compensated.

Moreover, never before have I known the overhead costs of harvesting to be so high. We all know that costs generally have increased tremendously, that the cost of bags for instance has increased by 200 to 300 per cent., and as the hon. member for Cunning-

ham has pointed out, if there is to be a further increase in cost in the raiiling of the grain from the place of storage there will be a further increase in the overhead costs, absorbing perhaps another £3 to £4 a ton in all, which would virtually swallow up the entire value of the crop. In saying that I have in mind a price of £8, £9 or £10 a ton, the maximum price paid for home consumption. While it would not be necessary to grade the crop for home consumption, it would be necessary to grade it and put it into sound bags for export and so an increased cost would be incurred in that respect.

It is hardly necessary for me to repeat what the hon. member for Cunningham has said, that 2,000,000 bushels are still in the hands of the growers and that with the approaching wheat crop the storage space now used for grain sorghum is urgently required for wheat. We know also that transport difficulties will be even worse during the period of the wheat harvest and it is necessary that urgent representations be made in an endeavour to have the ban on the export of grain sorghum lifted before the wheat crop comes in.

At 11.45 a.m.,

Mr. SPEAKER resumed the chair.

Mr. MADSEN: Although the Commonwealth Government have stated that it is necessary to retain this sorghum crop for fodder purposes, now that the wheat crop is assured further representations have been made without any effect. The position is that the grain is still deteriorating and will deteriorate from day to day. Although the growers considered the formation of a voluntary pool that may take into storage the grain held on the farms by the growers, it was considered that unless some advance could be made on the grain so stored the farmers would find themselves in financial difficulties in meeting the cost of the harvest and preparing the land for further crops. Many farmers have entered into contracts for the purchase of tractors and headers and are becoming financially embarrassed because no money is available on the crop harvested.

I support the hon. member for Cunningham's contentions and I am quite sure from my conversation with the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock that he as a practical man realises that the retention of this crop of grain sorghum in Australia is not necessary. I believe, as the hon. member for Cunningham has stated, that if he had his way this crop would have been marketed in quite an orderly fashion to the satisfaction, I am sure, of growers and everyone else concerned. I join with the hon. member for Cunningham in urging this Government to make urgent representations to the Commonwealth Government to have the crop of grain sorghum marketed as expeditiously as possible.

I have stated that the growers had, at the instigation of the Minister, considered forming a voluntary pool and approaching the Commonwealth Government for financial assistance to enable a first payment to be

made to the growers. The Commonwealth Bank no doubt has made investigations and while the Commonwealth Government were saying that they required this grain sorghum for feed, the Commonwealth Bank was equally certain that there was no immediate market for it in Australia. It was also quite aware that unless a market was forthcoming very soon, the grain would become virtually valueless. I am not in a position to say what the negotiations were, but I do know they broke down. I take it they broke down as a result of the Commonwealth Bank's not being willing to make the requisite finance available. In fact, these negotiations simply collapsed.

From my experience as a wheat-grower I know that the wheat crop in many instances is now free from danger, apart from hailstorms and windstorms, and we are led to believe that considerable quantities of feed wheat will be available from this season's crop. Therefore, no useful purpose can be served by retaining this vast quantity of grain sorghum for feed when there are possibilities of further vast quantities of wheat being available for feed, as distinct from flour purposes. In the last few days it has become known that large quantities of oats also will be available for feed. You will see, therefore, so far as feed is concerned, there can be no factual argument for the retention of grain sorghum in this State or even in the Commonwealth.

The export restriction is having a detrimental effect on the marketing of the present sorghum crop, and it is also having a detrimental effect on sowings of further grain sorghum. Quite a lot of grain sorghum has been sown already, but unless we can show the growers that there will be some co-operation between the Commonwealth Government and themselves in marketing the crop I feel sure that quite large areas that have been prepared for grain sorghum will not be sown. Hon. members can see that unless we face up to this matter there will be a great loss.

Surely it does not need any more than has been said to convince the authorities. The story has been plainly told by the hon. member for Cunningham. I have endeavoured to support him, but he said virtually everything that could be said. I do say that this Government should make urgent representations to the Commonwealth Government in an endeavour to convince them of the need for allowing the sorghum to be sold. I am quite convinced as a grower that no useful purpose can be served by retaining it in Australia any longer.

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Cook—Secretary for Agriculture and Stock) (11.51 a.m.): Mr. Speaker, naturally the subject that has been raised this morning is a very important one to all the grain-growers of Queensland, not only to the sorghum-growers of the Darling Downs and the motion to discuss the question is well worth while.

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. COLLINS: It is a fact that there is a surplus today of grain sorghum, and under the limitations that have been put upon the growers in regard to export its disposal is presenting a difficulty. The position into which we have got is a striking illustration of how in this country we can within a few months pass from a time of drought and scarcity of grain to a surplus of it, which is—I do not say equally embarrassing, but very embarrassing nevertheless. It was only last February when there was an acute shortage of all kinds of grain in the State; and the Department of Agriculture and Stock had for months been at its wits' end to obtain sufficient supplies from South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales for the manufacture of flour and to keep the poultry industry, the dairying industry, and the pig industry going, and to a limited extent the people who were feeding sheep and cattle. We were terribly hard put to it to do it and there was a great shortage. People could not get anything like their requirements, notwithstanding all the pressure that has been put on the Commonwealth Government and despite all the help rendered by the Commonwealth Government.

I try to be perfectly fair in speaking of what they did. They were beset with shipping shortages, and the States, particularly New South Wales, were faced with difficulties in ralling the quantity of grain promised to us round about February and prior to that because they did not have the rolling stock to do it. I was approached at that time by honest trading merchants who said they could not buy the sorghum available on the Darling Downs at the then floor price, which was also the ceiling price, of £6 13s. a ton, with the result that representations were made to the Prices Commissioner, and actually prior to February, 1947, he increased that ceiling price of £6 13s. a ton to £8 8s. and for a period merchants were able to buy at that price. Then black-marketing and racketeering, on account of the shortage, began and honest merchants could not buy the grain at £8 8s. and were paying anything up to £10 and £12 a ton for it on the black-market.

In order that honest trading might be possible I again approached the Prices Commissioner and got him to increase the ceiling price again. It must be understood that that is entirely distinct from the floor price. The ceiling price is the highest price to which the grain was allowed to go and the floor price is the price at which the Commonwealth Government were prepared to take over the grain. As a result of my request the Prices Commissioner increased the ceiling price to £10 10s. a ton, and this allowed traders to buy fairly considerable quantities, although a certain amount of black marketing was going on.

Shortly after February we got a very bountiful season, and the grain-growers saw their crops starting to yield very much in excess of the original estimates. The result was that within two months we were beginning to have a glut of grain sorghum. In May, I think, I was approached to see whether the Commonwealth Government would not take

over the sorghum crop. I received a telegram from the Prime Minister to the effect that he was willing to do so. I will read it to the House because I want to be as factual as possible on this very important matter. I would here say that I appreciate the way that various members of the Grain-Growers' Organisation, the Opposition, and our own party have worked in harmony on this problem right through, in an effort to discover some solution to it. I thank them for their co-operation.

The Premier had made urgent representations to the Prime Minister that something should be done to find a way out of the difficulty, and on 2 May, 1947, we received this telegram from Mr. Chifley—

“In reference your telegram 24 April grain sorghum. Commonwealth has guaranteed minimum price and will accept delivery of all offered at that price three and sevenpence grower's siding. Any further action in this matter is for your Government.”

I would draw hon. member's attention to the date of the telegram to which that is a reply, 24 April.

That was the offer made at that time and it was considered by the growers, and I also considered, that 3s. 7d., in view of the price of other grain and the cost of production, was too low. The price of bags had increased, in fact the cost of everything had increased.

Mr. Hiley: What would that be worth a ton at grower's siding?

Mr. COLLINS: £6 13s. a ton. Representations were made to the Commonwealth Government in June that the growers should be allowed to export grain sorghum. As all hon. members know, the State cannot grant an export licence. We approached the Commonwealth Government and asked them to allow a certain amount of grain sorghum that appeared at that time to be surplus, to be exported, and they took the view, to which I subscribed, that we were not yet out of the wood in Queensland so far as the wheat crop was concerned—that if the wheat crop turned out a failure as it did the previous year, although that was very unlikely, we should have been in dire straits and have to sacrifice our stock-feeders here, as we should not be able to get grain from the South. We did not press the case, but we put forward representations. I discussed the matter with Mr. Bulecock, the Director-General of Agriculture for the Commonwealth, and he said, quite correctly, that until the Queensland wheat crop was assured it was undesirable to do anything about pressing the case for the export of grain sorghum. The growers accepted that decision as being reasonable and we waited.

At the beginning of September we had particularly good rain in the wheat area with the result that I wired Mr. Pollard and informed him that the wheat crop was assured and asked if he would now allow a certain amount of grain sorghum to be exported, because there was unquestionably a surplus. We did not seem to be getting any

results. I then got the Director of Marketing to go to Canberra and interview Mr. Pollard to see whether he would allow the grain sorghum in excess of what could reasonably be absorbed by the market to be exported.

Representations had also been made to me by the Atherton Maize Board, which wanted to export maize. The Minister said he would like to satisfy himself as to the true position, and he sent an officer of his department to make a personal inspection of the grain-sorghum position here and the maize position on the Atherton Tableland.

Mr. Hiley: That is a beauty, is it not?

Mr. COLLINS: A responsible Minister has to be advised by his responsible officers.

Mr. Chalk: Would he not take your word for it?

Mr. COLLINS: He wanted to be sure of the position, and I do not blame him, because a Minister has to satisfy himself and his Government. I had not made any wrong representations.

Mr. Hiley: He had no right to expect that you would.

Mr. COLLINS: No, but that was his business. The result was that our officers took his man round and showed him the position. He saw that a certain amount of grain was going bad, that it was unlikely that it would be absorbed before the weevil and the oncoming wheat crop embarrassed it.

Up to this time I had not met the sorghum-growers in deputation although I had representations from the hon. member for Cunningham and others on their behalf. The Atherton Maize Board was allowed to export 3,000 of the 5,000 tons it wanted to export and the sorghum-growers were refused permission to export anything.

Mr. McIntyre: Why did he discriminate?

Mr. COLLINS: I cannot say; I do not know what was in his mind. We put both cases before him and what was in his mind is best known to himself, but I believe that both sections of the growers had an equally good case for exporting their surplus. The reason why he wants to retain sorghum in Queensland is that we may be able to export a greater quantity of wheat to starving countries overseas, and that is commendable, if the sorghum-grower and the maize-grower are not sacrificed for the benefit of somebody else in some other industry—and that is taking place now.

Mr. Hiley: And provided the sorghum will not be lost.

Mr. COLLINS: And provided the sorghum will not be lost. Up to that point it is reasonable, but now we find ourselves in the position that it does not appear likely that the grain sorghum will be absorbed before the weevil causes a good deal of destruction and loss to the grower.

Early in the piece I had advised the growers generally to form a voluntary pool to handle their grain sorghum. I said that irrespective of whether they got a licence to sell on the open market, if they were going to market their grain in an orderly way somebody had to handle it. I said that there was legislation enabling them to do it in either a voluntary or compulsory way. Whilst in general I favour compulsory pooling, at this stage I could not, for the reason that time would have to elapse to create a compulsory pool. The proposal would have to be advertised and we should have to wait a month or 30 days for objections to the pool to come in. Then they would have to elect their directors and do all the other things necessary in establishing a compulsory pool, whereas a voluntary pool could be formed virtually overnight.

The growers took my advice and formed and registered a voluntary pool capable of handling the crop. My advice was to get on with the voluntary pool and start handling the grain. We find, according to the Press, that they were unable to finance the venture. I shall say more on that directly. As I said before, we sent the Director of Marketing to Canberra and he got a reply on 13 September, but it was not until 25 September, 1947, that a deputation of the grain-growers waited on me as the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock and put the whole of the case before me. I again suggested that they should immediately get on with the formation of a voluntary pool. I am glad to say that they have done that.

In making that suggestion I had a twofold purpose. If the grain sorghum was going to be exported it was my intention to try to protect the grower and eliminate the man who had been buying it from him at a low price, and see that he did not get the whole of the rakeoff.

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. COLLINS: That was the argument that I put up—that they form a voluntary pool. I said that they could assemble, store, and clean the grain and re-bag it if necessary; that they at least would have it in safe keeping and that it would not go any further bad. I said also that they would relieve storage space on their farms and so provide for the storage of wheat; that if they got some advance it would be some money coming in. I still say that that is the sound thing to do.

Having assembled it, the growers would know how much sorghum they had to sell. They could feed it to the market and possibly get the ceiling price of £10 a ton. They would then be in a better position to argue with the Minister and say, "If we cannot export this week, the weevil will walk away with the sorghum." Those are still sound arguments.

Mr. McIntyre: But you require finance.

Mr. COLLINS: Yes. The Commonwealth Government have agreed to pay the minimum price of £6 13s. a ton at growers' sidings. That will be plus railage to the future destination of the grain. The growers have this

price of £6 13s. a ton guaranteed, and that is a basis of finance. I saw in the paper yesterday that the bank had refused to finance the crop. I spoke to the manager of the bank this morning and he said it was not true, because he said he would still make an advance on the crop. The question is whether the advance he is willing to make is as much as the growers would accept. That is the gap existing at the present time. If the growers get the advance, they would be somewhere along the road to selling it, preserving it, and saving it from destruction, which is an important thing with the world starving for food.

The grain-growers again waited on me and sought an increase in the price of £6 13s. a ton.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. gentleman has exhausted his time.

Mr. CROWLEY (Cairns): Mr. Speaker, I move—

“That the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock be granted an extension of time.”

Mr. SPEAKER: It is not usual on a motion such as this to grant an extension of time, but I leave it to the judgment of hon. members because the matter under discussion by the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock is a very important one. Is it the pleasure of hon. members that the hon. gentleman be granted an extension of time?

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. COLLINS: I thank hon. members for their courtesy. The important thing is to see that the crop is not sacrificed and that growers get as much out of it as it is reasonable for them to get. They approached me and asked me if I would support an application for an increase in the floor price of grain sorghum and I immediately agreed. I had made representations to the Federal Minister immediately I got a letter from the Grain-Growers' Organisation asking that the floor price be increased to £8 8s. a ton. That letter has gone forward to the Commonwealth Minister for Commerce and Agriculture, Mr. Pollard, and the Under Secretary of the State Department of Agriculture and Stock, and the Director of Marketing will both be discussing the question of an increase with Mr. Pollard in Canberra this afternoon. That is one step forward.

I should like to point out that the State Government have been active throughout the piece in helping the sorghum-growers and the maize-growers on the Atherton Tableland, or any other grain-grower for that matter. We have stressed the point with the Commonwealth Minister for Commerce and Agriculture that it is a very wrong principle that any one section of grain-growers should be sacrificed for the benefit of another.

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. COLLINS: It is a vicious principle that under the present set-up there should be a very high price for all kinds of grain on the export market, and that only one section of grain-growers, the wheat-growers, should be allowed to exploit it. A reasonable per-

centage of all summer grain crops, which are crops that we grow in Queensland to a greater extent than they do in other parts of the Commonwealth, should attract the export price. That applies not only to wheat-growers, maize-growers, or sorghum-growers, but to the barley-growers, the oat-growers, and the growers of any other grain. It is absolutely vicious in principle that the whole of the export market should be centred in wheat and that other grains should have to be sacrificed and confined to the Australian price while wheat is given the preference of a higher export market. That is a principle to which I, as Secretary for Agriculture and Stock, am opposed, and I am fighting it all I can. I am sure that I have the support of every hon. member in this House in my endeavour to obtain at least a minimum of justice for all the grain-growers of Queensland.

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. COLLINS: I contend that the grain crops should be treated as a whole, and not dealt with in a sectional way. All the grain-growers should be placed on some sort of basis of equality. We know that oats have not the same feed value as wheat, maize, or sorghum and consequently it will be probably sold at a lower price. Sorghum has not the same feed value as maize, nor has it quite the same feed value as wheat. All those qualities should be correlated and equal justice meted out to every section of grain-growers.

Mr. Russell: It is very difficult but to encourage the industry and have further development you must have some understanding.

Mr. COLLINS: That is the point. That is why I am watching Queensland's interests in this particular set-up.

We are situated in latitudes where we receive more assured summer than winter rain-falls. In other words, we get more rain in the summer and less in the winter than southern States. Consequently we can grow summer crops to a greater extent possibly than winter crops. We can grow maize and sorghum in particular, and various millets. It is of importance to the various grain-growers of this State that we have an assured market for these grains.

I am not going to subscribe to the argument that it is wrong to feed grain to stock while humans are starving for it. After all, unless you feed grain to stock you will not get essential foodstuffs. Unless you feed grain to poultry you are not going to get meat and eggs from poultry. The same applies to pig meats. Grain has to be fed to a desired limit to livestock in order to obtain a necessary balanced ration.

Our Premier right through has been very concerned over the whole business. As far back as February he discussed it with the Prime Minister. Again in April he took up with the Prime Minister the desirability of increasing the price of sorghum and taking over the grain from the growers. Right down to the present time he has been and is still working on the case. I have here a letter

from the Premier to the Prime Minister dated 15 October last setting out the position as he saw it in Queensland. He stated in that letter—

“I desire to attach hereto a copy of a letter received from the Queensland Cereal and Chemical Industries, relating to that company's moves to build up an export trade in flour and meals derived from maize and sorghum.

“It will be observed that this firm alleges that a southern mill is exporting 500 tons of barley per month, whilst they are unable to export any of their exports, due to the export ban.

“As you are no doubt aware, bounteous crops of summer grains, i.e. maize and sorghum, have been harvested and there are bright prospects for a record wheat crop and other winter-growing cereals.

“This has raised the question of maintaining some stability in the market price levels for fodder grains and my Minister for Agriculture and Stock has made representations to your Minister for Commerce and Agriculture, supporting applications which have been made by sorghum-growers for the opening of an export market. These representations have been limited to the export of sorghum surplus to domestic needs and to farmers' grain and did not apply to sorghum purchased by merchants under a domestic ceiling price considerably below present export parity.

“From enquiries I have made, there appears to be some justification in the contention of the company that Queensland firms are not receiving the same encouragement as southern firms to develop an export market for meals and other manufactures.

“I am of the opinion that it is highly desirable that secondary industries based upon Queensland grain production should be encouraged to establish connections in the export trade provided, of course, that there is a reasonable chance that such export trade can be maintained when world conditions become normal.

“I shall, therefore, be glad if you will give the request of this firm your earnest consideration.

“Yours faithfully,

“Sgd. E. M. Hanlon.”

On the 27th of this month the Premier despatched the following telegram to the Prime Minister—

“Have received strong representations from grain-growers and others in this State urging that your Government be approached requesting that the present embargo on export of maize and sorghum be lifted. Market position particularly with respect to sorghum was outlined by my Minister for Agriculture to your Minister Commerce and Agriculture in letter dated 22nd October last. As I mentioned in my letter to you dated 15th October bounteous crops of maize and sorghum have been harvested in Queensland and there are prospects of record wheat crop and other winter-growing cereals. In these circumstances should be glad if your Government would favourably consider granting some relief to

growers in this State by permitting the export of that portion of grain-sorghum crop which can be regarded as surplus to domestic needs.”

This is the file I have in connection with the matter, and hon. members will see by its size that at least the Department of Agriculture and Stock has not been entirely idle in the matter.

I trust that as a result of discussions that have taken place and will take place in this House on this very important motion, the Queensland grain-growers will receive their just dues, and will not be sacrificed to any section of grain-growers who are trying to get the whole of the benefit of the high export prices that are ruling at the present time. I am pleased to say that the quite reasonable prices that are being asked for this sorghum by grain-growers, and the right to have a certain amount exported overseas at the present high ruling prices, will receive the whole of the support of the Government of whom I have the honour to be a member.

Honourable Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. HILTON (Carnarvon) (12.21 p.m.): I do not wish to detain the House very long. This is, in my opinion, one of the most important matters that we have discussed during this session. I feel that all hon. members appreciate very much indeed the excellent resumé of the position that the Minister has given to the House.

As a native of the Darling Downs and one who has some knowledge of the position up there, I wish to say that I am in entire agreement with the mover and seconder of this motion so far as they have outlined the position on the Downs. Some friends of mine have a large quantity of grain sorghum on hand at the present time. They were able to get temporary storage for a period, but as wheat harvesting is about to begin that storage is no longer available to them. They cannot dispose of that grain to merchants or to any other market. Every possible avenue has been exhausted, and unless the export ban is lifted—at least to some extent—the people to whom I refer will be faced with the position of merely dumping this very valuable grain on the ground and letting it decay. I think the most urgent representations should be made in order to obtain some alleviation of the position.

After listening to the whole outline of the position, as given by the Minister, we must concede, as the hon. member for Warwick did concede, that the attitude of the Federal Government in the first instance—and up to quite recently—was a sound and sensible one. Until the wheat crop was assured, there was full justification for not granting an export licence. Now that position has been reversed. During the last two months the wheat crop has become an assured fact; so while their attitude in the first instance was a sound and logical one, if the export ban is continued by the Federal Government it will indicate shocking stupidity. In view of the outline of the position given by the Minister,

and the representations that have been made, and in view of the fact that this matter has been ventilated publicly in this Parliament today, I think the Commonwealth Government will take due recognition of the position and do the sensible thing.

It is said that good does come out of evil. While I can appreciate the injustice and the difficulties suffered by these grain-growers on the Downs—the granary of Queensland—at the present time, I do hope that this experience will give them cause to think of the future and to pursue further the pooling arrangement they made on a voluntary basis at the suggestion of the Minister.

To anyone who travels through the Darling Downs at the present time and observes the wonderful conditions that exist it is evident that the granary of Queensland is in a very flourishing state. There is a surplus of grain on hand and farmers are about to reap a bounteous harvest. There is wonderful scope for further development, in the growing not only wheat but all other suitable grains, and I hope that organised marketing of sorghum and these other grains will become an established fact and that the principle of compulsory pooling will be adopted generally. I emphasise the need for organised marketing and grower-controlled commodity boards, not only in this State but throughout the Commonwealth. I venture the opinion that if at the present time there were organised grower-controlled commodity boards in the Commonwealth the Minister in charge of this important matter in the Commonwealth Government would be better able to appreciate the position and the growers would be in a position to state their desires and demands more effectively.

At 12.26 p.m.,

The CHAIRMAN of COMMITTEES (Mr. Mann, Brisbane) relieved Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Mr. HILTON: However, I hope that the export licence will be given in time to permit of a large shipment being made in the ship from India referred to by the hon. member for Cunningham, but if that cannot be done I hope the growers will explore every avenue of storage possibilities in many of the empty storage places now available down the Brisbane River. It would be rather expensive if they had to store this grain on the Darling Downs and other centres and later have to re-handle it and re-bag it for shipment overseas. Probably it would be a very good idea to make an immediate exploration of the possibilities of the storage down the Brisbane River in some of the Army and Navy buildings not in use, and so save expense to the growers and have the grain ready for shipment if an export licence is granted.

Mr. McIntyre: There is the weevil factor.

Mr. HILTON: That is a very big factor, I admit, but I understand there is a new chemical treatment. Probably that could be applied if the grain has to be stored in the buildings down the river. So far as my knowledge goes the weevil factor can be entirely eliminated by that means but of course I am not an authority in that respect.

Our experience in this matter opens to our minds vast possibilities in the storing and handling of these important grains and I hope that when the compulsory pools are established in the handling of these grains silos will be erected to handle the grain in bulk, as is done in the southern States. I associate myself with other members in their expressions of opinion on this very important matter and I repeat that I hope the Federal Minister concerned will see the light and grant an export licence immediately.

Mr. HEADING (Wide Bay) (12.29 p.m.): I associate myself with this motion because in the Burnett area a tremendous quantity not only of grain sorghum but of maize is grown for the feeding of stock. During drought periods we sometimes have to go to the Darling Downs to buy grain for the feeding of our pigs and cattle but at the present time, owing to the very good crops of the last season—and I think I can safely say that as on the Darling Downs so our crops of grain sorghum are the best ever grown in the district—there is a considerable quantity of this grain on their farms. Many have surplus grain above their requirements.

When we consider that this season appears to be developing very well and that many summer grain crops are already planted, when we realise that if the season continues as it has started we shall have a considerable quantity of grain, we appreciate that it is impossible to hold the present stocks for very long. I think it is generally known that in order to hold grain for any length of time it should be put into tanks or barns that are weevil-proof, and galvanised tanks are hard enough to get today for water, let alone for storing grain.

The farmers of the Burnett had a very bad time last year and lost a considerable amount of money. In their efforts to rehabilitate themselves they planted a good deal of summer grain crops and the yield has been excellent, but it is discouraging to these people to find that they are unable to get a reasonable price for the grain they have grown.

A deal that can be made with India has been mentioned. India has offered 3,000,000 sacks for the bagging of grain in Australia, and that is an important consideration. Every hon. member knows the difficult position we are in because of shortage of bags for our grain. This year it has been almost impossible to carry on continuously with the harvesting of peanuts in the Burnett district because of the shortage of bags. Many threshers work only two or three days a week for this reason. If this deal can be made then great benefit will accrue to the State. I think it will be admitted that there should be no hold-up in the harvesting of wheat in particular when it is ripe, because a hold-up at that time might mean considerable loss.

Another important factor is the offer by India to supply linseed oil. There has been a delay in the painting of houses and so on because of this shortage.

Mr. Collins: The export of wheat will achieve the same result in that respect.

Mr. HEADING: But I understand that this deal can be done more rapidly. Painters are complaining of lack of work because of shortage of linseed oil. Only recently the secretary of the Painters' Union stated in the Press that painters are being held up because of shortage of oil.

If we cannot get bags we cannot harvest our wheat. Unlike the Southern States, where they have silos, Queensland must bag all her wheat and for that reason it is essential that supplies of bags be made available as speedily as possible.

The Atherton maize-growers have been put in a much better position, in that I understand they are getting 14s. a bushel, which is much better than the sorghum-growers have been able to obtain up to the present. I am not suggesting that there has been any political favouritism but the sorghum-growers should be placed at least in the same position as the maize-growers are in at the present time.

Mr. BURROWS: (Port Curtis) (12.35 p.m.): I desire to associate myself with this very desirable motion, as it concerns a matter about which the growers are very concerned. There are not as many sorghum-growers in the Monto district as on the Downs, but a considerable quantity has been produced in that area. This crop has been the only return quite a number of the farmers have had for at least two years and now that they have been able to produce a crop they are rather disappointed to know that they cannot market it. I am sure that that point is fully appreciated by all hon. members.

I trust that the Minister's representations will met with the success they deserve. It is also pleasing to hear that one class of grain-grower will not be made an aristocrat at the expense of another class. It was gratifying to hear the Minister's remarks about speculators in these crops, and to know that they are going to get their deserts and not be allowed to farm the farmers. After hearing what the Premier and the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock have done, I am sure that they are as determined as anybody else in Queensland to see that the growers get what they deserve. Queensland is not going to be made the Cinderella State in respect of this crop.

It is interesting to know, too, that had the wheat crop been a failure Queensland could have come to the rescue of the rest of Australia by producing this very useful and bountiful crop, given an average season and average encouragement.

Mr. CHALK (East Toowoomba) (12.38 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the hon. member for Cunningham, because my party realises that this is a matter of importance, not only to the sorghum-growers on the Darling Downs but to the State generally.

I was particularly pleased to hear the Minister say in his opening remarks that this was a motion well worth while; I am certain that the growers of sorghum in Queensland

will be pleased to have those remarks from him and to know just what has taken place between the State and Commonwealth Governments in an endeavour to have this matter ironed out.

Already it has been clearly shown that the sorghum crop on this occasion was a most prolific one, but the successful marketing of the crop depends to a considerable degree on finance, particularly in connection with returned soldiers, many of whom are growers of sorghum on the Downs. The hon. member for Cunningham has pointed out that many of the men who have sorghum on their properties lost considerably because of the drought, which prevented a satisfactory wheat crop. They went into sorghum production, believing that it would be an outlet for them, and now this man-made crisis, as we may term it, originated in Canberra, has arisen and threatens to close it to them.

It is conservatively estimated that at least 1,000,000 bushels of grain sorghum are in the hands of the growers and a similar quantity in the hands of the merchants and so it will be realised that a considerable amount of finance is tied up in this crop, which if made available to the growers would play a very important part in the further development of the grain industry, especially on the Darling Downs.

I have discussed the matter with many sorghum-growers and I have gone into it fairly fully with the merchants, who have assured me that the Australian market will not be able to absorb all the grain sorghum at present in storage.

Mr. Roberts: It is the merchant that you are concerned about.

Mr. CHALK: The hon. member for Nundah can see things only from the legal side. He usually speaks on legal matters, but I am discussing a matter of vital concern to some of my primary-producer electors. Everything possible has been done by the Grain-Growers' Association and the Minister has explained just what the State Government have done in the matter but the Federal Government continue the ban to the detriment of the sorghum-growers of Queensland.

While this controversy is going on the rats, mice and the weevils are continuing their attacks on the crop, and these, if allowed to go on much longer, will render it useless for both State and Commonwealth requirements. It would appear that the Federal Government are deliberately feeding the weevils while starving people are crying out for the grain.

I am well aware that the argument of the Federal Government is that the ban is required in order to see that the maximum quantity of wheat will be exported to Great Britain and other countries and I entirely agree that we as a wheat-producing country should make certain that we are able to send as much wheat as we possibly can to the countries overseas, but I should like everyone to look at the position a little more closely than that. It is admitted by all that the present wheat crop throughout Australia promises to be a record one. Indeed, I am told it will be sufficient to meet more than three times

Australia's requirements. I understand also that the State wheat crop this year will be ample for normal State needs, whereas previously, as the Minister has explained, it has been necessary to import wheat from other States to supply them. On the figures, is it not possible for Australia to make a very substantial contribution towards the wheat requirements of overseas countries and still have enough to meet our own? And does it not follow that when it is harvested the position of the sorghum-growers will be a tragic one unless the present stock of grain sorghum is exported at once? That being so, we should export the surplus grain sorghum immediately.

I have been told on reliable authority that not only will the Indian Government take all of our surplus grain-sorghum but that they will pay £16 10s. a ton for it. That Government have agreed to have ships in our harbours within three weeks of the lifting of this ban. And that is only one side of this argument. I am given to understand also that if this export ban is lifted the vessels that will come here to load grain sorghum will come here loaded not only with linseed oil but with jute. Why, only two days ago one Brisbane firm told me that they had a written undertaking from the Indian Government that the first vessel that comes here to lift grain sorghum will bring to this State at least 500 tons of linseed oil and jute for making approximately 3,000,000 bags. I am quite sure that every hon. member realises how urgently supplies of linseed oil are needed. Why, hundreds of industries are crying out for it. In many instances the shortage is being felt even in the domestic needs of our womenfolk. Therefore, this question affects not only the growers but many other industries within our own State and the Commonwealth. Take the position in Queensland as regards linoleum.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I hope that the hon. member will not get away from the subject-matter before the chair.

Mr. CHALK: I was endeavouring to point out that the position as it affects linoleum in this State is wrapped up in the shortage of linseed oil, which in turn is wrapped up in the grain-sorghum question. Today, because of the shortage of linseed oil, we can get only a very cheap grade of Australian linoleum.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I cannot allow the hon. member to continue in that strain.

Mr. CHALK: Very well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will accept your ruling and will content myself with saying that this export of grain sorghum is affecting very many industries in Queensland. If we do not export grain sorghum we shall not get supplies of linseed oil, which the Indian Government have announced they want to barter for grain sorghum.

This House will agree that the Federal Government must do something more than they are doing at present. The Minister outlined to us what the Premier and himself were doing, but we must go even further and

make certain that the Federal Government take notice of our representations, and see to it that the growers in Queensland get at least the same treatment as is being meted out to grain-growers in other States.

I hope that this Chamber will be unanimously behind this motion, and that we shall see the Premier and the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock demonstrating to the Federal Minister for Commerce and Agriculture, Mr. Pollard, who I am told is anti-Queensland, that we want protection for the growers, as well as materials for many industries, particularly linseed oil for which a vital need exists.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) (12.50 p.m.): I do not want to prevent the hon. member for Logan, who rose at the same time as I did, from making his small contribution to the debate, but in accordance with the policy I have adopted since my election, I want to declare myself on this motion. After listening to the hon. member for Cunningham and the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock, I want to say I am in complete accord with it.

I am prepared to accept the assurance that the grain position in this State is such that the internal economy of the country would not be affected by the export of this surplus sorghum. I am prepared to accept their assurance too that if the sorghum is not exported it will deteriorate, and be lost not only to the farmers themselves but to the country and the people overseas who need it.

I really believe that if the Commonwealth Government were fair and honest—which they are not—when they said to the farmers, "You cannot export it; we will not give you an export licence," then the decent thing for the Commonwealth Government to do would be to give the farmers the export price for the sorghum. But apparently they say to the farmer, "You cannot export it; you have to let it rot in your fields and sheds and barns and warehouses, and take the risk whether the mice and weevils beat the buyer to the sorghum." I condemn the attitude the Commonwealth Government adopt in general to export licences. There is no difficulty in the way of a big crook—a big racketeer—

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member is going outside the scope of the motion.

Mr. AIKENS: I obey your call to order Mr. Mann, I only wanted to suggest to the farmers that if they want to get their sorghum exported they tie themselves up with a Romano or Parry or Goldberg or some other big crook who has the ear of the Federal Government and they will get not only permission to export sorghum but permission to export themselves. That is the way to get permission from the Federal Government—tie yourself up with a big black-marketeer or big taxation-dodger or a big crook who wants to flee the country in order to dodge the responsibility for his criminal and nefarious actions and you will not only get permission to export your goods but you will get permission to leave yourself and dodge the investigations that are pending. I regret, although I feel sure it would ulti-

mately react to the detriment of the farmers, that Romano or Goldberg or Parry or one of that type who have the ear of the Federal Government, are not interested in sorghum. If they were there would be no difficulty in getting an export licence.

Mr. PLUNKETT (Albert) (12.53 p.m.): We cannot blame the Federal Government up to a point for restricting the export of sorghum in the early stages until the wheat harvest was assured. At that time there was a shortage of grain in Australia, but the whole position has altered today. I wish to compliment the Minister on the action he has taken over many months, and also the Premier for trying to bring pressure to bear on the Commonwealth Government to induce them to lift this ban. We have reached the stage when if Queenslanders are not prepared to fight for Queensland against the Commonwealth we shall be left well behind.

I believe the ban was placed on this grain for one purpose. I am of the opinion that the reason for the ban is the influence used by poultry farmers and other interests and meal-makers and manufacturers in southern States who have gone to the Minister and asked him to see that this grain is kept in the country. They want the Commonwealth Government to retain the ban in order to get cheap foodstuffs for the manufacture of meals for poultry and other food supplies. It appears that the growers of sorghum in Queensland are to be sacrificed for the benefit of people in the southern States.

We know that we shall have a bumper wheat crop of 90,000,000 bushels and we are faced with the serious position of having bagging for only 38,000,000 bushels. That will cause a great loss. We have an opportunity of doing three different things at the one time, if the right thing is done. We could sell our products at a good price and we could get from India, the only country from which we could get them, jute goods that are hopelessly short at the present time. Moreover, we could get from that country linseed oil, of which there will be a shortage for some time to come. By closing the deal with India, a good job would be done for our producers of sorghum and Australia would get in return some of the commodities in short supply.

The Commonwealth Government are becoming a law unto themselves. In addition to Queensland, New South Wales is having a disagreement with the Commonwealth about wheat and wheat bags and how the wheat is to be stored. The position is so serious that the wheat boards have been told that the producers must hold 8,000,000 bushels on the land as there will be no provision for storing it, in silos or anywhere else. In effect, they are telling the farmers that they must keep the wheat on their farms and use it for stock feed.

I am pleased the Government are in agreement with this motion and was pleased to hear the Minister say that he is willing to do whatever he can do to ensure that the sorghum grain is exported. Eventually the

growing of sorghum will become a Queensland industry, more than in any of the other States.

Mr. HILEY (Logan) (12.57 p.m.): It is necessary that we should remind ourselves that this industry is essentially a Queensland industry, with no southern parallel, and because that is its characteristic it is an excellent illustration of the defects of centralised administration and the failure of people in Canberra to understand the diversified requirements of a continent as vast as Australia when the particular problem to be solved does not happen to have local application. I am perfectly satisfied that if sorghum were freely grown in the States of New South Wales and Victoria, this crisis that faces us today might not and probably would not have arisen.

Another approach to this particular problem is this; I accept the clear inference of a statement made by the Minister that the Federal Minister was sincere in the purpose he was trying to accomplish, but here again one gets a classic example of a purely theoretical approach to a problem by people who have no practical understanding of the issues and because of that find themselves making an utter blunder in the ultimate handling of the situation. Obviously, on paper, the ideal of conservation of sorghum and wheat for the consumption of other parts of the world looks beautiful and if it were a practicable possibility it would be the sensible thing for the people of this country to do. But, in practice, when the practical issue of the failure to retain the sorghum crop for home consumption is realised and measured in the whole balancing of the problem, then what in theory seemed to be an excellent arrangement in practice proves to be plainly dangerous.

The case put forward by the mover of this motion and other hon. members in its support as to the benefit to be derived from the exchange of certain commodities and above all the hazard to new planting—the cumulative argument—leaves me in no possible doubt of the wisdom of this motion and the urgency of the representations implied in the debate.

One further aspect of this that I want to comment on in some brief detail is the peculiar effect of the loss of income tax on the position of the sorghum-growers and other growers of cereals in this State, and to contrast the position of the average grower of cereals in Queensland with that of growers of similar crops in other parts of the Commonwealth. I think it is admitted that those areas in which cereals are grown in Queensland are more subject to disturbance by drought than areas where similar crops are grown in other parts of the Commonwealth. I recognise that the South Australian and Western Australian growers in particular, as well as others, do experience droughts, but when it comes to the Queensland wheat crop the experience has been one of drought disturbance of greater than normal incidence. The effect is that because our taxation laws permit of the carrying forward of losses and provide for the averaging of the incomes of primary producers, when you get a year in

which nature is bountiful that is an extraordinary reason why you should do everything possible to encourage the grower of cereals in Queensland to go his hardest to catch up on the capital losses he sustained in the earlier years of drought.

What do we find in this instance? The two areas in Queensland where sorghum is mostly grown are the Downs and the Burnett. On the Downs there was an almost total failure of the wheat crop last year, with the result that virtually every man on the Downs who depended substantially on wheat as a means of income is at present carrying forward a debit balance of losses with the Commissioner of Taxation. In the Burnett, the other great sorghum-producing area in Queensland, they experienced last year what was probably the worst drought in the history of the area and I doubt whether there would be one single primary producer in that area who is not "in the red" with the Commissioner of Taxation. These men need every possible encouragement and every possible opportunity to overtake the grievous harm they suffered in the years of terrible drought. If those farmers who are already holding considerable stocks of unsold sorghum approach the planting season for this year's crop, which is almost immediately in front of them, with unsold and undisposable stocks on hand, the answer obviously is that those men will be denied the opportunity of overtaking the very serious drought losses that they sustained last year.

Quite apart from all the other logical reasons why this case should be pressed to the utmost with the Federal authorities, there is the question of public morality. When a Government go to the extent of saying to their citizens, "To help the nation, produce all the cereals you can," then if there is any morality left in high places, the position of the men who responded to the call of the nation and produced the cereals should be recognised. If it is not, if these men are left lamenting with their crops still unsold their condition too would be quite intolerable. So that, apart from the abundant arguments in favour of the motion—the physical argument of the need for making best use of present stocks, the benefit of exchanging the stocks of which we have a surplus for commodities that we need badly, the hazard that logically attaches to the planting of a new season's crop if last year's surplus is not disposed of, I say on a plain question of public morality the Federal Government, having asked these people to produce this crop, should recognise their obligation and allow it to be disposed of.

Before I close there are two or three matters introduced by earlier speakers on which I wish to make passing comment. The Secretary for Agriculture and Stock happened to give to this House a classical example of a cure for black-markets. I am grateful to him for doing so. He told us graphically how when cereals were short there was substantial black-marketing in grain sorghum and other cereals and he proceeded to tell us where the correction came from. It came when production became abundant. I believe the lesson to be learned from what

happened to the black-market in cereals can apply with equal force in countless other directions in which black-marketing is flourishing.

Mr. Collins: You still must have some control.

Mr. HILEY: The two things have no relation; it is quite irrelevant to the illustration the hon. gentleman gave, which I am taking up. The illustration the Minister gave was that the minute cereal production in this State became abundant black-marketing disappeared like morning mists, and this is a lesson we should not permit ourselves to overlook.

Another comment the Minister made caused me great concern. He told us—and I was astonished to hear him say it—that he, representative of the Government of this State and charged with the administration of the affairs of the Department of Agriculture and Stock, wrote and told the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture the factual positions in relation to this industry. He even went further and sent his Director of Marketing—I understand he was the officer—from Brisbane to Canberra to convey certain information first-hand. I, in common with most hon. members, was amazed beyond measure to think that the Minister should calmly tell us he apparently passively accepted what was a clear insult, not only to the Minister himself but to this sovereign State. Are we to tolerate the state of affairs in which a Jackanapes, having a clear statement of fact made to him by a responsible Minister in this State, sends some clerk up to police the accuracy of his statement? If that sort of thing is to be tolerated I hope other voices as well as mine will be raised in protest at what I regard as a gross insult to a Minister of this State and to this State itself.

I was interested also to hear the speech delivered by the hon. member for Carnarvon and the force with which he made an eloquent and repeated plea for the control of these matters by boards constituted of producers. This is a change of front. This is a thought that we on this side of the House have expressed repeatedly as providing the ideal means of approaching the problem of organised marketing.

Mr. Collins: It is the whole of our legislation—controlled and dominated by the producers.

Mr. HILEY: I am glad to hear that. Everyone will be glad, because it is something that administratively the Minister is reluctant to carry through.

I am pleased to support the motion moved in such an interesting manner this morning and I close with this comment: that as pollard has always been recognised as being a food for rats, mice and weevils, if the present state of affairs continues Mr. Pollard will be regarded as the patron saint of rats, mice, and weevils.

Mr. SPARKES (Aubigny) (2.24 p.m.): I should first of all like to congratulate the mover and seconder on the able manner in which this matter has been brought before

the House. Both hon. members are practical men and in a position to know the state of affairs on the Darling Downs.

I congratulate the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock and the Government on their attitude towards this very important matter. It is wonderful to think that when the State is vitally concerned we can all get together in this way. I want to associate the Premier also with this fight in defence of Queensland. He is putting up a splendid fight in the Southern States on behalf of Queensland, but we do not realise as much as they do in the South just what he is doing on behalf of Queensland. I learnt more about the Premier's fight for Queensland during my short stay in the South than I would have heard here in 12 months. The hon. gentleman is deserving of all the credit we can give him in this connection, because he has never taken advantage of the situation to enlarge upon the fight that he is putting up against virtually his own political people in the South in defence of this State. We must put up this fight today if Queensland is to retain her sovereignty. There is no doubt that today this State is threatened by Victoria and New South Wales, with their huge populations. They stand like octopuses at the very door of this State.

We have this important subject before us today because of our fortunate position of being in what is known as the summer-rain-fall belt. The very crop we are discussing is grown under those conditions. It is harvested in the winter-time, when little or no rain is to be expected, and those conditions offer a splendid opportunity in this State for the growing of that cereal. We can grow wheat in this State and grow it well on the Darling Downs, but unfortunately the quantity is very small in comparison with, say, that produced in New South Wales, with an estimated crop this year of 120 million bushels—Queensland will be fortunate if she reaches 10 million bushels. The position is that not only the sorghum-growers but the maize-growers also are to be sacrificed for Southern interests again, and that is my point. That is what the Minister is fighting against, and that is what Queensland has to contend with.

Let me come back to the subject of grain sorghum. Last year the wheat crop was a failure, and many share-farmers in the Dalby district were faced with a possibility of having to leave the farms and it was at that very time that appeals came over the air to the primary producers to grow more grain, to grow grain sorghum and other grains, and the farmer went to work and planted as much sorghum as he could. Having produced the crop, what is his position today? He cannot market it. I sympathise with the Secretary for Agriculture and Stock. I have had a number of interviews with him on this matter. I am pleased with the attitude of the Government on it. The Premier is fighting for many other interests, apart from the sorghum-growers, because Queensland is getting a raw deal from the South. At one time I had the idea that one Parliament for the whole of Australia would be ideal, but by

heavens, because of what happened during the war, and especially the latter stages of it, that idea has gone right out of my head.

Mr. Gair: I think you supported uniform taxation.

Mr. SPARKES: Quite probably I did. I am not going to say that I did, but if I did, then I was wrong. It is easy enough to do a thing and say that you are right, but it takes a little courage to admit that you are wrong. If I supported uniform taxation then I admit I was wrong. I believe that when this State and the other States of the Commonwealth gave away their right of taxation they sold their birthright. Once a State loses the right to impose taxation, it loses control of its people. Probably we should not be in this position today had we not done it. If the Deputy Premier says that I supported uniform taxation—and I have no knowledge that I did—then I say that what I did was wrong. I am quite willing to admit it. I am quite prepared to admit it.

My main purpose in rising was to congratulate the Premier particularly on the great fight he is putting up for this State in the Federal arena against the interests of the more powerful States. It is unfortunate that as soon as some people get to Canberra they become obsessed with one idea and the smaller States, such as Queensland and Western Australia, are forgotten. It is because of that fact that I congratulate the Premier and his Government on the attitude they are adopting on matters of vital interest to this State. I congratulate them on their stand on this particular question because the growing of grain sorghum is destined to become a great industry in this State. Everything is set for it. Wheat-growing is a very precarious industry in this State. I have heard men say that the wheat harvest in this State this season is assured. The wheat harvest is not assured until it is in the bag, and even then it may be subject to flood rains. We are coming into the storm season. Therefore, anything may happen to it. If we get rain in November the wheat harvest will be gone to glory. Grain sorghum is harvested under winter conditions and to me is one of the coming great industries in Queensland, just as maize-growing has become important on the Atherton Tableland. My point is that if the Government sit down to dictation from Canberra then it will be only a matter of time when our main industry in this State will be subordinated to the interests of the southern States.

Mr. McINTYRE: (Cunningham) (2.32 p.m.), in reply: We have the Minister's assurance on behalf of the Government that everything will be done to right this gross injustice. Therefore, I formally ask leave to withdraw my motion for the adjournment of the House and allow the ordinary business to be proceeded with. I repeat that the story is a simple one, that it is also open to a simple solution, and that I hope common sense will prevail.

Motion (Mr. McIntyre), by leave, withdrawn.

FRUIT AND VEGETABLES BILL.

SECOND READING.

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Cook—Secretary for Agriculture and Stock) (2.33 p.m.): I move—

“That the Bill be now read a second time.”

The discussion on the initiation of the Bill was pretty wide and general. Knowing the contents of the Bill as I did, I dealt very fully with them. I therefore do not want to delay the House unduly at this stage. There are, however, a few matters on which I could probably inform hon. members, particularly those that were raised on the previous stage.

One is the fact that the grower needs to be educated up to the arts of grading and packing his fruit and vegetables. I am very happy to say that we have in my department officers who are continually going round meeting fruit-growers, attending meetings on subjects of interest to them and giving very necessary instructions. It is very necessary that fruit- and vegetable-growers should be well versed in the art of grading and packing. Very often good fruit is spoiled by bad packing. This is a very important function of officers of the department. Any grower or body of growers who believe they are not au fait with that work and care to communicate with the head office in Brisbane will receive the necessary attention. We will see that necessary instructions are given both orally and in pamphlet and lecture form to bring them up to date on this very important aspect of these industries.

As I stated earlier, we do know that certain malpractices have been going on. We do know that it has been very hard to police them. That has been one of the principal reasons for bringing down this Bill. It is hoped that it will make it more easy to police the grading, packing, and displaying of fruit for sale.

We are aware also that the old Act did not include many of the very important fruits we have in Queensland at the present time. For instance, it did not include papaws. Papaw is a very valuable fruit that is gradually growing in importance, and I venture to say that with the development of aerial transport it will play a very important part in the export of fruit from this State to the southern markets. I believe that papaw is one of the best fruits we grow in Queensland. While we know that the pineapple crop is probably the biggest grown here I believe that with the development of refrigerated transport the papaw will be a very valuable part of our fruit supply. I think it is equally necessary to have vegetables included in the packing business as fruit. Both are well catered for in the Bill with which we are dealing.

Quite an important item was mentioned during the original debate; that is the possibilities of snap-freezing and its importance in the United States. While I am in agree-

ment that it can be a very important thing, since the debate I have gone into the matter in more detail in order to ascertain the place it holds in the United States of America, where it is practised to a greater extent than in any other country in the world. First of all, it is a rather costly way of preserving fruits or vegetables. It is a very good way—there is no question about that—but I shall give the percentage of fruit or vegetables snap-frozen in America, canned or dried, used as beverages, or used fresh. According to statistics to which we have had access, 21 per cent. of the fruit is canned, 12 per cent. is dried, beverages account for 9 per cent., 57 per cent. is used fresh, which makes a total of 99 per cent.; and snap-freezing accounts for only 1 per cent.

Mr. Aikens: One per cent, or less.

Mr. COLLINS: One per cent. or less. I venture to say that possibly the United States would offer a better opportunity for the sale of that type of product than Queensland or Australia, for the reason that we have climatic conditions that enable us to grow fruit or vegetables for virtually the whole 12 months.

Mr. Aikens: In some part of the State or other.

Mr. COLLINS: In some part of the State or other. I am not saying that you can do it in all the State. In some places you cannot grow them in the winter—the high tableland and Stanthorpe for instance, but we can do so on the lower altitudes. Certain fruits we cannot grow in Southern Queensland in winter but we can grow them perfectly north of Rockhampton in the rich Burdekin area, the Townsville area, the Tully area, and Cairns area. In those areas we can grow fruits that are entirely out of season in Southern Queensland or Australia.

Mr. Aikens: Right in the middle of the winter.

Mr. COLLINS: Right in the middle of the winter. Take the Burdekin; the best crops of potatoes and fruit are grown there in the winter. We have such a range of climate that while not discounting the value of snap-freezing and the possibilities it holds, I wish to warn the House that we do not want to dwell unduly on it.

Another thing I was able to discover in connection with quick-freezing of fruits and vegetables, is that for this procedure they have to be cut into small pieces, and with most fruits sugar has to be put in. In the preliminary treatment, therefore, it does not differ in many respects from the handling of fruit that has to be subsequently canned. The cost of quick-freezing is approximately the same as for canning, but the distribution of quick-frozen products is more costly because they have to be stored in a temperature at 32 degrees below freezing point. Transport under these conditions is one of the big difficulties. It is very difficult, particularly in a tropical climate such as we have in Queensland, to keep temperatures down to anywhere

round about freezing point. Any hon. member who has had the problems of transporting cheese or butter knows that very well, but when the temperature must be got down to 32 degrees below freezing point it means that one has quite a serious problem on one's hands.

I could go to considerable lengths regarding this procedure, but I think I have said enough to inform the House that we must keep our feet on the ground in all these things and do everything in the most practical way. We do not want to eat canned or snap-frozen fruit or vegetables if we can eat fresh fruit or vegetables. We want to eat fruit and vegetables as fresh as they can be, and within as short a time as possible from the time they are picked. Moreover, great deterioration takes place. A fruit or vegetable picked before it is ripe is very often artificially coloured in gas chambers. For instance, bananas and oranges, although they look perfectly ripe, when one tastes them at the table they are very insipid and frequently acid.

The Bill, as hon. members will have seen, gives us a great deal more control over the correct ripening of these products and the control of them. It gives control over the size also, which means grading. It lays down grade standards, and these standards can be policed. It is no use having a standard if there is no way of patrolling the standard. Unfortunately, as we know, one can do things with the best of intentions, but unless one has the legal power to deal with a dishonest man, every honest and decent trader has to fall in line with him eventually. I am not suggesting that the ordinary trader is dishonest; in fact, the dishonest man is the rare man, but, after all, he is the man who sets the pace. If he is allowed to sell cheap fruit at a high price every honest trader has to fall in line in his trading or sell out his business to him. The whole object of the Bill is to protect the decent, fair, and honest trader and the person who goes into a shop and there sees splendid fruit and vegetables marked up at a price and to give him the opportunity to buy what he sees, to make it compulsory for the shopkeeper to sell the fruit he has on display at a certain price to the man or woman who wants to buy it.

With these few more or less brief remarks I have pleasure in moving this motion.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba—Leader of the Opposition) (2.44 p.m.): This Bill is important, and in the main is an improvement on the existing Fruit and Vegetables Act. As compared with that measure there are no drastic changes. The Bill is very similar to the original Act, with the exception that it includes a number of regulations under the original Act and should tighten up some of the weaknesses in our previous legislation. Personally, I think that if it is administered as I feel sure it will be administered, it will be of benefit to the fruit-growers and the fruit industry of the State. There is no doubt that it is many a long year since there was a greater need or urgency for stricter supervision of the marketing of fruit than there is at present.

As we pointed out at an earlier stage, during the war years people got slack in a number of sections of the trade. The grower got slack in his pack, the agent was not as particular in the selling of the product as he should have been because, owing to the abnormal demand he could sell anything without any trouble, and the retailer was not particular either as to the class of fruit he bought, because he also could sell it to a fruit-hungry public. But the time is fast approaching when these conditions will come to an end. When that time does come, quality will count. Anything that we can do to help restore our quality standards should be done.

On looking at the report of the Royal Commission on Fruit and Vegetables we find that on page 11 the Commission had some very pertinent remarks to make with regard to the inadequacy and non-enforcement of marketing standards. It said—

“One of the causes of glut is the arrival at the market of unsound, immature or low-quality fruit and vegetables or of commodities whose bad grading or topping inhibits sales.”

There is no doubt about that. If we analyse the majority of gluts that take place on the fruit and vegetable markets, not only in this State but in any State in Australia, we find that there is never a glut of well-packed quality fruit. A glut consists of the unsound, immature, badly packed, and badly-graded fruit. While that fruit is on the market it has a general effect on sales and forces down the overall price received for fruit on the market at that time. If we could eliminate from the market this fruit, which should never be on the market, we should be doing a great deal towards eliminating the main cause of gluts.

The report goes on to say—

“It was generally conceded that since the war the standards followed in relation to such matters had appreciably sunk.”

The members of the commission then say—

“This drop in standards has been contributed to by several causes, the chief being that there have been ruling high prices and short supplies so that the grower has been induced to send to market commodities which he would not ordinarily send, and packed in a way in which he would not ordinarily pack them. The imposition of ceiling prices has also had an effect in this regard since, in many cases, the poorly-packed and second-class commodity attracts the same price as the first-class commodity.”

There is no doubt that the fixing of ceiling prices has had a boomerang effect and has not been in the interests of either the grower or the consumer in many instances.

The report also says—

“This tendency of growers in war-time to market such commodities in such a way has been permitted by the authorities upon the excuse that, in time of short supply, the only commodities which should be rejected are those unfit for human consumption.”

Further on the report says—

“It was apparent to us that the inspection of these commodities and their control by the officers of the Department of Agriculture have been very perfunctory and indeed of little value.”

The Commission then makes this recommendation—

“In our opinion the Act and the Regulations should be reviewed towards tightening up the standards, and the law should be fully enforced. There seems to be no reason why packing, grading, quality, and maturity standards should not apply to all types of fruit and vegetables and not only to some as at present.”

There is no doubt that that is a very sound recommendation, and I take it that the Minister took that into account in bringing down this legislation that we are considering today.

On page 27 of its report, the Commission had this to say with regard to packing and grading—

“In our view the law in this regard should be reviewed and widened to prevent poor quality and ill-packed goods coming on the market, but the most important matter to ensure is the enforcement of the law.”

That is the point. After all, it is not a bit of use arriving at standards and passing Acts of Parliament and regulations under those Acts unless the law is enforced, and enforced in such a way that it will bring about that desirable thing we want to achieve in marketing, the elimination of all the undesirable classes of fruit that bring about gluts on our markets.

It is interesting to note that in this measure under consideration the definitions, as the Minister told us, have been enlarged, and that a number of fruits and vegetables have been included. There is a drag-net phrase in the definitions which reads, “any other fruit or vegetables.” Therefore it does not matter whether the fruits and vegetables are named or not, because they are covered by the drag-net provision. Still, I think it is a good idea to include, so far as we can, the names of the fruits and vegetables with which we are dealing, because if a grower looks at the Act he can understand it more clearly than he would if we said merely, “any fruit grown in Queensland.”

The main provisions of this Bill can be classified under four headings. The first concerns the grading and packing and labelling of fruit and vegetables, whether for sale in Queensland or in other States. Then we have the provision that inspectors may enter packing sheds to see that the grading standards are carried into effect. Thirdly, there is the provision dealing with the retailer's duty to sell fruit of a similar quality to that displayed in his display. There is also power to condemn fruit and vegetables that do not conform to the prescribed standards. Provision is contained in the Bill relating to the powers of inspectors and the enforcement of the Act.

In respect of grading, we have to arrive at a certain standard for all the different varieties of fruit in this State and for vegetables as well. It is necessary to set these grades out clearly so that they can be clearly understood by growers, who will be responsible for the packing of their fruit according to those grades. I have every confidence in the officers of the Department of Agriculture and Stock who will be responsible for the fixation of the respective grades, because they are gentlemen who come in close contact with the growers and know the growers' point of view. That is something to be commended in the activities of the department at present, because in the past there used to be a gap between the growers on the one hand and the officers of the department on the other. There was a certain amount of suspicion in the growers' minds in regard to officers of the department, but over the years, because of a more personal contact between officers and growers, that suspicion has been broken down and today there is a feeling of friendliness and confidence in each, which is certainly to the advantage of both. I believe that as the officers have now the viewpoint of the growers in mind, the standards will be fixed with the idea of setting the highest possible necessary standard for our various fruits, and they will be standards that it will be possible to attain and be satisfactory to the growers.

Mr. Collins: And to the consumer.

Mr. NICKLIN: If a higher standard is set for marketing purposes naturally the consumer will benefit.

One of the greatest difficulties in the marketing of fruit in the past has been that the retailer was not able to buy a sufficient quantity of a specified grade or standard of fruit that he required. The fruit has been so badly packed or graded that he is unable to give other than an indifferent service to his customers. If he can go to the market and say to his agent, “I want three cases of 160, choice standard oranges,” knowing that when he opens the case he will have 160 oranges of that standard he will be able to give a very much better service to the public. He may want a case of 18 pineapples or 7-inch bananas and if he knows that he can buy that grade or standard with confidence that he will get them, he will give a better service than he does today.

Another matter of utmost importance is the marketing and labelling of cases. I know that the regulations lay it down that fruit cases shall be marked with such and such particulars, that they shall be labelled with the respective grades, numbers and contents and things like that, but at the present time the regulations are not being observed as fully as they might. You see large quantities of fruit on the market with no marks on the outside of the cases to indicate what is inside. The agent has to tell the buyer what it contains and the buyer has to make a rough guess as to its contents. It is very important from the growers' point of view that he should mark the cases in such a way as to show the variety and quality of the fruit, together with the count. If he does that the

buyer can see exactly what he wants to buy and is not called upon to open dozens and dozens of cases to get his requirements.

Mr. Moore: And a greater quantity will be sold.

Mr. NICKLIN: Yes, and the market will be cleared more quickly. There will not be the congestion at the markets that there is today.

If I may digress just for a moment, I should like to point out that the congestion at the Brisbane market today is actually to the detriment of the sale of fruit and vegetables and before very long all concerned in the marketing of fruit and vegetables will have to face the problem of establishing modern city markets somewhere in the city of Brisbane where fruit and vegetables can be sold to advantage, thereby removing the congestion from the centre of the city that exists round the markets today. That is not a provision in the Bill and I am not going to pursue it any further.

In regard to standards, one of the most important factors is maturity. Nothing condemns fruit and prevents its ready sale more than the foisting of immature fruit on the buying public. As regularly as the sun rises and sets, so at the commencement of the seasons for the various fruits the marketing of very immature fruit reacts seriously against the sale of that fruit later in the season. At the beginning of the citrus season each year you have immature oranges coming on the market, not only in Queensland but throughout Australia. Oranges that are coloured up in the ripening rooms look all right on the outside but are as sour as gall when you come to eat them. We find high prices ruling in the market for about a fortnight and then you cannot give oranges away, for the simple reason that the public will not buy them. It is about a month or six weeks later before they get sufficient confidence to buy oranges again. That should never happen. It can be prevented only by setting a reasonable maturity standard and strict policing and enforcement of that standard. The same remarks apply to pineapples, not so much on the Brisbane market as on the Sydney market.

Mr. Collins: And in the Brisbane market too.

Mr. NICKLIN: That is so, but not to the same extent. This happens particularly in the southern markets. At the commencement of marketing the winter crop each year, we have immature fruit going on the market, which ruins the sales of pineapples on our southern markets. A similar happening occurs to a lesser extent in the summer. Maturity standards are particularly hard to police in connection with summer pineapples because they are worked on a sugar content. The summer pineapple will very often pass the sugar-content standard yet it is fruit that should never go on the market for weeks after it does. The maturity standard of pineapples will have to be arrived at not only by taking into account the sugar content but also the maturity standard and the colour

standard of the fruit. These, in combination, will perhaps get over the difficulties of the moment. Now you cannot condemn these immature pineapples, because they measure up to the sugar content that is set. It is a very serious matter to the fruit industry and I hope that when this Bill is placed on the statute book the Minister and his officers will arrive at satisfactory maturity standards and see that they are maintained and enforced.

We have trouble each year in connection with deciduous fruits also. A very big percentage of them come on the market in an immature state. I know that growers in the Stanthorpe area, where deciduous fruits are grown to a large extent, have a big problem in combating fruit fly and that results in the picking of the fruit earlier than it should be picked. In hot climates fruit ripens very rapidly in summer, causing the growers to play safe by sending immature fruit to market and that does not do the industry any good. The difficulty could be overcome by the establishment of cold stores in the Stanthorpe district. One is in operation now, but the establishment of cool stores by the growers will permit much of this fruit to be placed in them in an advanced stage of maturity, to be held there for a while, thus easing the rush on to the market and at the same time helping to control the fruit-fly infestation.

Mr. Brown: Can you tell us anything about black heart in pineapples?

Mr. NICKLIN: I can. It is a problem that the industry has been worried about for a considerable time. It is practically impossible to pick a black-hearted pineapple by its appearance.

Mr. Collins: I should say nearly as difficult as picking a black-hearted politician. (Laughter.)

Mr. NICKLIN: I would sooner pick a black-hearted politician. (Renewed laughter.)

The hon. member for Fassifern says that we need only have a look on one side of the House to detect them. (Laughter.)

Mr. Collins: We know which side. (Laughter.)

Mr. NICKLIN: The black-hearted pineapple is a physiological trouble and we do not know exactly what the real cause of it is, although we have an idea. If the rough-leaf pineapple is put on a cold floor in the winter it will not often go black-hearted, whereas the smooth-leaf pineapple, for some unknown reason, will have a black heart through it. It is impossible for growers to tell the affected fruit by external appearance, although some say they can detect them.

Mr. Brown: It would be a good job if they could detect them, because sometimes you buy a pineapple and it is all black in the centre.

Mr. NICKLIN: I can assure the hon. member that the growers are just as concerned about it as the buyers. We realise that it does not do our industry any good

and that we cannot build up the sale of our fruit unless we can give the public something with which they are satisfied.

There is another thing I should like to tell the hon. member—that we would like to get rid of it because all through the winter canning season we have to pay a dockage of 13s. 4d. a ton to cope with the black-heart that may be in pineapples that we send.

Mr. Theodore: Do you think the carbide treatment may have something to do with it?

Mr. NICKLIN: No, the carbide treatment has nothing to do with the incidence of black-heart; as a matter of fact, by treating with carbide and forcing an earlier bloom on winter fruit you may eliminate black heart to a certain extent, because it is generally from the middle to the end of the pineapple season that black-heart is worse. By bringing the pines in earlier by carbide treatment and marketing them in June you eliminate the incidence of black-heart to a great extent. Unfortunately, that is something we shall not be able to eliminate by setting any grade or maturity standards, because it is something you cannot detect from the external appearance of the pines with any degree of certainty. I should again like to emphasise there is a great need for setting more efficient and effective maturity standards. Nothing will chase the buyers away more quickly than getting an unsatisfactory or immature fruit, whatever variety it may happen to be.

Mr. Dunstan: How would you test the maturity, by tests or appearance?

Mr. NICKLIN: A combination of both. I would suggest a test for sugar content and appearance for maturity standards. It is particularly hard to pick a mature orange from outside appearance. They are often artificially coloured and look the full size and almost the mature colour, but when you cut them they are far from good. The sugar and acidity test will very quickly determine whether an orange is fit to eat.

In regard to the grading and picking, and maturity standards, the only way in which we can get satisfactory results is along the lines suggested by the Minister, that is, by educating the growers. As I have already pointed out, a large number of new growers have entered the industry in recent years and they have to be taught proper grading and proper maturity standards. In that respect the Minister's officers can do a big job. I would suggest to him that he arrange through his officers packing field days in the various fruit-growing districts.

As the Minister knows, field days, which have been a feature of departmental work for a number of years, are extremely instructive and do more to convey information to the growers than all the articles that may appear in the "Agricultural Journal" or pamphlets the department distributes. Yet, I have not yet known of a packing field day given by the officers of the Minister's department. Some may have been held somewhere in the State but I have not heard of them.

Mr. Jesson: Do not the growers get the "Agricultural Journal"?

Mr. NICKLIN: Yes.

Mr. Jesson: There is enough about packing in them.

Mr. NICKLIN: I know that, but as I have been explaining, you can teach more by visual and practical demonstration in five minutes than can be learned by reading half a dozen pamphlets.

Mr. Aikens: You can teach more by example than precept?

Mr. NICKLIN: Exactly. I suggest that the marketing and packing officers in the department conduct field days in the various districts as opportunity offers when the fruit season begins. Here I would suggest to the Minister that he strengthen the department. At the present time there are not sufficient officers to handle that work and cover the whole State. I realise the difficulty of getting competent packing instructors; they are not easy to get.

To back up my suggestion of holding packing field days I would quote one example of how this has helped in the past through instruction given to school children in the school packing classes conducted by the department. These were started many years ago by Mr. Rowlands when he was packing instructor of the department. I venture to say that nothing has ever been done in this State that has had a more beneficial effect on packing than the work of Mr. Rowlands in these classes. During the war, of course, they fell away, but the effect such classes had on the standard of fruit going on to the market was remarkable. The kiddies went home from school and taught Dad how to pack the fruit. Although some Dads were rather difficult to convince, after some of the kiddies had packed the fruit and sent the cases to market in competition with Dad's packing we very often found that the kiddies did all the packing after that because they got two or three bob more for their pack than Dad got for his. I merely quote this as an example of the value of packing classes.

As to what is to happen to growers who contravene the regulations and to fruit that contravenes the regulations, I notice that the penalty is being increased from £20 to £50 for the first offence, and for a second offence the minimum is £10 with a maximum of £100. Those are considerable fines and a big increase on those in the original Act, but I am not complaining about that. I suggest to the Minister, however, that fines are not as effective as the other powers he has under the Act, straight-out condemnation of the fruit that does not measure up to the standards, particularly in regard to maturity. In the past we have found that fruit not up to the standard has been graded down and eventually finds its way on the market in some form or another and has been sent to the processing plant, with the result that its being sold on the market has had a detrimental effect on the sale of fruit and if sent to the processing plant has resulted in the packing of an inferior product. I think the best way

to deal with this fruit is to condemn it and sell it to the pig men—let him feed it to the pigs. We might get something out of it that way.

If growers have to pay railage, the cost of cases and everything else connected with the cost of sending fruit to market, only to have it condemned when it gets there, they will quickly mend their ways, but if they can get a few shillings for that kind of stuff it will continue to come on the market. The quickest way of eliminating it from the market is to use the powers of condemnation straight out.

I notice that under the regulation-making powers of the Bill, power is given to set the standard of package and case that may be used. I hope the Minister and his officers will police the regulations in connection with the standard of fruit cases to ensure that growers get a standard case in which to pack their fruit. I said at an earlier stage that they are getting a very raw deal from the sawmillers in the quality of timber they get for making cases.

Mr. Power: They are cutting anything at all for that.

Mr. NICKLIN: They certainly are. In a bundle of case-timber one is likely to get anything from a piece of board as thin as a sheet of paper to the end of a weather board. That is not fair to the growers. They cannot possibly market their fruit attractively unless they get a reasonable standard container. The Minister has all the power necessary under the regulation-making power to set and enforce standards. I should not mind in the least if the maximum fine of £100 was imposed on a sawmiller who continued to supply the quality of stuff we have to put up with now. Perhaps a fine or two of £100 would induce the sawmillers to give the fruit-growers a better case.

Mr. Collins: You might not get any.

Mr. NICKLIN: We should get them because the prices we are paying now make it very profitable for many millers to cut case-timber.

I wish to deal now with the retailing section of the trade. It needs a little bit of gingering-up at present, because the retailers got into bad habits during the fruit-hungry years. We find, for instance, that a great many of them are not now prepared to pass on to the public the benefits of any cheap fruit or vegetables that may be in the market. Many of them are not interested in selling cheap fruit nowadays. All they are concerned with is selling high-quality stuff at a high price. That was very noticeable during the last citrus season when there were small mandarins on the market. Although these could be bought for from 5s. to 6s. a case containing anything up to 250 to 280 mandarins, the retailers did not handle that fruit and the consumer consequently did not get the benefit, as he used to do in the old days, of being able to buy 24 mandarins for 1s. or 18 for 6d. Now he is asked to pay 2s. to 4s. a dozen all the way through. I do not know whether we can do anything about that

Mr. Collins: The growers have the power of marketing in their own hands if they like to use it.

Mr. NICKLIN: They are taking advantage of it to a considerable extent. It is not as though the retailers were not getting their share of the profits.

If you examine the report of the Royal Commission on Fruit and Vegetables you will find that it states that in most instances the mark-up ranged from 50 to 75 per cent. Let us take a mark-up of 50 per cent. and 5s. worth of fruit. Of that the retailer gets 1s. 8d., the agent who handles the fruit gets 4d. and the grower 3s. That is an instance of a 50 per cent. mark-up but as the report said, the majority are nearer 75 per cent. In the distribution of 5s. worth of fruit at that percentage you find that the retailer's share is 2s. 2d., the agent's 3½d. and the grower's 2s. 6½d. The retailer is getting a very good share out of the fruit sold and it is only right that he should be compelled to sell fruit of the quality he displays. In this respect, as I mentioned earlier, care and discretion should be used in the exercise of this power because after all the retailer goes to a great deal of trouble in arranging a beautiful display of fruit and it would not be right for the buyer to say he wanted to buy a particular layer when the quality of the fruit was the same all the way through.

Mr. Collins: The Bill does not actually say that.

Mr. NICKLIN: It says that the buyer may demand any fruit on display.

Mr. Collins: The fruit on display has to be of even quality.

Mr. NICKLIN: A crank buyer might want oranges from the bottom row.

Mr. Brown: He could have the bottom row if he took the rows above.

Mr. NICKLIN: However, I feel sure that the measure will be of considerable benefit to the industry and I have sufficient confidence in the officers of the department to know that they will administer its provisions with discretion, to the benefit not only of the fruit-grower but of those persons who keep the industry going by buying fruit. I commend the Bill and trust that it will be helpful to the industry generally.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (3.23 p.m.): With the Leader of the Opposition I think we should all support this Bill. We know that there has been a need for the tightening up of the control and policing of the present Act and therefore we think it is time that we took the steps proposed in this measure. If we carry out the provisions of this Bill in their entirety there will be benefit all round, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out. It will be a benefit to the grower to have his fruit and vegetables graded and packed cleanly and branded properly. The retailer will develop confidence in the purchase of fruit and vegetables and if the retailer develops confidence in his customers it means an easier

sale and a better price to the grower. Furthermore, confidence will be developed in the mind of the buyer because he will know that the old practice of topping does not now exist and that the quality of a layer of fruit displayed represents the quality of the whole stack. This Bill does not deal very much with maturity of fruit.

Mr. Collins: Oh, yes.

Mr. DECKER: Not as we think it should. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition in that there should be definite standards, particularly in the—

Mr. Collins: You will have standards by regulation under the Act.

Mr. DECKER: That is an important fact.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to pineapples. I need only refer to bananas to show how the public are gulled in the buying of green immature fruit. I suppose other hon. members have had the experience of going into a fruit shop and buying some beautiful-looking fruit, only to find on taking it home that it was entirely unsuitable for human consumption. The same can be said of peaches and other stone fruits in season. We should lay down a standard for all fruits including a standard of cleanliness, evenness of grade, and maturity. That will provide a basis that will find ready acceptance by everyone, especially the householder.

Even though we criticise the present system of marketing fruit and vegetables, it is only the odd farmer who packs his fruit and vegetables badly. It is only the offending few who make a measure like this necessary. It is only because of the few that regulations have to be stringent. I do not think that anyone has any objection to the application of proper regulations to govern these matters because they usually give general satisfaction to the grower and the buyer, any that is everything.

However, there is one principle to which I object, although the Minister may have a very sound reason for it. I do not object to the right of the buyer to demand that the seller shall undo a wrapping so that the buyer may inspect the goods he is about to buy. That is a proper provision. I do not object either to the right of a buyer to select his fruit or vegetables from a display in a window or in a shop. But I have a decided objection to a provision that allows the buyer to go to an extreme limit in demanding that the seller shall sell to him the whole or part of any display of fruit or vegetables exhibited in a shop. I think that is unreasonable and will lead to abuse.

Let me explain what I mean. Let us suppose that the Minister has a fruit shop and that I am his competitor in business. Certain fruits or vegetables may be in short supply but the Minister, through careful management, may have been able to get a certain quantity of the fruit or vegetable in short supply, which he displays in his shop or

window as a draw line. I, his competitor in business, can go along and force him to sell me the whole of that display.

Mr. Collins: And I could go back and do the same to you.

Mr. DECKER: No. The competitor who tries on that trick is careful not to display the whole of his supply of that fruit or vegetable in short supply that he has bought. He sells it in small parcels only. I do not propose today to deal with the many tricks that could be practised, beyond saying that this is not a sound principle to embody in a Bill. It is all right to say the part of the display shall be sold to a customer on demand, but is wrong to provide by law that the buyer shall have the right to demand and receive the whole of the display. That is going to extremes.

Mr. Collins: Why are they displayed if it is not for sale?

Mr. DECKER: Of course it is for sale, but why do we ration certain goods throughout Australia? Is it not for the purpose of distributing them amongst the greatest possible number of people and if the principle is fair in one way it should apply also to another. The Minister should give serious consideration to the rigid application of a principle of that kind. Perhaps when we reach the Committee stage a little variation in the wording of the relevant clause will make a great deal of difference and give us some satisfaction. We do not want to rob the people of their freedom altogether, although certain restrictions are necessary.

Taking the Bill by and large, there is very little fault to be found with it except in that respect. I am pleased to see that inspectors will have a discretion. For instance, instead of condemning all the fruit in a case an inspector can order the case to be repacked. That will allow the salable portion to be placed on the market. We want to eliminate waste of foodstuffs and loss to the growers. Such a provision is one we can all support. The principles of the Bill are reasonable. That is why I support it, but I should like the Minister to give consideration to the point I raised as to the power of a customer to purchase the whole or part of a display. That is a little bit "over the fence."

Mr. PLUNKETT (Albert) (3.32 p.m.): There is a need for this Bill, which deals with products of the producers, but its success or failure will depend on the way in which it is administered. Naturally it must contain power to do certain things, and quite a lot can be done to improve both the fruit and vegetable industries. It is necessary, when this power is reposed in the Government, that capable officers should have charge of its administration. Fruit production is becoming a valuable asset to the State. I support the Bill because it will materially help fruit-growers particularly.

Reference was made by the Minister to snap-freezing of foodstuffs. That is an aspect of the industry that may ultimately be of considerable importance. It is an innova-

tion and naturally it is at the moment a very expensive method. I should like to know what has been done to introduce it to this State, and what have been the results. A big Sydney retailer installed snap-freezing works in association with his business, his object being to buy in the flush season when prices were reasonably low in order to assure him of supplies when certain commodities were in short supply. The idea has developed a little further, and it is now used in the manufacture of foodstuffs. I will give an idea of how snap-freezing is developing in Sydney. Ordinary meat pies are being manufactured—

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member is developing his argument on snap-freezing, whereas he should deal with the principles of this Bill.

Mr. PLUNKETT: I want to show how snap-freezing is being applied to foodstuffs. About 6,000,000 pies are distributed each week in Sydney, assisted by snap-freezing methods. About 600,000 are sold on the beaches and at afternoon sports in and around Sydney on Sundays. That will give hon. members an idea of how this new principle is developing.

While I realise that it would be impossible for a small centre to snap-freeze fruit, the principle could be developed in connection with cold storage in some centre where there was a demand for it. The same firm that I have referred to has been requested by the overseas shipping people to supply the whole of their fruit and vegetable for their ships trading between here and England. I mention these things to show the advantage to be gained, especially when dealing with fruit and vegetables. There is no limit to what can be done. Although the cost is great now, as we go on the practice will develop and cost will fall and it will inspire the fruit-grower of this State to grow fruit of better quality than perhaps he has grown in the past. These things have many ramifications. There is not much use in growing fruit unless we can distribute it to the consumer in the best condition. As we progress we shall be able to send good fruit to the North.

Mr. LOW (Cooroora) (3.37 p.m.): It gives me pleasure to support the Bill, which aims at the consolidation and amendment of the existing law in regard to the packing and sale of fruit and vegetables. From investigations I have made and from information I have received, I find that topping off and bad packing practices are very prevalent. I agree with other hon. members that topping is wicked and wrong and must be stamped out. Many retailers who buy their requirements from the markets are now making a habit of buying according to the numbers and names on the cases rather than on the commodity displayed. That shows conclusively that because of topping many of the retailers have no confidence in the appearance of the fruit, but they have confidence in the people they know who produce it. When these retailers

who are not aware of this practice are caught, naturally they must pass on the loss to the public, and they are the ultimate victims.

I roundly condemn the practice of sending immature fruit to the market. This is brought about mostly by experiments to bring about the best class of fruit—by means of ripening practices—so that the vendor will receive the best price. I have not heard it said in this Chamber in this debate why immature fruit is sent to the market, but I believe the reason is that when the glut takes place prices are lower and many producers are forced to carry out this practice for the purpose of getting the best price available, even though they know quite well it means cheating someone and it is a reduction in the quality of the product.

Mr. Nicklin: They only get it once.

Mr. LOW: That is the position, they only get the price once.

Mr. Collins: It lessens the sale of such fruit.

Mr. LOW: I know that in my district there are a number of fruit-growers and they would not come at that. There are others who are new to the business and they try this sort of thing once for the purpose of beating the other chap to the market when there is no glut.

That brings us to the question of stabilised prices for fruit and vegetables. I am interested in the distribution as well as in the production of fruit and vegetables. We must endeavour to distribute in such a way as to avoid gluts so that the producers will get at least cost of production plus a margin of profit.

That should be our aim. It is only by regular distribution throughout Queensland and the other States that we shall get stabilisation of prices at the present time.

I think it will be of great interest to hon. members to give the history of the distribution system. I was one who was very closely associated with it; in other words, I was charged with the responsibility of the initial move in the establishment of the first Committee of Direction retail and wholesale shop in Queensland. First of all, it was decided, in March 1945, when I was secretary—I still am—of the Nambour and District Progress Association, that something had to be done in connection with the distribution of fruit and vegetables in that town. During the war, when the demand was great, naturally retailers in the district were able to sell fruit and vegetables to the Australian soldiers and the Americans, but we discovered that when things settled down the people would not get the same class of fruit and the same distribution, so we set about making investigations with a view to establishing a co-operative concern. The fruit and vegetable services in the district were very poor, the quality was bad, and prices were high. With many fruit-growers who were members of the association, and other townspeople, we realised, not only from the point of view of consumption but in the production of fruit and vegetables also, we

were up against it if the distributors of fruit and vegetables did not sell at fair prices. To bring these about, after all this discussion had taken place at a meeting, it was decided to convene a meeting of the representatives of the Committee of Direction, the organisations in the district, the fruit-growers, the Dairymen's Association, and the Cane-growers' Association, for the purpose of discussing the establishment of a co-operative fruit and vegetable shop. In April 1945, Mr. Flewell-Smith, manager of the Committee of Direction, Major Savage, who was president of that association, and Mr. Donaldson, who was staff officer of the Committee of Direction, met at Nambour and we discussed the position from many angles. The position was very acute, and we could see that the best possible thing was to establish a fruit and vegetable retail and wholesale shop in the district. It was left to me and two other gentlemen to obtain premises. That was the most difficult problem of all. After much investigation and negotiation we were able to get premises, and I must say that the shop has been a huge success. It was opened on 4 July, 1945. It was backed by all the district associations that were present on the former occasion. I will say this of the Committee of Direction, that the establishment of a fruit market was a definite attempt to ensure that people got fresh fruit and vegetables as they require them. The quality of the fruit and vegetables distributed has been good and the tendency has been to keep prices down. It is useless expecting the Prices Branch or anyone else to police the price-fixing regulations in connection with the sale of fruit and vegetables; the only way to do this is to have competition. Competition is the most effective weapon the people have in connection with prices of fruit and vegetables.

The hon. member for Mundingburra spoke of the municipal fruit mart in Townsville, with its large population, and the success achieved over a great number of years. He spoke of the annual turnover of approximately £13,000 or £14,000. In a district such as ours, and a fruit-growing district at that, the turnover of fruit and vegetables in the shop I have referred to has been—

	£	
1945-46	20,180	
1946-47	18,586	

There was a slight reduction because the management realised that they could cut prices further and still make a reasonable margin of profit. For the three months of this financial year the takings were £3,220, which is very good for this time of the year when fruit and vegetables are not in plentiful supply.

In the first week of October, 1947, the customers dealt with by this shop numbered 1,935 and the takings amounted to £295. For the second week of October the number served was 1,873 and the takings were £290, and for the third week the customers numbered 1,984, and the takings amounted to £284. In the fourth week 2,305 customers were served and the takings amounted to £338.

In a business such as this the average number of customers is an important factor. For the month of October they averaged

2,000 a week at Nambour. When the shop was opened the staff numbered six. At present it is eight. In addition, many managers for similar shops in other parts of the State have been trained here. At the beginning I was inundated with letters from all over the State asking who was interested in the shop, how they came to be interested, and for any other particulars we had. There was a great demand for similar shops throughout the State. I am very happy to say that the Government took that shop as a pattern on which to establish other C.O.D. shops throughout the State. Similar shops have been established at Gympie, Roma, Charleville, Innisfail, Bowen, Mackay, and Rockhampton. Cool rooms are established at Charleville and Roma, and a shop will soon be opened at Longreach.

Two places that were very keen about establishing shops at the time when this one was opened at Nambour were Southport and Ipswich, but I suppose the people experienced the same difficulty there that they were having in other areas, the difficulty of obtaining suitable premises. I strongly recommend that the Committee of Direction of Fruit-marketing open shops in all large towns in Queensland, and in Brisbane in particular.

As an illustration of the need for such a shop here, I quote the following extract from the "Courier-Mail" of 16 October, 1947:—

"Racket Grows in Vegetables.

"Profit Margin Widens.

"Fat profits are being made on vegetable sales in Brisbane, but farmers are not sharing them.

"Brisbane housewives yesterday were paying 9d. to 1s. a lb. for beans, 10d. to 1s. for peas, up to 8d. each for cabbage, and up to 11d. per lb. for tomatoes.

"But—

"At the wholesale market, these lines were selling at: Beans 2d. to 5d. per lb., with a very few choice at 6d.; peas 3d. to 6d. per lb., with a few specials at 9d.; cabbages 2d. to 5d. each, and tomatoes—the very best of them—at 7d. and 8d. per lb."

That is one reason why I should like to see a retail shop established in the metropolitan area. At the present time, with the quality of fruit that is offered for the price being charged, one feels that one is getting fleeced every time one enters a shop. Such a shop must be established on similar lines to the C.O.D. retail shops already in existence throughout the State.

It is a problem not only for the Government but for the producers, as they have to realise the need for having a stabilised market for a perishable product. It will be a very effective weapon in keeping prices down and the quality of goods up. If you have to control the matter by price-fixing regulations you will find that as soon as the price-fixing officer is out of the shop the retailer starts to "chisel" those in the shop to make up for the fine he thinks is pending, when in many cases no fine is imposed.

Experiments took place on the North Coast during the last two fruit seasons in the distribution of fruit at seaside places over the Christmas holidays. The suggestion was tried in the 1945 and 1946 seasons when there was a glut of stone fruit from the Granite Belt. Rather than bring about a total loss of fruit at Christmas, 1946, 275 cases of peaches and plums at an average price of 6s. 6d. a case were sold in 25 minutes at Maroochydoore. If we can undertake a distribution system like that in a glut period and rush fruit and vegetables to the areas where masses of people are collected I am sure that the C.O.D. and the Government will be doing an excellent job.

I favour the licensing of fruit and vegetable shops right throughout Queensland, not limiting the number. If a shop continues openly to commit breaches of the regulations, rub it out and keep only those that are prepared to give the people a fair deal.

Mr. Brown: Do you believe in price-fixing.

Mr. LOW: Competition is the most effective way of dealing with price-fixing.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I think the hon. member is getting away from the matter before the House if he starts to deal with price-fixing.

Mr. LOW: The interjection led me off the track. I find that most instances of over-charging take place during busy periods and in the serving of children. This is particularly so at seaside resorts, where there is a floating population. I have been interested in the distribution of fruit and vegetables for many years and I realise what it means to the producer and the consumer. Where there is a floating population and where there are masses of people the retailers do not care whether their customers come back or not. They do not treat their regular customers in this way, but where there is a floating population or masses of people are congregated breaches of the regulations take place.

I had the privilege of being present at the opening of the Northgate cannery a few days ago and I consider it a most useful undertaking. It will be a great help to the people engaged in the production of pineapples. I was particularly pleased to see whilst I was there that the factory was treating pineapples from Kandanga, which is in my electorate and is a rich primary-producing area and is growing more pineapples today than it has grown for many years; and there is no black heart in Kandanga pines. That was why the Kandanga pines were being put through the Northgate cannery. They were of good quality. I should like to see the processing of other fruit and vegetables also taking place, as it would help to relieve gluts on the market during the very busy periods.

I should like to say that if Northerners want a cannery established in the North they should organise and establish their own cannery, if they wish to survive.

That is what we have done in the South. I suggest that in the meantime the Government make freight concessions available to the pineapple and other fruit-growers in the North to enable them to send their fruit to southern Queensland until they are able to establish their own cannery in the North. In other words, they must be encouraged. (Laughter.)

Mr. Collins: At someone else's expense.

Mr. LOW: The Government might help the people in the North until they are able to stand on their own feet.

I hope the day will never come when we shall lose the benefit of Empire Preference, because it means so much to the pineapple industry and to the people engaged in the production of fruit and vegetables.

The fruit-case problem, so adequately dealt with by the Leader of the Opposition, is a very serious one and calls for a thorough investigation by the Minister. In two and a half years the cost of a half-bushel fruit-case has jumped from 10d. to 1s. 11½d. and the quality of it has deteriorated. The Minister suggested that we should get our supplies in North Queensland.

Mr. Collins: Not that you should, but that you can.

Mr. LOW: The hon. gentleman meant that we should.

Mr. Collins: No.

Mr. LOW: Transport would be the biggest factor. The freight rate on case timber is very low, it comes into the lowest class, and according to the report of the Commissioner for Railways he would like to get rid of some of this low-class traffic so that he might concentrate on the more profitable trade.

The Leader of the Opposition made mention of fruit-packing also. All I want to say on this subject is that the practice of giving lessons in fruit-packing at State schools is an excellent idea. Some 23 years ago I attended a country school in the Maroochy district for lessons in the packing of fruit for the Brisbane Exhibition. I had quite a number of lessons and the instruction was so beneficial that when the fruit I packed was displayed and judged at the Brisbane Exhibition I received the first prize, for which I got a gold medal, the only medal I ever got in my life.

A Government Member: Did you hang it on your gold chain.

Mr. LOW: It is too valuable for that; I am afraid I should lose it if I did. However, the judge at the Exhibition made a good job on that occasion.

I congratulate the Minister on the introduction of the Bill, and I express the hope that it will not go the way of many other Bills, that it will be effectively enforced and not simply placed on the shelf. It is necessary. It is one that can be of benefit to the industry, in fact, to all concerned, producer and consumer alike. It has my support.

Mr. MULLER (Fassifern) (4 p.m.): I am not going to condemn the Bill, though I must confess I am a little disappointed with it because it does not go far enough. Perhaps I have not been able to digest it to the extent that the Minister has been able to do but as far as I can see it does not protect the consumers sufficiently. The consumers are entitled to consideration. If any section of the community was fleeced in the last few years it was the consumers of fruit and as far as I can see nothing in this Bill will give them any greater protection. The Bill certainly provides that a retailer shall be obliged to sell the fruit he displays. I have the greatest contempt for the retailer who displays fruit in small piles in a show window on which a price card is placed and sells to the public, very often children, from a case under the counter. The Minister told us that any person could demand fruit displayed on the counter or in the window. That can be done now. I am not obliged to buy fruit the retailer offers me and if he refuses to give me the fruit he displays I can walk out of the shop. There is nothing in this Bill to provide for action against a retailer who offends in this way. It should be an offence to sell fruit other than that displayed or marked at a certain price. There is nothing in the Bill that will convince me that a retailer will be obliged under it to do anything different from what he is doing today.

Mr. Collins: It is an offence. It is already in the Act.

Mr. MULLER: The only difference will be that when an inspector walks into a shop the retailer will give him what he asks for, as he will naturally realise that he is a person in authority, but how many persons, particularly children, walk into a shop where beautiful apples, oranges or bananas are displayed and are served by the unscrupulous retailer from cases under the counter? When that is done it should be an offence against the law. It is a practice that should be stopped. When I examined this Bill I found adequate protection given to the wholesaler and retailer but no protection to the consumer.

Provision is certainly made against the topping of fruit and vegetables and that is very desirable and necessary. The same applies with the marking of packages. After all, the trade mark of any grower is important. A wholesaler or retailer purchasing fruit will invariably look at the brand the case carries, that is, the producer's name and address. The Minister, when replying, might give us the definition of "packing." I have seen no such definition in the Bill. Packing might be held to include canning, but as far as I have been able to discern it does not refer to either canning or canners. I had an experience only a few days ago that brought this point to my mind. A lady showed me some canned peaches she had bought. A glance at them caused me to form the opinion, which opinion was confirmed after I had tasted them, that they had been canned before they had matured.

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They were not fit for consumption. The only contents of the tin that you relished was the juice. The fruit was not fit for human consumption.

This is a serious matter because when you are buying fresh fruit you can judge for yourself whether it is good, bad or indifferent, but when you buy it in a can you do not know. If the canner is to be permitted to can anything, he is just exploiting the consumer.

There is nothing in the Bill to prevent the charging of excess prices for fruit. Only a few months ago—during Exhibition week—I had a bit of time on my hands and I made a pretty close check. I was told at that time that there was a glut of citrus fruit, but you could not buy mandarins or oranges of any size under 3d., 4d., and 5d. each. Fancy paying 4d. and 5d. for oranges! How can the man on the basic wage be expected to provide fruit for his children when it is at such a price? It is utterly impossible. I do think we should protect the producer, and in order to protect the producer we have to protect the consumer as well. After all, the difference between the price the producer gets and the price the consumer pays is altogether too much. That is more evident in fruit than in anything else.

A Government Member: Eliminate the middle-man altogether.

Mr. MULLER: I do not say that you can eliminate the middle-man; you cannot do that; you have to have someone to hold the fruit between the producer and the consumer. But, nobody can tell me that a medium-sized orange is worth 5d. or anything like it.

Mr. Collins: This Bill does not deal with prices.

Mr. MULLER: From the information I have gathered—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has intimated that this Bill does not deal with prices. I ask the hon. member not to continue in that strain.

Mr. MULLER: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Bill deals with the marketing of fruit and vegetables, and I cannot see why any objection should be raised to that. Its purpose, I take it, is to see that fruit is sold to consumers in a reasonable way. The very essence of the Bill, I take it, is first of all to see that the consumer gets a good article, that it is properly packed, and that it is sold to him at a fair price.

Mr. Collins: We see that the fruit is properly displayed and packed, and not stacked against the consumer.

Mr. MULLER: Unless we have that protection—

Mr. Collins: You have it in another sphere, not in this Bill.

Mr. MULLER: We shall hear the hon. gentleman in reply. We appreciate the speech he has made and I am sure we shall be delighted to hear him in reply; nevertheless,

what I have said embodies a few points I wish to make in connection with the Bill. I have no desire to condemn it or be critical in any way, because I believe the time has arrived when some action should be taken. I think these are matters that should be looked into very closely. I should like the Minister to give us his definition of what the word "packing" means in regard to canned fruit.

Mr. Collins: It does not refer to canning.

Mr. MULLER: If it does not include canning I do hope that on some future occasion action will be taken to ensure that whatever is put into a can is first-quality fruit.

Mr. KERR (Oxley) (4.9 p.m.): I wish to add my appreciation of this Bill. There is no provision, nor can the Government take steps to make a provision in regard to the fixation of prices; that power is exercised by a different authority altogether, therefore it is not proper to discuss price on this Bill. Properly carried out, however, it will establish a basis upon which the Prices Commissioner can see that his prices are observed in a more effective way than today. That is one thing I see in the Bill—I think it will help to bring about the better policing of the different prices of fruit and vegetables. It has my full support.

There is no doubt that in the past the fixation of prices has had this effect: a buyer in the market buys a case of fruit at, say, 10s., another at 15s., and a third at 2s., but when selling it he can get the maximum price for all that fruit. It is almost impossible to police that. This Bill has this good feature, that it will establish a basis on which the Prices Branch can effectively base price-fixation.

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Cook—Secretary for Agriculture and Stock), in reply (4.11 p.m.): I do not wish to delay the House because the House has approved very roundly of the whole of the Bill

The hon. member for Oxley has just raised the point that although the Bill does not deal with prices it will deal with the basis on which the Prices Branch will be able to fix the prices on quality fruit that has not been mixed with poor-quality fruit. That has been one of the biggest curses in the policing of prices. There can be three qualities of fruit, a few of the primest, a few seconds, and a few thirds all mixed together, and the vendor may charge the highest prices. This Bill deals with the mixing of inferior fruit with good fruit; it eliminates it.

For the information of the hon. member for Fassifern I would point out that the Bill does not deal with the canning of fruit. It deals with the packing of fresh fruit and vegetables for sale and their display as fresh fruit and vegetables. The hon. member for Fassifern has an opposite view to that of the hon. member for Sandgate, who suggests that it is very unfair to allow customers to demand the

fruit on display but if the retailer need not sell the fruit he has on display the very thing complained of by the hon. member for Fassifern occurs, that is, he can put up fruit for display and refuse to sell it, so that he has the opportunity to give the customer either bad fruit or let him go away. There is no occasion for him to display the whole of the best of his fruit. He can display the qualities he has for sale, but if he displays for sale he should sell the fruit so displayed to a customer who wants that particular fruit. Malpractices are having a detrimental effect on the whole of the industry and we want people to be able to eat more fruit and get better fruit, and we must see to it that the customer is able to get the fruit that he sees in the window.

Mr. Muller: Do you not think it will still go on?

Mr. COLLINS: It is very difficult to make dishonest people honest. We have found that out on many occasions, but we can do the best we can and this will tighten up the law.

The hon. member for Cooroora believes in stabilisation of prices but at the same time he believes in open competition. I do not know how he can reconcile the two. They cannot be brought together because stabilisation of fruit and vegetable prices is impossible, for the simple reason that what is first-grade today when kept for three or four days becomes second-grade or perhaps unfit for human consumption. Although a price can be fixed for it when it is of good quality how can a price be fixed for the worst quality? So we cannot do better than try to keep growers supplying good fruit and vegetables to the market and allow the customers to decide what fruit they will buy. There will always be gluts and shortages but we are trying to make for an even break in the end so that producers will get a fair spin and the customers will know what they are buying. We trust people will be able to eat more of this very necessary health-giving food than they have been doing in the past.

The Leader of the Opposition gave us a very interesting discourse on this point. We all know that he has a thorough knowledge of the business. He appreciates the heavy penalties prescribed in the Bill but thinks that a straightforward condemnation of the inferior fruit, even though there may be some good fruit in the pack, would be better than a fine. We do not desire to destroy anybody's fruit or vegetables if we can avoid it, but at the same time we have no desire to encourage dishonest practices, and we believe that a fine will guard against that.

Of course, I look to the public to give us some help in this matter. Not very long ago we read of a case in which someone was selling what he was pleased to call kitchen-grade apples. Actually, that was fruit that had been condemned as being unfit for human consumption. It was condemned by the inspectors and kept off the market, but while we see a great deal in the Press against the condemnation of this fruit, which had some usable fruit in it, we do not see any-

body backing up the action of the Government's inspector in condemning it and I should appreciate the co-operation of the fruit-growers themselves in cases like that.

Mr. Nicklin: That was through lack of knowledge.

Mr. COLLINS: But we have nothing to refute the argument that because it contained some usable fruit it should not be condemned or destroyed, because it is mainly usable. I repeat that I look to the public and the growers in particular to give us some support in such cases.

Motion (Mr. Collins) agreed to.

COMMITTEE.

(Mr. Devries, Gregory, in the chair.)

Clauses 1 to 4, both inclusive, as read, agreed to.

Clause 5—Meaning of Terms—

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Cook—Secretary for Agriculture and Stock) (4.19 p.m.): I move the following amendment:—

“On page 4, after line 31, insert the following definition—

‘Registered brand’—A trade mark within the meaning of the Trade Marks Act 1905-1936 of the Commonwealth and registered under that Act;”

The object is to tighten up a weakness that we have noticed since drafting the Bill.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 5, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 6 and 7, as read, agreed to.

Clause 8—Seller to sell on demand fruit and vegetables which are displayed—

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (4.21 p.m.): I wish to explain to the Minister that he misunderstood me in connection with this clause.

Mr. Collins: I am glad to hear that.

Mr. DECKER: The clause reads—

“A person selling by retail fruit and/or vegetables in, upon, or from any place shall not refuse to sell on demand the whole or any part of any lot of fruit or vegetables displayed in or upon such place.”

I have no objection to people buying from a display. I think it is only right, if fruit is displayed, that the buyer should have the right—

Mr. Power: You did not say that before.

Mr. DECKER: I am making this speech.

If the Minister looks round the shops of Brisbane he will find that the displays are not merely displays of a little bit of what the shop has for sale. Some of the premises are large enough to display the whole of their stock. I think we are getting far too stringent in framing our legislation in a way that

makes it compulsory that the whole, not any part could be bought by one purchaser. In times of shortages, when glut periods have passed, this provision leaves the way open for abuse. A person could go in at 8 o'clock in the morning and buy the whole of the fruit.

Mr. Theodore: What benefit would he get?

Mr. DECKER: You are restricting trade to a few instead of to the whole. Why force any retailer to sell the whole of any article to any one customer, whether that customer is one person or a firm? This is going to the limit, to my mind. It is forcing the retailer to sell any part of the fruit or vegetables displayed, which in my opinion is going too far. I hope the Minister can see it in that light. We do not want to be dictators. In many Acts we pass we eliminate the right of appeal and leave the matter solely in the hands of the Minister. I think the Minister might consider this point and accept an amendment. We are getting too total in our legislation today and not allowing enough freedom.

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Cook—Secretary for Agriculture and Stock) (4.24 p.m.): I appreciate the fact that a person dressing a shop window goes to a deal of trouble in making a proper display; it is a fairly expensive thing. I think it would be entirely unreasonable for a customer to demand, say, the bottom layer of fruit, seeing that there is a provision in the Bill to prevent the retailer from making the bottom layer better than the top layer or the front layer better than the back layer.

He would be a very unreasonable person who would say, “I want fruit from the bottom row of apples,” and cause the shopkeeper to bring down the whole display. I am satisfied that there is a certain amount of reasonableness amongst people generally and I do not think that the situation mentioned by the hon. member for Sandgate will ever arise.

In any case, if you open the gate to evasion of the law, where is it to stop? If we say that the shopkeeper need not sell the fruit on display, which is the only alternative to the clause, we shall drift back to a position that we are now trying to remedy. This matter received a great deal of consideration and the clause has been framed in this way so that the best fruit and vegetables will not be for display purposes only while the buyer who is attracted by it receives only fruit or vegetables of poor quality.

The hon. member suggested that a rival fruiterer would come to the shop and buy the whole of the best fruit or vegetables but there is nothing in the Bill to compel the fruiterer to display the whole of his fruit and vegetables. He may display only a part of them and obviously that is what he will do. Even if a customer who was a rival fruiterer did buy the lot, how could he pay the fixed retail price, then take the fruit or vegetables to his shop and display them for sale at the same price at which he had bought them?

We want to give the customer a better deal and this is a better way to do it. The clause is all right.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (4.27 p.m.): The Minister has evaded the point, the usual thing when an hon. member objects to anything. I said nothing about a customer's buying the bottom layer. I agree with that part of the Bill and I agree that he should have the right to demand a part of the display but I object to his being given the right to demand the whole of the display. To make the point clearer still, let me tell the Minister that I as a fruiterer could go into any shop tomorrow and buy the whole of the fruit and vegetables displayed in the shop and take it to my own shop. That is the effect of the clause. I have no objection to the right of a seller to demand a part of the display but it is going to extremes to give him the right to demand the whole of it.

Mr. MORRIS (Enoggera) (4.28 p.m.): I still think that the Minister does not understand the point raised by the hon. member for Sandgate. There are occasions when certain fruits or vegetables are in short supply in the market but a fruiterer may be fortunate enough to buy, say, the only bag of beans in the markets on a particular day. That fruiterer has certain regular customers whom he supplies day in and day out and to whom he is required to give a good service. If he does not, they will not continue to buy from him.

Now I come to the point raised by the hon. member for Sandgate. There may be a shortage of beans in the markets and the fruiterer may be fortunate enough to buy the only bag available. If he brings it to his shop and displays it anyone can walk into the shop and demand that he be sold that bag of beans.

Mr. Brown: If it is on display.

Mr. MORRIS: The hon. member can come in afterwards. Anyone with sufficient intelligence to read the Bill carefully will realise that any purchaser could enter a retailer's shop and buy the whole bag of beans, if it was on display. Obviously, if beans should be in short supply, that retailer will not keep the whole bag on display. He will know which of his customers will require beans and he may want to attract other customers at the same time. With that object in view he might ration out those beans at the rate of one pound per customer, but under this Bill he will not be allowed to do so, as one person can demand the whole bag. That is the point that has been raised and has been laughed at by hon. members opposite, who have not sufficient intelligence to realise the effect of the clause. The objection is a sensible one and the provision should be altered.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba—Leader of Opposition) (4.32 p.m.): There may be something in the technicality raised by the hon. member for Sandgate. Like many provisions contained in various Acts, it is not

how they read that counts so much as how they are administered. I do not know whether it will make a great deal of difference in the long run, but the result that has been described could occur. It is hardly likely, though, that a retailer would display the whole of the supplies held by him of a short line. As I see it, this clause requires to be a little bit wide, but its administration must be sane and sympathetic.

Let us look at the selling of fruit in Brisbane. As I said on the first reading, there are no better fruit shops in Australia than in Brisbane. The practice adopted here has been the open method of selling, namely, the fruit is displayed for the customer to select from it. If this provision was interpreted literally, a buyer could demand the bottom layer of a pyramid of oranges, apples or pears, but, as I said, common sense must be used in interpreting it. Some shops display baskets of choice fruit for decorative purposes. What would happen if a buyer entered one of those shops and wanted to buy the basket displayed? Under this clause, if it was interpreted literally, a shopkeeper would have to sell it. The effect of this provision will depend on whether it is sanely and sensibly interpreted by inspectors. Let us hope that common sense will be used by buyers. It will not matter a great deal if the clause is allowed to remain as it is and it is essential to have fairly wide powers. It is always the administration that counts.

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Cook—Secretary for Agriculture and Stock) (4.35 p.m.): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the sensible attitude he has taken on this question. It will work out exactly as he says. The point is that if you break the clause down you break the back of the Bill, which has been framed to protect the public. Take the case raised by the hon. member for Enoggera and the hon. member for Sandgate of a man who has a few good and regular customers that he must keep regularly supplied; he buys a bag of beans and somebody takes the whole lot. As a shrewd trader, which I know each of these gentlemen is, would he not supply those regular customers out of his bag before he put it on display?

Mr. Morris: He wants to attract other people too.

Mr. COLLINS: He would attract other people with what was left. All he wants to do is to sell his product. Would it not be better to sell in one lot, if necessary, after he has supplied the regular customers, than sell them in a slow dribble? It is very seldom that these things are in such short supply that one cannot buy the whole of the stock one wants by going to another wholesaler. Is not that what one is in business for? What we are trying to do is to help the trader, and the customer.

Clause 8, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 9 to 18, both inclusive, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, with an amendment.

The House adjourned at 4.40 p.m.