

Queensland



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Legislative Assembly

THURSDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 1950

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THE ACTING SPEAKER (The CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES, Mr. Mann, Brisbane) took the chair at 11 a.m.

QUESTIONS.

RAILWAY ROLLING STOCK.

Mr. McINTYRE (Cunningham) asked the Minister for Transport—

“Will he kindly supply the following details regarding rolling-stock, namely—
(a) the ages, in five year groups, of all passenger and goods rolling-stock now in use, (b) the seating capacity and tare of each type of passenger coach now in use, (c) the carrying capacity, in tons, of each type of goods vehicle now in use, and (d) the number of passenger and goods vehicles fitted with roller bearings.”

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

“The particulars sought by the hon. member are very extensive, and, in the main are included in statistical records compiled by the Department. Should it be convenient for him to call at my office I shall be pleased to make the information available.”

GARRATT LOCOMOTIVES.

Mr. TURNER (Kelvin Grove) asked the Minister for Transport—

“1. Could the Australian standard Garratt locomotives now lying idle at Clapham be successfully utilised on the Queensland Railways? If not, why not?”

“2. In what respect does the Beyer-Garratt locomotive introduced this week differ from the Australian standard Garratt referred to?”

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

“1. No. Experience with these locomotives showed that they had a tendency to derail, and they were of a design undertaken for emergency war service. They required a great deal of mechanical attention necessitating frequent withdrawals from traffic and interference with maintenance of locomotives of other types.

“2. The Beyer-Garratt locomotive has been constructed by Messrs. Beyer Peacock and Co. Ltd., England, who are world-renowned specialists in the design and manufacture of this type of locomotive, whereas the Australian Standard Garratt locomotive was designed in Australia as a war-time measure and under conditions of urgency with the result that it had a number of inherent defects, which carried an element of danger in running operation. The Beyer-Garratt has been designed specially to suit Queensland conditions, and conforms to the highest locomotive engineering standards. The design of the Beyer Garratt boiler is much superior to that of the Australian Standard Garratt boiler and

is capable of freer steaming. The Beyer-Garratt has a heavier axle load than the Australian designed Garratt, and consequently will have a better weight ratio to hauling power with less tendency to slip. The comfort of the crew under operating conditions has been given special consideration and the laborious nature of the work has been considerably reduced."

NATIONAL SECURITY RESOURCES BOARD.

Mr. KEYATTA (Townsville) asked the Premier—

"In regard to the Federal Government's National Security Resources Board to control materials,—

"1. Will this board have any effect on the States or public resources and supplies?

"2. Will it affect any of the present projects or works now in progress?"

Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca) replied—

"1. and 2. I saw a reference in the Press recently indicating that the Commonwealth Government proposed to set up a National Security Resources Board. No official advice of any kind, however, has as yet been received by me from the Prime Minister with respect to the proposal. I have not, therefore, any information at present as to the nature and extent of the Board's functions. I note from the Press report, however, that the Prime Minister has stated the Board will be able to do, among other things, work of value in the co-ordinating of the activities of various departmental committees which are now functioning. Having regard to the multitude of Commonwealth Committees which seem to have sprung up in recent times, this is indeed a laudable objective."

HOSPITAL OUTPATIENT'S SYSTEM.

Mr. KEYATTA (Townsville) asked the Secretary for Health and Home Affairs—

"Will he consider eliminating the present distressing delay in attending to hospital outpatients by substituting a scheme more expeditious and of greater mobility and facility?"

Hon. W. M. MOORE (Merthyr) replied—

"In common with all other departments of Hospitals Services, the outpatients departments are under continual surveillance to ensure that the high standard of free service given to the public is maintained and all possible improvements effected from time to time. So efficient is the service generally that the delay to patients availing themselves of this free service is no greater, and often less, than the delay occasioned to patients at private doctors' surgeries. There has been some delay at the Townsville Hospital occasioned by lack of accommodation, but when the new modern hospital is opened in the very near future the accommodation and facilities available for outpatients will enable the Townsville Hospitals Board to effect any improvements necessary in the outpatients' service."

OVERTIME, IPSWICH RAILWAY WORKSHOPS.

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

"1. What was the cost of overtime at the Ipswich Railway Workshops for 1949-1950?

"2. In view of the fact that in the case of employees of the Workshops residing in Brisbane the working overtime usually involves a daily period of absence from home of 14 or 15 hours, will he have an investigation into this matter from the aspects of (a) the abnormal strain and inconvenience suffered by such employees, and (b) the economic value of overtime worked under such conditions?"

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

"1. £256,335.

"2. The working hours of the employees in the Ipswich Workshops have been increased by one and a-half hours daily. It is only to that extent of time that men are away from their homes longer as the result of overtime working. Whilst it may be that the additional hours worked at the end of the day are not productive of the same output as the earlier hours of work, the Department's dire need of additional rolling-stock makes the working of overtime imperative at present. Because of the financial cost involved and the desire to accede to the men's wishes not to unnecessarily exceed the statutory working week, the Department is anxious to eliminate overtime at the earliest possible opportunity. The Honourable Member and other members of the Opposition constantly complain to me of the inability of the railways to move fertiliser, wheat, cane, and other primary products, and I, accordingly, felt that he would welcome the energetic action being taken by the Department to overcome the difficulty. This can only be accomplished by the speedy return of rolling-stock to traffic."

COMMONWEALTH AID ROADS AND WORKS ACT.

Mr. SPARKES (Aubigny), for **Mr. EVANS** (Mirani), asked the Treasurer—

"1. What was the total amount received to 30 June, 1950, under the provisions of The Commonwealth Aid Roads and Works Act?

"2. Of such amount, how much respectively was spent (a) by instrumentalities of the Government, giving details, and (b) by way of grants to local authorities or other local bodies, giving names and amounts, respectively?

"3. Has the operation of the Act in question been extended, and, if so, what allocation has been made to this State for the current financial year?"

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

"The information is being prepared."

STATE COAL MINES AND COKE WORKS.

Mr. KERR (Sherwood) asked the Secretary for Mines and Immigration—

“1. Who were the largest purchasers of coke and coal from the following State undertakings during the year ended 30 June, 1950:—(a) Styx coal-mine; (b) Collinsville coal-mine; and (c) Bowen coke works?”

“2. What was the reason for the drop of 32,336 tons in the output of the State-owned Collinsville mine during the year ended 30 June, 1950?”

“3. Will he supply a list of modern mining plant presently owned by the State, and also a list of modern mechanisation plant, if any, on order, and the cost thereof?”

Hon. W. POWER (Baroona) replied—

“1. Largest purchasers for 1949-1950 were Styx State Coal Mine: Mackay City Council; Mackay Gas Company; Australian National Power Alcohol, Sarina. Collinsville State Coal Mine: Railways, State Coke Works, Mount Isa Mines Ltd. State Coke Works, Bowen: Mount Isa Mines Ltd.

“2. Drop in production was due principally to—(a) General coal strike for six to eight weeks at beginning of 1949-1950; (b) Reduction in number of employees at the State Mine from an average of 390 in 1948-1949 to 334 in 1949-1950.

“3. The State Coal Mines at Collinsville Styx, and Mount Mulligan are all equipped with their own power-houses generating electricity for use below ground. Coal is won at the face at Mount Mulligan by the use of electric coal-cutting machines, drilling is performed by electric drills, coal is loaded by hand and transported to the surface by endless rope. At Collinsville, all coal is won and loaded by hand, and drawn by horses to the rope-haulage systems. At Styx, coal is won and loaded by hand. Electric drills for Collinsville have been on order for some time at an estimated cost of £10,000. Air drills are required for Styx, and an air compressor with drills and pneumatic picks are on order at an estimated cost of £1,200. The mines at Mount Mulligan and Styx and the conditions obtaining therein preclude the operation of modern mechanical units, but an upper seam at Styx is now being developed with a view to mechanisation later. The No. 2 Tunnel at Collinsville has been developed and partly prepared to lend itself to a scheme of mechanisation for mechanical cutting, drilling, loading, transporting, and screening. There has also been constructed and equipped a modern engineering workshop. This scheme is now under consideration, and costs are not yet available.”

SPREAD OF GROUNDSSEL.

Mr. LOW (Coorooora) asked the Secretary for Public Lands and Irrigation—

“In view of the serious spread of groundsel in South-eastern Queensland, will he give favourable consideration to (a) having this weed declared noxious under the provisions of the Stock Routes and Rural Lands Protection Acts, and (b) having an expert investigation into possible methods of eradicating this pest?”

Hon. T. A. FOLEY (Belyando) replied—

“Upon the recommendation of the Co-ordinating Board, the Biological Section of the Lands Department is to carry out experiments aimed at finding practical measures that could be employed by landholders and Local Authorities to effectively destroy Groundsel. Upon receipt of the results of these experiments which, it is anticipated, will not be available for at least six months, further consideration is to be given by the Co-ordinating Board to the declaration of Groundsel as a noxious plant under the Stock Routes and Rural Lands Protection Acts.”

OVERTIME AND RECREATION LEAVE, RAILWAY DEPARTMENT.

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

“1. What was the total cost of overtime in the Railway Department for 1949-1950?”

“2. What is the approximate value of recreation leave due to railwaymen and outstanding since 1939?”

“3. Is it a fact that when recreation leave for past years is granted, the employees concerned are paid present salaries or wages less 10 per cent.? If so, what is the reason for such reduction?”

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

“1. £1,279,421.

“2. The value of all accumulated annual leave (excluding current year's leave not taken) due to employees at August 31, 1950, is £720,000. Separate figures showing value of leave outstanding since 1939 are not available.

“3. No.”

LOCAL-AUTHORITY RATES, QUEENSLAND-BRITISH FOOD CORPORATION.

Mr. SPARKES (Aubigny) asked the Premier—

“What local-authority rates were paid for 1949-1950 by the Queensland-British Food Corporation, giving names of councils and amounts, respectively?”

Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca) replied—

“The Second Annual Report of the Queensland-British Food Corporation tabled in this House on 19 September shows the amount paid by the Corporation for rates.

for the year ended 31 March, 1950. However, for the further information of the Honourable Member, the following Local Authority general rates were paid by the Corporation during the year ended 30 June, 1950:—

Shire Council	Amount.		
	£	s.	d.
Emerald	1,686	10	5
Bauhinia	1,085	5	7
Peak Downs	1,355	17	2
Belyando	565	8	6
Banana	40	15	6
Fitzroy	22	0	0
	£4,735 17 2		

The amounts shown for the first three shire councils above include reimbursements to previous owners for rates paid in advance when properties were purchased. Other rates paid, including Rabbit Board rates, totalled £107 2s. 10d."

ENLISTMENT FOR OVERSEAS SERVICE.

Mr. MORRIS (Mt. Coot-tha), without notice, asked the Premier—

"Does the Premier support Mr. Chifley's stand in opposing the Federal Government's recruiting campaign, giving as his excuse that it includes voluntary enlistment for overseas service?"

Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca) replied—

"The hon. member should know that the question of defence is entirely a matter for the Federal Government and that the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Government are now arguing it out. I am a member of the Recruiting Campaign Committee formed here for the purpose of encouraging enlistment in our defence forces."

PAPER.

The following paper was laid on the table—

Regulations under the Fish Supply Management Acts, 1935 to 1946 (21 September).

CALLIDE AND BLAIR ATHOL COAL.

Mr. BURROWS (Port Curtis) (11.16 a.m.): I move—

"1. That in view of the overall shortage of coal in Australia and its retarding effect upon the development of Australian industry, the Commonwealth Government be requested to make substantial financial and technical aid available for maximum production from the great open-cast seams at Callide and Blair Athol; and

"2. That no further subsidies be granted for imported coal while ample supplies may be obtained in Australia."

The necessity for this motion may seem extraordinary to anyone who is not familiar with political happenings in Australia of the past few months. Actually, it is a request from this House of Parliament to the

Federal Government that they should function as an Australian Government. The mistakes of the Federal Government during the past six months in relation to coal production have disappointed even their most fanatical supporters and I shudder to think what the future holds in store for us if they are not corrected. At a Country Party conference held in Brisbane recently a motion was carried protesting against the action of the Federal Government in showing marked preference for overseas coal rather than for coal from Queensland.

The fact that coal is a dire necessity for the majority of industries requires no emphasis; it is an elementary principle, and there is no need for me to labour the point. Coal has been described as the lifeblood of a nation, and I think that is a very correct and a very apt description. Unfortunately for Australia, however, this basic principle has been overlooked by some people, with the result that our economy is being jeopardised to a far greater extent than by other more widely-published forms of subversion. I say that in all sincerity and earnestness, because I firmly believe it. We hear a great deal today about the dangers of Communism, and while not wishing to minimise those dangers in any way, because I agree that Communism is a menace to any democratic country, I ask hon. members: what is the use of killing one pest if we cultivate another that is equally dangerous? There is only one reason why Australian industry is starved for coal today, and it is not Communism.

Mr. Sparkes: What is it?

Mr. BURROWS: It is the ignorant, vicious and inspired prejudice against Queensland. That is what is behind the shortage of coal in Australia, and that is why Australian industries are starving for coal today. Unfortunately, in the southern States there is even prejudice against the use of Queensland coal to keep the people warm, and some persons would rather submit to Communism than use Queensland coal.

Two years ago I moved the Address in Reply in this House and I concentrated my remarks on the problem of coal supplies, and the effect of coal shortages on our economy. I remember quoting a statement by the general manager of Broken Hill Pty. Co. Ltd., the leading heavy industry in Australia; indeed, I suppose it would not be an exaggeration to say that the whole of the economy of Australia is based on its production. In his annual report two years ago the general manager said that the production of his company for that year was the lowest it had been for 13 years, and that at a time when the production of the largest iron and steel works in the Southern Hemisphere should have reached its zenith, it was in fact at its lowest point, and he gave as the reason for this tragic fall the shortage of coal for productive purposes. This company owns quite a number of coal-mines, and these produce more coal than is required to keep its

works in full production, so that naturally one wonders why the works could not be kept in full production. The reason is that under the system that operates in the South the production from these mines is taken to keep people in Melbourne, Adelaide, and other places warm, and to run utilities such as electric-light undertakings and railways. I submit, as I submitted two years ago, that Callide coal, which has been largely used in Queensland on the railways and for electric-light and other undertakings, is not suitable for similar purposes in the Southern States for only one reason, and that, as I said before, is because it comes from Queensland.

Mr. Sparkes interjected.

Mr. BURROWS: Let me tell the hon. member that he could be better employed than aiding any attempt to sabotage Queensland coal.

As I said before, that statement made by the general manager of Broken Hill Pty. Co. Ltd. a little over two years ago was a sinister one, and indicated a continuance of the shortage of several products of which iron and steel are constituents. A shortage of iron and steel, as I said here yesterday, means a shortage of essential goods such as roofing iron, structural steel and wire. The primary producer requires wire, for instance, to increase his production and if he cannot get wire, production cannot be increased. If the builder cannot get roofing material and nails he cannot build homes, which are urgently needed in the development of this country. The railways cannot get iron and steel to build rolling-stock, which is essential to our transport system. The whole question comes back to the shortage of coal.

Literally, we are being starved of all essential goods. It is because of our procrastination and our neglect and distrust and the hateful prejudice against this State that we have to wrestle with the present position, which instead of improving is deteriorating. We knew of these mistakes three years ago. We are not so dull that we could not appreciate where it was all leading us to, but in spite of our errors we have blundered on and on, as I said, until the position today is worse than it was. We have not profited by our past mistakes. We have actually resorted to the importation of iron and steel, and thereby taking the line of least resistance, but at what a price! Imported iron and steel goods are 250 per cent. more expensive than those produced in Australia. Not only that, but the imported article is inferior to what we can produce in Australia.

Mr. Wordsworth: What about encouraging steel works at Bowen?

Mr. BURROWS: I admit that the hon. member is exasperated in talking about encouraging anything. He ought to thank God that someone encouraged his growth. I bet his mother often looks at him in wonder.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. BURROWS: The fact that we are importing 1 ton of iron and steel is a sad

commentary on our right and fitness to hold this country. We are committing an even greater crime than importing iron and steel, as I will tell you later, but the fact that we have imported 1 ton of iron and steel is sufficient to prove that we are not entitled to hold this country. This country possesses the greatest coal deposits in the world—capable of production with the absolute minimum of effort—yet we are too lazy to bother about using them. What title have we to this country today when we lack the enterprise and capacity and, if I may be forgiven for using the word, the guts to develop our resources? We have been admitted to membership of the United Nations and that membership gives us the right to sit in judgment on other countries. What right have we to sit in judgment on other nations when we complacently fail to establish our right to our own land? Does it not remind us of the injunction in the Sermon on the Mount, "Judge not that ye be not judged"? Have we a right to sit in judgment on other nations when we are making such a mess of developing our own?

The Almighty never intended, when he so richly endowed this continent, that it should be peopled with a handful of people too indolent and stupid to use its vast resources.

We continually hear that the people in the southern States are being subjected to all sorts of inconveniences and restrictions, such as gas, light and power rationing, because of the shortage of coal, but, as I pointed out, every person in Australia is suffering directly or indirectly in one way or another, for the same reason. When we trace this condition to its cause we establish the fact that the shortage of coal is the cause of all this inconvenience and lack of balance in our economy; yet our known resources of coal are such that if a further large seam of coal is discovered in this country, representing millions of tons, the fact is not deemed worth recording in the newspapers; it is not even news. Our open-cut mines have been truly described as one of the wonders of the world. Nowhere else is so much coal available for so little effort. As I said before, the only thing we appear to lack is the intelligence and capacity to make use of them.

What I have already said tells the story of our economic degradation. It is tragic and horrible to contemplate what this indolence and this complacency have cost us. We are undoubtedly guilty of these failings and it is only wasting time to try to apologise or make excuses for them. It is time we admitted our incapacity. That crime, however, bad as it is, fades into insignificance when we think of a further crime that has been committed against our economic and national future—not by an individual but by our national Government a few months ago. I refer to the criminal assault on the Callide field made by the present Federal Government. Certain members of that Government realised that the lack of governmental assistance and encouragement were not sufficient to retard the development of this huge national deposit, so they used their influence to obtain a very

generous subsidy for the overseas competitors of Callide. I say that every person associated with that subsidy to the overseas competitors of Callide coal is a traitor.

Government Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. BURROWS: I say that after a good deal of thought and with a good deal of regret. That crime will go down in history as something too horrible to contemplate. As I said, it was prompted by prejudice; not the prejudice of one nation against another nation, not the prejudice of one race against another race, but prejudice of people of one race against people of the same race—the prejudice of Australians against Australians. That is the most despicable form of prejudice I know. For the want of a better word I will call it civil prejudice; and that reminds me that the most vicious and brutal form of warfare is civil war. The most vicious, brutal and savage form of prejudice is civil prejudice or that prejudice which exists between civilian and civilian, of man against his own kith and kin. The implications of such an un-Australian attitude were completely forgotten by the Federal Government. In attempting to kill the struggling coal industry of Callide they displayed brutal savagery that Pontius Pilate or King Herod would envy.

To give the House in a few words a story of this assault on Callide I would first of all point out that Australia needed coal badly. It is really superfluous for me to make that statement because even children in the street knew it. Australia was literally starved for coal. The mines at Callide were producing ten times the daily average output of any other mine in Australia per man. Markets for that output were sought in the coal-starved States of the South. Many difficulties had been overcome and orders were about to be placed for Callide coal when like a bolt from the blue the industries that were prepared to sign contracts for the supply of Callide coal were told they would be given an enormous subsidy if they used imported coal instead of the Australian article. I use the words "enormous" significantly, and with a full knowledge of its meaning.

This happened in Australia. Within a week of its happening we read in the Press that one of the leaders of the South African Government had boasted that his country was about to leave the British Empire. Dr. Donges, Minister for the Interior in South Africa, in a statement made in Pretoria, advised South Africa that it was no longer necessary to take the oath of allegiance to His Majesty the King. And this is the country about the economy of which the Federal Government are so concerned!

The effect of this generous subsidy may be better judged and hon. members might better understand why I use the word "enormous" when I mention that the subsidy was to be at the rate of approximately 45s. a ton, which is about three and a half times the cost at which coal is being produced at the Callide mine today. What chance did any struggling industry have to survive against such powerful interests? However, to the everlasting

credit of the present Premier of Victoria, Callide was not crucified by these Queensland-haters in the South. There was at least one prominent Australian, and a politician too, who believed in the adage that patriotism, like charity, begins at home. He was not a Labour politician. He was the Premier of Victoria. Today Callide is back in production; it has been given a reprieve. But the desire to kill it still exists.

The coal industry at Callide is a young industry and was started under difficult conditions, and it is the duty of Australian Governments to nurture, encourage and help young industries in this Commonwealth. That is an elementary principle no Government should ignore. A subsidy at least equal to that paid on the imported foreign coal should have been proffered to Callide by the Federal Government; there should have been no need to seek it. That Government should not have waited until a subsidy was asked for; they were aware of all the circumstances. And what better article could you use in Australia than the Australian article?

Mr. Kerr: There is better coal than the Callide coal.

Mr. BURROWS: When the hon. member says that there is better coal than the Callide coal he has discovered quite a lot. There are better men than he and I who differ on that point, but the point I want to make is that there is a better policy the Federal Government should have adopted than the one they did adopt, and it is my purpose to impress it upon them.

Let me tell the House of the reaction displayed by the men associated with coal production at Callide to the outlook of the Premier of Victoria. The mine-owners reduced their prices, and the Queensland Government reduced the royalty too. Every employee on the job stepped up his output. Several ships have been to Gladstone and the Australian Shipping Board, the instrumentality that directs shipping to take the coal away, said that it would send the necessary ships but required a loading of at least 700 tons a day, and that if this loading was not forthcoming a penalty or demurrage would be imposed upon the shippers of the coal. The Gladstone waterside workers and the Harbour Board employees, in answer to the demand for 700 tons of coal a day, averaged on the first ship that came 1,000 tons, and on the second ship it was 1,100 tons. Every effort is being made to speed up loading by the installation of modern coal-loading facilities at Gladstone, which will revolutionise coal-loading in Queensland and eliminate all risks of delay in the turn-round of ships. There was a delay in the allocation of ships which caused a temporary hold-up, but I feel that this is only a temporary hold-up and will be overcome.

Every mine-worker put his best effort forward to see that Victoria got the coal and that Premier McDonald of Victoria was not let down, but every one of those mine-workers is mindful of the fact that his pay is being taxed to provide part of the subsidy that the

Federal Government have so generously given to bolster up the coolie coal-mines of Africa. It is not very comforting to any set of taxpayers to realise that they are being taxed for that purpose—to satisfy the hatred of the Federal politician towards Queensland. One can quite understand how the men engaged in one industry will feel when they know they are being taxed to subsidise their competitors in a foreign land. In any request for a subsidy for Callide coal, or for that matter for any similar Australian industry, what better precedent could this House or the Federal Government have than the eagerness with which the Menzies-Fadden Government rushed in and offered subsidies on African coal?

Mr. Wordsworth: They offered to subsidise Callide coal, too, but the Premier said he did not want a subsidy.

Mr. BURROWS: The hon. member is a new arrival in this Assembly, and I do not desire to take advantage of his ignorance. If he cares to listen to what I have to say, nobody will be happier than I to retract any incorrect statements that I make. He has been deputed to answer these charges that everyone knew I should be making. I am not in the habit of making untruthful statements.

At this stage I should like to quote the following article, which appeared in the "Brisbane Telegraph" of 31 July, 1950:—

"Responsibility for the development of the Callide coal deposits now rests with the Federal Government. Following a statement by the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Fadden) that Commonwealth assistance depended on the attitude of the Victorian and South Australian Governments, the Victorian Premier (Mr. McDonald) said his State would guarantee a market for Callide coal if the Commonwealth would subsidise it on the same basis as imported.

"It would not cost the Commonwealth any more to subsidise Callide coal than imported, and there is now no reason why it should not do so.

"If, as Mr. Menzies has stated, Australia is to become the arsenal of the Pacific again, adequate supplies of coal will be one of our most vital needs. It would be crass stupidity to depend on imports to make up the deficiency in our requirements. In the event of war, shipments from overseas would become hazardous and unreliable. The surest and safest way to get the coal we need is by the development of local open cuts, such as Callide."

Those are not my sentiments; they are the sentiments of a paper that is not renowned for its support of this Government. On the contrary, it has faithfully supported the Opposition and, probably with a great deal of regret today, it also faithfully supported the present Federal Administration.

I have been given a photograph of a coolie mining coal in a South African mine. This poor unfortunate man is paid the princely

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wage of 2s. 6d. a day, but that sacrifice is small compared with others that he has to make. For instance, because the wealthy mine-owners in Africa are not compelled to observe the same hygienic and safety provisions as their counterparts are in this country, the average expectancy of a coal-miner's life in the mines in Africa is round about five years. Those are the conditions against which Australian miners are expected to compete. However, after proving that by efficiency and because of the natural advantages they enjoy they can compete against them and still have a high standard of living, our Federal Government say, "If we cannot get you down to the coolie level in any other way, we will subsidise the mine-owner who employs the coolie."

The expected shortage of coal that will be experienced in Australia during the next five years has been variously estimated at from 2,000,000 to 5,000,000 tons. As late as last Saturday I heard Senator McLeay say over the wireless that Australia would be at least 3,000,000 tons short of coal within the next 12 months. I then looked up a few authorities on the matter and I found that the Sydney "Morning Herald" of 3 March, 1950, quoting from a publication entitled "Research Services," gave the estimated deficiency at 2,000,000 tons and that is the lowest expected deficiency I have been able to find. The same paper, dated 6 April, 1950, credited the Prime Minister of Australia with saying that Australia was not producing as much coal as it could and should and estimated that we should be 4,000,000 tons short in production for the current year. The Brisbane "Telegraph" of 11 March, 1950, quoted a similar figure and the Commonwealth-New South Wales Joint Coal Board, in a statement to the Sydney "Morning Herald" of 3 March, 1950, estimated the rise in demand in the next three years to be 20 per cent, while the same authority pointed out that the net deficiency, after allowing for loss by the strike in 1949, was over 2,000,000 tons. The actual deficiency was 3,000,000 tons but this coal strike of wide magnitude last year was responsible for a shortage of 1,000,000 tons.

We have suffered from this deficiency but Callide can supply that deficiency if given a direct rail link with Gladstone. The Prime Minister has already rejected any suggestion of Commonwealth assistance for this proposal but it would not be inappropriate for this House to ask him to reconsider his attitude. The construction of such a railway line, besides giving Australian industry an unlimited quantity of Australian coal of good quality, would also give it coal at a very much reduced price. Senator McLeay has said that the subsidy on African coal would most likely be £10,000,000 before it was finished. I heard Senator McLeay make that statement; in fact, I took him up on the point, and he endeavoured to qualify it by saying, "I only said about £10,000,000." I submit that they will never be finished with the paying of subsidies, if they have their way, unless they can find some coal seam somewhere else than in Queensland. They

will not be finished with it unless we build that direct railway link between Gladstone and Callide, and that £10,000,000 I mentioned before would build a line of silver rails between Gladstone and Callide.

Mr. Menzies has made the excuse that we have no steel rails for rail construction. If we have not got the will to do anything, then we shall not have anything and, as I said before, there is no excuse for a lack of desire to do something, particularly in the national interests. Imported steel rails are available. We can import £20,000,000 to £30,000,000 worth of coal. The £10,000,000 that I mentioned was only the subsidy; there is the cost of the coal on top of that—all money going out of Australia. If we can provide that money to buy imported coal, surely we can provide £500,000 to buy imported steel rails. The coal that is bought overseas is put into our furnaces and goes up in smoke, a burnt offering to the hatred and prejudice of those vicious men who at present have the power and the right to control the government and destiny of this country. But if they bought steel rails and built this railway it would be an everlasting monument to their statesmanship.

Mr. Wordsworth: That is a State job.

Mr. BURROWS: The State will quickly build the line if Mr. Menzies will provide the cash, or a share of the cash. The hon. member is very unsophisticated in these matters. We only want in that regard the same consideration that the Federal Government are giving to South Australia in the development of its coalfields.

(Time, on motion of Mr. Wood, extended).

Mr. BURROWS: I thank hon. members for their consideration.

Plenty of excuses will be forthcoming for the failure of the Federal Government to function as a Federal Government. We shall most likely be told that there are engineering difficulties in the construction of such a railway but I have discussed the matter with engineers and I have not met one who did not assure me that the construction of such a railway, from an engineering point of view, will be a comparatively easy job. The expenditure of large sums of money on providing road facilities is only a palliative; those sums could be spent to much better purpose in building a railway, even if it were built for only 40 miles along the comparatively level flats in the Callide Valley, so that the coal could be carted into Gladstone from its terminus. Such a railway would have a great influence on the future production of this coalfield.

Governments should have an outlook that will give industry plenty of coal at the best possible price. It is unnecessary for me to elaborate on that statement. If industry gets cheap coal it should be able to produce cheap goods. The construction of a heavy-duty railway line similar to the Whyalla line in South Australia would benefit southern industries immensely. Not only would it give industry cheap coal but it would also assure

it of unlimited supplies. What better contribution could any Government make to a nation's economy? I can assure hon. members opposite that this Government will play their part, if we can only arouse the interests and enthusiasm of the Menzies Government.

Mr. Morris: This Government have done nothing towards building that railway line.

Mr. BURROWS: This line remains unbuilt because of the obsession of the Federal Government that Queensland must not be developed. That obsession must be corrected. There are no difficulties in the road, only a mountain of prejudice. No doubt vested interests in the South believe that if only given half a chance this State will progress so fast that it will outstrip its southern sister States.

Mr. Fadden has set himself up as an authority on coal, for he has said that the quality of the Callide coal is not good. Mr. Fadden has never been associated with coal—at least, I have never heard of his possessing any qualifications in that direction—but at least I should expect a man in his position, after making such a statement, particularly such a libellous statement, to support it with some authority.

Mr. Nicklin: Let us have the libellous statement.

Mr. BURROWS: He said it was no good. Powell Duffryn Technical Services Ltd. may be accepted as a very high authority on coal, and when Mr. Fadden attacks the quality of Callide coal he is attacking the qualifications of the Powell Duffryn group—the world's best authority on coal, its content and uses. The Brisbane power-house successfully used Callide coal during the last 12 months and there has been no complaint about its quality. It has also been used in railway locomotives and in other industries. I maintain that all the complaints against Callide coal have been inspired by prejudice and/or financial considerations.

I will illustrate that point. At the present time a considerable quantity of New South Wales coal—not sufficient to supply the demand—is being sent to Victoria. The New South Wales coal industry has not been prejudiced by hatred like that shown to Callide and it has a sound organisation that carries its product from Newcastle to Victoria. It has the added advantage of a comparatively short distance of transport and is able to supply coal at £3 17s. a ton, whereas African coal is £6 6s. a ton and Indian coal £6 10s. Callide coal, although only £5 a ton, is still £1 to 25s. dearer than New South Wales coal. There is not sufficient New South Wales coal to supply the demand and various industries are competing with one another in order to get the cheaper coal. That is where the application of a Federal subsidy could be a great advantage to Callide. I predict that the day Callide coal is available at the same price as other coal, all fears about its quality will disappear. As I said previously, I have

not met one engineer or person who is recognised as an authority who was prepared to say that Callide coal was lacking in quality. It is only natural that such complaints will be made while efforts are being made to get the cheaper New South Wales coal; therefore we may perhaps forgive the persons who have complained. When the Gladstone-Callide railway link is built Callide coal will be available in Melbourne at a cheaper price than New South Wales coal, and in consequence there will be no question of its quality.

As I said before, the present price is still more or less in the melting pot and it will be influenced by legislation that is not yet passed. It is expected that the cost of Callide coal will be about 12s. or 13s. a ton at the pit. At open-cut fields in New South Wales, such as Caledon, it is 46s. free on rails at siding, and at Cessnock No. 2 it is 41s. The price differs in different districts. The cheapest open-cut coal produced in New South Wales is at Huston, where it is 26s. 4d. a ton on rail at the colliery siding. It will thus be seen that it is only the non-existence of this railway that is stopping Callide coal from being sold in the southern States at a price that will make it very attractive to coal-users there.

The Kemp Report on the development of Blair Athol can be taken, with very few alterations, as a blue-print to the solution of our coal problem if applied to Callide. Any person of average intelligence who reads that report will appreciate the fact that coal can be landed at Gladstone at round about £1 a ton. If that is so, the benefit to industry would be enormous. It is the duty of any Government to make every effort to bring such a state of affairs about.

The Australian demand for coal is not the only demand. In the "Mining Journal" of 20 July, 1950, I read a letter sent to the chairman of one of the Blair Athol companies from Major E. B. Nevin, an American, in which he states—

"In the last six months of 1949 the U.S.A. purchased 1,355,102 tons of bituminous coal from Maryland and Virginia east coast ports at a cost of 12,523,561 dollars for Japan, to which must be added the large cost of the long water haul down the east coast through the Panama Canal to Japan—a long route, not entirely safe in war time from enemy submarines. In sharp contrast, Blair Athol coal not only would be cheaper, but also one-third the steamship haul to Japan."

Other markets exist. For instance, New Zealand in 1929 took 30,000 tons of Blair Athol coal through Gladstone and lately that dominion has been making inquiries. The Phillipines have been inquiring as to the possibility of getting Callide coal through Gladstone, and—hon. members can believe it or not, but it is a fact—only the other day an inquiry was made about a cargo of Callide coal to be shipped in a vessel that was available, and the destination of that coal was Pakistan, India. Such are the ramifications and implications in this trade. I could not believe the statement until I confirmed it.

Without exaggeration, the possibilities for Callide and Blair Athol coal are unlimited and Governments should be eager to come forward to help in the development of these fields.

There is a great quantity of coal in Queensland, much more than Queensland will use in the next 200 years. Apart from its trade value, we should do something to supply the countries, and in particular the parts of Australia, that have not been so generously endowed with the commodity that we have in abundance. All that is necessary is a realisation by the Federal Government of their responsibilities; and, as I said formerly, all we want the Federal Government to do is to function as an Australian Government.

Mr. Collins: Why did they subsidise the Indian coal?

An Opposition Member interjected.

Mr. BURROWS: The hon. member's interjection as to why they did not subsidise Callide coal is a question to which I have given quite a great deal of thought, and I say that the iniquitous subsidy on foreign coal could possibly have been introduced for any of the following four reasons: political graft; prejudice and hatred of Queensland; the desire to help the cause of Fascism; plain stupidity. The first is a possible reason because the amount of money expended by the anti-Labour forces in Australia in order to obtain office was colossal; even the kids at school wonder where Mr. Menzies got his finance from. It is difficult to believe that they sold their country; to be quite honest, I am reluctant to think so, but that is one of the reasons that appealed to me as worthy of investigation. However, I am not in a position to investigate it.

The second reason certainly exists, and it is a very probable reason, because prejudice unfortunately does exist in the minds of all of us to some extent but to a greater degree in some people than in others. Prejudice against Queensland might have been a reason and I submit it was the same prejudice that prompted the delegation of hon. members opposite to Canberra recently.

As to the third of my reasons, the present Government in South Africa is a Fascist Government. There are not many countries in the world where Fascism still has a footing, but in the hearts of many people there is still a desire to see Fascism back once again.

Mr. Aikens: In that respect they are similar to the Menzies-Fadden crowd.

Mr. BURROWS: I think that there might be some affinity between the Fascist Government of South Africa and the Menzies-Fadden Government of Australia, and in that regard I am reminded of a statement made by Mr. Menzies in April, 1940, when he said—

"I have great admiration for the Nazi organisation of Germany. We must not talk of destroying Hitlerism or shooting Hitler."

A Government Member: Who said that?

Mr. BURROWS: Mr. Menzies said that. I do not come here with wild statements. Hon. members opposite will have opportunities of denying that later, but Mr. Menzies has not denied it. When we realise that the Government of South Africa are a Fascist Government we see the affinity between Mr. Menzies and Dr. Malan and we see what prompted the Federal Government to crucify Callide coal.

I want to be charitable. I gave as my last reason crass stupidity, and I want to say that there will be no happier man than I if time proves that that was the only reason that prompted this mis-use of Australian taxpayers' money in order to kill an Australian industry and retard the development, defence and growth of this country.

Instead of subsidising this country's competitors, why do not the Federal Government do the decent thing and impose a prohibitive tariff on the imported article, as they did in the case of the rayon industry? The reason is that the rayon industry is concentrated in the southern States, whereas Callide is in the northern, forgotten and despised section of Australia. That is the reason for this desire to kill Callide and preserve the sacred South.

An Opposition Member: That is parochialism.

Mr. BURROWS: It is not parochialism, it is Australianism.

I appeal to hon. members opposite to cut their association with the Federal Administration and to tell the people that they have broken with the Government who have betrayed Australia and Australia's economy. After what has happened, any hon. member who will support the Federal Government can rightly be accused of aiding and abetting them in their betrayal of Australia. I am not happy about making such statements as these, but it causes me a good deal of concern to know that the Australian Government are doing these things. To what better place should the average citizen be able to look for an example than our national Parliament? Yet he finds the Government there betraying Australia. What is the use of saying that a few poor unfortunate men who ask for something are a lot of Communists? As I said previously, who are we to throw stones at other nations?

An Opposition Member: You have thrown some this morning.

Mr. BURROWS: I am not throwing them at other countries. I pictured for the hon. member a fools' paradise, and he is feeling very much at home in it.

I know these things and I believe them. If I did not bring them forward in this House I should regard it as a dereliction of duty on my part not to expose these traitors, and if there was any way in which I could give them more publicity, I should eagerly do so.

I am not seeking notoriety or publicity in urging the development of this great Australian industry. When I say that Callide should be developed, I am not referring only

to the electorates of Port Curtis and Callide; I want to help the whole of Australia. I do not want to cash in on Callide publicity. As a matter of fact, to be quite candid, I do not want to die a politician; I find it very difficult to live as one. I do not care whom I offend or what the political consequences may be. My duty is to take every opportunity I can to draw public attention to this neglect, this ill-treatment, this sabotage and, I might truthfully say, this rape of a great Australian industry.

Government Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. WHYTE (Mackenzie) (12.19 p.m.): In rising to support the motion so ably moved by the hon. member for Port Curtis, I wish at the outset to refer to an article by Douglas Wilkie that appeared in the "Courier-Mail" of 19 September, in which he said that the British Labour Party had nationalised very little except Britain's worn-out coal-mines and run-down railways. In making the point that steel and railways are closely interwoven with coal, I point out the lack of logic in the argument that the Government are entitled to take control when business is ruined by private enterprise, but must keep their hands off when dividends are being paid to private enterprise.

The tragedy of British coal-mining is now fully realised. As Douglas Wilkie says, it is agreed that the Government control was essential to enable Britain to win the peace, as without ample coal production there would be insufficient exports to bridge the gap between exports and imports. As every hon. member knows, nationalisation of British coal-mines produced over 200,000,000 tons last year and evidently has a bright future before it, whereas our coal-mining industry is causing worry to Australia. But we in Queensland are showing better figures every year. For the year just ended 2,000,000 tons were produced. Also, we know that in a crisis we can improve that beyond ordinary expectations. Nevertheless, the overall picture for Australia is not a happy one. It is not made any the happier by the Commonwealth Government's action in subsidising coal mined by cheap coloured labour.

The Sydney "Sunday Herald" of 10 September, 1950, has this to say—

"£8 million for coal from India, South Africa.

"Subsidy to cover extra cost.

"One and a half million tons of coal imported from India and South Africa this year will cost Australia £8,000,000.

"The Federal Government will pay a subsidy of £2,000,000 to the Victorian and South Australian Governments for the coal."

It is a terrible shame that taxpayers' money should find its way towards subsidising foreign coal when the only obstacle to ample supply from Australia is developmental work to enable our big coal deposits to be tackled. We read a week ago where Senator McLeay, the Commonwealth Minister for Fuel, said that notwithstanding the record production, the 1951 production would be 3,000,000 tons short of requirements. The present Secretary for

Public Lands, when Secretary for Mines, introduced the Coal Industry (Control) Act and said—

“I find when looking up the coal position throughout the world that other countries besides Australia are in the same position in regard to the need for more coal for electricity and gas.”

Europe and America cannot produce enough for their own requirements. The Minister gave the House a complete picture of the future which faced the coal industry in Queensland.

The hon. member for Port Curtis has told hon. members of the Callide possibilities and I can trump his remarks with the Blair Athol deposits, which is one of the seven wonders of the world. We had an opportunity of having lunch with Mr. Gordon-Walker, British Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, and he described it in those terms. I ask hon. members to imagine a 90-foot band of clean coal. I heard quite a number of hon. members opposite speak of the practice of picking the eyes out of the coal under the system of sub-letting leases, but there could be no such practice as that with the Blair Athol coal—there is one huge band of good-quality coal. And there is very little overburden, too, just 25 to 30 feet of soft material that can be removed without the use of explosives. Hon. members can imagine the tremendous quantity of coal that is there. As I said in the House a fortnight ago, it would do hon. members from both sides good to take a trip to Blair Athol to see the seam for themselves. It would be an eye-opener to them and I am sure that when they came back they would support what I am saying.

Mr. Kerr: Quite a number have seen it.

Mr. WHYTE: But quite a number have not.

Blair Athol is like a giant-held captive. Some day soon I hope it will burst its bonds and stride freely across the country, either in the form of electric conveyor belts or by rail or huge freight planes. Of one thing I am sure, it must come into its own as the world's best deposit of coal, the average analysis of which is shown by “The Central Queensland Economic Review,” just issued by Mr. Dyne, to be—

	Per cent.
Moisture	8.3
Volatile matter	25.7
Fixed Carbon	59.3
Ash	6.7

Its British thermal units per pound range between 11,000 and 12,000. It is an ideal steam coal. Its development is in a major degree dependent on a rail link to the North, so well spoken of by the hon. member for Hinchinbrook the other day in this Chamber, or a direct line to the coast.

I say sincerely that the Government are in duty bound to give early and weighty consideration to the exploitation of these wonderful deposits, either by gasification, electric power, the extraction of oil from coal or the treatment of its by-products, which science tells us are to be found there in abundance.

Electric power could be generated and transmitted all over the country from Blair Athol. As hon. members must realise, that development cannot take place if an abundance of water is not available and this can be procured from Connors River or Eastern Creek. If necessary, a dam could be constructed in the Nogoia River. Already weirs are being placed across the Nogoia which method will provide an ample supply of water. In this way we could refine coal into electric power.

It is pleasing to note that according to the annual report of the Department of Mines, recently tabled in this Chamber, the production at Blair Athol for the year 1949 showed an improvement of almost 100,000 tons. Another heartening fact in that report is the statement that the Railway Department is playing its part in the development of Blair Athol by regrading the line between Emerald and Clermont to enable heavier loads of coal to be hauled. That work would tend to increase coal production at Blair Athol.

I repeat that Blair Athol is an open-cut coalfield and is the largest known deposit of black coal in the Southern hemisphere that is capable of being worked by the open-cut method of mining. The seam extends over 5 square miles and has a depth of overburden varying from 22 to 35 feet, mainly sandstone. The coal is a good steaming coal but is unsatisfactory for gas or coke-making. One of the open pits has an exposed face of clean coal over 90 feet in depth.

One feature of Blair Athol is its distance from the coast. Up to date this has been a handicap to its development but when defence measures are considered it becomes a very important asset. Then, in my electorate also we have the go-ahead Bluff field, which possesses valuable characteristics in the direction I have pointed out associated with Blair Athol. I would also draw attention to the Nebo coal deposits, which I mentioned in this House a fortnight ago. This untapped wealth is a coal of a high gas and coking quality. In other words, if you add Blair Athol coal to the deposits existing at Nebo you have everything that coal can give and everything that a nation needs.

I will conclude with a few words on the open-cut method of mining. It is called also open-cast mining. The justification for winning coal by open-cut methods is three-fold. Firstly, large quantities of coal can be won if big machines are available—everything depends upon that—with little risk of accident and no risk of industrial disease and without the need of trained miners; secondly, open-cast digging will not only extract all the coal, but can put back the land evenly so that the soil can be cultivated, if suitable; and thirdly, cheap coal can be provided for industry if the haulage is not too great.

Compared with underground mining, open-cut working has the following definite advantages:—(1) given a suitable ratio of overburden to the coal, a larger output per man-shift can be obtained at a low working cost per ton of coal; (2) the support of roof, provision of ventilation, and the cost of maintenance of shafts, haulage roads and other underground workings are avoided;

(3) skilled underground labour is not required, and safety measures are less onerous and supervision is simpler; (4) less capital expenditure is generally necessary for the development of the deposit or for the subsequent working; (5) less development work is required and therefore the mine can be brought quickly into production, and (6) the hazards of gas or dust explosions are considerably reduced.

The Minister for Mines told the House in 1948 that in 1933 the output per miner was 2.98 tons per underground shift, and in 1946 it was 3.66 tons. At Blair Athol, where open-cut mining has developed, this average has been increased to 7.5 tons per shift per employee.

I trust, Mr. Acting Speaker, that I have shown to the satisfaction of the House that there is every reason for the Commonwealth Government to begin its coal-assistance policy at home. Charity begins at home. This assistance could take many forms, but I am positive the best one is that suggested by the hon. member for Port Curtis, which I heartily support. I have also a few tables that I should like to quote. The Blair Athol Coal and Timber Company's open-cut produced 170,404 tons for the year, and finished the year with a face cleared of overburden exposing 150,000 tons. The Blair Athol Open-cut Collieries Ltd. open-cut produced 142,720 tons for the year and at the close of the year had a stripped reserve of 70,000 tons.

I wholeheartedly support the motion so ably moved by the hon. member for Port Curtis.

Mr. KERR (Sherwood) (12.32 p.m.): Firstly, and without any equivocation, I should like to commend the mover for raising this motion in this House; and I should also like to give due credit and praise to him for his doggedness in pursuing as he has done the development of the Callide coalfield in particular. It is obvious that his straightforward advocacy of the development of this field has not at all times been particularly pleasing to some other members of the Government party, particularly to the hon. member for Rockhampton and the hon. member for Keppel. This coal is now going by rail through their territory and through their port, and naturally it could not be expected to receive a great deal of sympathy from them, because of that fact alone. I again say to the hon. member for Port Curtis that he has done a great job in pursuing the development of the Callide field to the extent he has.

Naturally I had given this question some thought before I made up my mind to speak on it, and I was really astonished that the hon. member for Port Curtis should avail himself on an occasion such as this—when speaking on the important question of coal—to abuse and enter into a tirade against the Federal Government, which was purely political propaganda. On that ground alone, I am almost compelled to withdraw commendation to him for bringing this motion. I am extremely sorry that he did so. Notwithstanding that, I should like to say to him, that he should keep on fighting and not give

up the ghost, and take heart, because notwithstanding all the red herrings he has brought out and the untruths he has spoken about the Federal Government, I believe the Federal Government will give every assistance, both financially and technically, for the development of the Callide coalfield in due course. Everyone on this side advocates the same thing; and our voices will be heard in the proper place where these things are eventually brought about. Again I say to the hon. member, "take heart," because I believe in the course of time it will be brought about.

Mr. Farrell: They are taking a long time.

Mr. KERR: The hon. member's Government have been a long time. The Queensland Government have been talking of the development of the Callide coalfield for the past two years, but they have done nothing.

Yet he expects the Federal Government in a matter of weeks to produce 200,000 tons of coal with the flick of an eye. (Government interjections.) Moreover, there have been Labour Governments in power in Federal politics for many years, but what assistance was got from them? (Government interjections.) None, of course; but assistance will be given by the present Federal Government, I honestly believe.

We are all agreed on the lamentable fact of the acute shortage of coal in Australia. That is obvious to all. Even the smallest boy or girl knows it. If we have the interest of the whole of the people of this land at heart it is our bounden duty to exhaust every avenue to remedy that state of affairs. Reserve stocks to last at least three months should be built up. This would be above the day-to-day requirements. That should be an objective.

I make some mention of the effect of the lag in coal production that exists today in the overall Australian picture, not particularly Queensland, on the cost of living.

Mr. Jesson: What has that got to do with the motion?

Mr. KERR: It has something to do with the motion because if this extra production of coal cannot be obtained the day-to-day supply will continue. It is the duty of every Government, not only the Government of Queensland, to ensure that this lag in coal production is overcome.

Mr. Jesson: Do you not agree with the motion?

Mr. KERR: I agree with the motion, but not with the way it has been put by the hon. member for Port Curtis. I regret that he was not constructive in any way; in fact, his statements were more destructive than constructive. To overcome this lag of coal production we must examine the cause, carefully and dispassionately, outside the scope of party politics. We must first diagnose the cause of the sickness in this regard before we can begin to effect a cure. Who is there who can honestly deny that the outstanding and principal cause of the under-production of coal in Australia today and over the past

five years, has been the domination of the coal industry of the Communist leaders of the Miners' Federation of Australia—nothing more, nothing less. In passing, I would mention that the tactics adopted at the present time by the Federal Labour Party in regard to the Communist Bill are not—

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member is not in order.

Mr. KERR: I appreciate—

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! I do not want to stifle the hon. member, but I would point out that the motion has nothing to do with the Communist Party Dissolution Bill now before the Federal Parliament. There is no reference to it in this motion. I ask the hon. member to deal with the matters contained in the motion.

Mr. KERR: You gave the hon. member who moved this motion great latitude. You were a little precipitate, if I may say so, in calling me to order. They are not only supporting the leaders of the communistic Miners' Union but they are perpetuating one of the greatest evils in our economy and one of the greatest threats to our standard of living. I will endeavour to make some constructive suggestions. That is my object. I am not belabouring this phase of the matter but am simply making constructive suggestions to improve the commendable motion before the House.

At page 524 of the Jubilee issue of the Mining Journal there is an article by no less an authority than Mr. Colin Clark. It shows that mine workers in 1929 enjoyed an advantage in wage rates over other occupations, but that advantage does not apply now. For the period 1929-1949 mine workers' rates were increased by 50 per cent. The facts I am about to relate have a big bearing on the lag in production.

Mr. Ingram: Production is greater now than ever.

Mr. KERR: No. Only for the open-cut mines production would be down. (Dissent.)

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! I want to say to hon. members that they will have the opportunity of refuting statements made by the hon. member for Sherwood and I ask them to allow him to make his speech without interruption.

Mr. KERR: I thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker. I am trying to find a cause for this lag in coal production. I was saying that the mine worker's rate had increased by 50 per cent. The rates in the clothing and engineering trades increased by 75 per cent. and in the building industry by 64 per cent. and in the food and transport industries by 68 per cent. Can it be truthfully said that any of those industries is as hazardous as the coal-mining industry? Is there any wonder that there is a shortage of men in the coal-mining industry, because men will naturally go where the best financial results can be obtained for their labour and where the nature of the work does not

involve the same hazards to life and health as those to be met in the coal-mining industry?

The article by Mr. Colin Clark says—

“The number of coal-miners has continued to increase at every census except that of 1933, held during the depression. But their number has not kept pace with the increase in employment generally, coal-mining employment as a percentage of working population being .91 per cent. in 1921, .69 in 1933, and .81 in 1947. The recovery since the depression has enabled coal production to increase, and in 1948-49 Queensland coal production was more than 70 per cent. greater than the average of the three pre-war years. Even this has been no more than enough to meet our requirements. Industrial requirements of coal are much greater than would be expected as a result of population increase only, due to the rapid increase in manufacturing industry in Australia in recent years. This further industrialisation has created heavy additional demands for power.

“There are several reasons for the inability of the coalmining industries to cope with the demand, and not the least of them is the shortage of labour . . .”

I am trying to ascertain the cause for the lag in coal production and here is one important reason: the wages being paid to coal-miners are not in line with the increased wages paid to other industries where there is less hazard to health and life. The rate of pay in 1949 in the mining industry was 4s. 0½d. an hour, in the building trade, 4s. 3½d., and in the clothing, boots, &c., industry 4s. 1½d. Those figures provide one reason for the lag in coal production.

Other reasons for the decrease in coal production are Communist control of the industry and wage anomalies, and they must be overcome.

Let us look at the production figures since 1942 as they appear on page 541 of the Jubilee issue of the “Queensland Government Mining Journal.” I am quoting from an article by Mr. Dunne, who is chairman of the Queensland Coal Board. Of course, he knows nothing at all about coal, but he has written this article and we either have to accept him as an authority or forget all about him! In 1942 the production from underground mines was 1,579,923 tons, whilst in 1949 it was only 1,547,000 tons, a decrease of 33,000 tons.

Mr. Jesson: There was a strike on.

Mr. KERR: I will tell the whole truth; I will hide nothing. Let us now examine the total output figures. In 1949 the total production was 1,971,985 tons, but that total was obtained only because of increased production in the open-cut mines, the increase since 1942 being 370,000 tons. The open-cut mines were responsible for the increase in the production figures for 1949.

Mr. Donald: What was the output per man per shift?

It is greater now than it ever was.

Mr. KERR: The hon. member cannot dispute the facts contained in this journal. I am giving the facts, and if we cannot rely on facts contained in a journal such as this we can forget about everything that ever comes before this House.

It is perfectly clear that less coal was produced from underground mines in 1949 than in 1942. What would have happened to our coal-production figures if it had not been for the open-cut mines? We should have had to ration supplies of gas and electricity. Nothing was done in the West Moreton fields to overcome the production lag. If we had not had our open-cut mines, we should have been in the same position as Melbourne.

I ask hon. members to examine the map contained in this journal and to see where these great coal deposits are. In the central district we have the area extending from Collinsville to Baralaba. Then we come to the Roma-Darling Downs-West Moreton-Rosewood deposits. The Ipswich-Rosewood area has been estimated to possess coal reserves of 2,600 million tons of coal, and it supplies 50 per cent. of our present production.

A Government Member: Are these your figures, or Colin Clark's?

Mr. KERR: They are Powell Duffryn's figures.

In my opinion this field stands out and should be given first priority in immediate development and on the very solid ground, the only ground, and that is the ground of costs. The general requirements of 500,000 people in the metropolitan area is something that should receive our attention, but let us also work back north and not forget the requirements of our important regional electricity schemes. Provision will have to be made for the consumption by them of coal from the nearest coalfields to their powerhouses. There are the Wide Bay, South Burnett, Capricornia, and Townsville regional boards. I have omitted Cairns, in the belief that the Tully Falls may take care of that. As these regional districts develop they will require many more thousands of tons of coal than they need today, and mines in the closest proximity to them will be required to be developed so as to give them the cheapest fuel available, thereby enabling them to provide the cheapest possible electricity. This will enable long haulage to be avoided at all costs.

Mr. Wood: Are you prepared to state your attitude towards the payment of a subsidy on coal now?

Mr. KERR: I am prepared to do that in due course; the hon. member need not worry about that. Let me make it perfectly clear to him that I have only one interest at heart and that is to get coal for the people of Queensland and Australia and I divorce myself from any party politics entirely. That is something that the hon. member cannot overcome. The electricity schemes will in 1952 require 534,000 tons of coal, in 1955

an estimated amount of 642,000 tons, and in 1958 an amount of 786,000 tons, or half the coal produced in the State today.

Mr. Jesson: Are those your own figures?

Mr. KERR: They are Mr. Cochran's figures. Every time the hon. member opens his mouth he puts his foot in it. He is prepared to repudiate the figures supplied by his own Government authority.

In the short time left to me I want to stress the importance of coal production in this State. It comes next to primary production, and if you are to maintain your standard of living and stop the spiral of inflation going on today you must have coal. You cannot get coal in many places economically unless you have railways and in that regard I wholeheartedly support the hon. member for Port Curtis for a railway line to the Callide field. I go further and say I want the Commonwealth Government to step in and help finance the building of it; and they will too. The hon. member for Port Curtis has grown thin on Callide coal—no railway and no coal. I want him to take heart, to have some faith in people outside of the Labour Party.

Mr. Burrows: You want to bring me down to your level?

Mr. KERR: No, I want to raise the hon. member up to our level. The subsidising of the production of coal at Callide would have been purely an emergency means to keep industry going and to prevent blackouts during the winter period in Melbourne. How much coal could have been provided from the Callide field to overcome the lag and shortage in Melbourne at that time? Hon. members opposite cannot answer the question. It was not possible to do it.

Mr. Jesson: That is a square-off.

Mr. KERR: It is not a square-off at all. It is an honest statement of the position and the hon. member knows it. My personal opinion is there should be no subsidisation whatsoever on imported coal or on local coal. I will give reasons.

Mr. Burrows: Are you in favour of a protective tariff on coal?

Mr. KERR: No, not a protective tariff.

Mr. Burrows: Don't you believe in that?

Mr. KERR: Yes, if it is necessary, but we have an abundance of coal in Australia. Let us do without a subsidy, and if a railway is built, as the hon. member for Port Curtis and as hon. members on this side of the House want to do, there will be no necessity for the subsidisation of the cost element in the production and delivery of that coal.

Mr. Burrows interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Mr. KERR: I am here to speak what I think on these things without any fear whatsoever. I am not tied down to what I should think or what I should say. We are up against difficulties in the building of railways. We find that the Broken Hill people,

who supply steel rails for Australian Governments, are 30 or 40 per cent. behind in meeting the demand. That will be difficult to overcome. I want to make this suggestion; that the Queensland Government give the Minister for Transport an open order and a roving commission to go after these rails to build this most important railway.

Mr. Power: You want to get him out of Queensland?

Mr. KERR: I do not; I merely want him to go and find these rails, and I believe he will and that there will be no reason for saying that there are no rails to build this railway. I want to make one comment in this regard, and that is this: we have been hampered to a certain extent by the fact that we have had three Ministers for Mines in three years. Is it fair to the people to change one of the most important portfolios in the Cabinet, such as is that of Secretary for Mines, so frequently? Mining is the basic means for the development of our secondary industries. If a man is not kept at the helm in that department and given a chance to do something, instead of being shifted every year for some reason or other, we cannot look for continuity of developmental policy. The Government should keep the present Minister in that office for the life of this Parliament, because he will not be there after the present period is expired.

Mr. Burrows interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I should like to remind the hon. member for Port Curtis that continuous interjections are disorderly. I therefore ask him to obey my call to order.

Mr. KERR: I want to proceed to deal with the regional electricity undertakings that are afoot. Some of them are assuming shape. I will refer to the Burrum field, but first let me state that 50 per cent. of our known reserves of coal are to be found in the Walloon series in the West Moreton and Rosewood areas. We should do something to develop that field economically, because we can get that coal out cheaply and ship it from the wharves in Brisbane to Melbourne a good deal cheaper than the Callide coal. Make no mistake about it. It is better coal, too.

At 2.15 p.m.,

In accordance with Sessional Order the House proceeded with Government business.

COMMISSION TO ADMINISTER OATHS.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I have to inform the House that His Excellency the Governor has been pleased to issue a Commission under the Public Seal of the State empowering me to administer the oath or affirmation of allegiance to such members as may hereafter present themselves to be sworn, which I now direct the Clerk to read to the House.

Commission thereupon read by the Clerk.

COAL MINING ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

THIRD READING.

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

RABBIT ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(The Acting Chairman of Committees, Mr. Farrell, Maryborough, in the chair.)

Hon. T. A. FOLEY (Belyando—Secretary for Public Lands and Irrigation) (2.19 p.m.): I move—

“That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to consolidate and amend certain enactments relating to the introduction into and the keeping in Queensland of rabbits; and for these and other purposes to amend the Rabbit Acts, 1913 to 1943, in certain particulars.”

The main reasons for the introduction of this measure are, firstly, representations made by various members of the rabbit boards already constituted and in operation in the State and the desire of the Government to give every facility possible to rabbit boards to enable them to carry out their functions in the most efficient way.

The Bill first of all repeals the Rabbit Act of 1885 and the Rabbit Act Amendment Act of 1889, also the further Part VII. of amendments thereto contained in the Land Acts and Other Acts Amendment Act of 1941, but although we are repealing these measures we are retaining certain principles contained in them and incorporating them in what will be known as the Rabbit Acts, 1930 to 1950. The phraseology, however, will be slightly different. The Parliamentary Draftsman thinks that it is necessary to meet present-day conditions.

One of the first alterations repeals the definition of “holding” in the Principal Act and inserts a new definition that will read—“Any country land under any tenure or freehold.” That is all-embracing and the slight alteration it involves is necessary for reasons that will be explained as I proceed. The repeal of Section 12 of the Principal Act is also necessary to make provision for the qualification of persons eligible to be elected as members of rabbit boards and also of voters. In short, any owner, part-owner, general manager, or manager of a holding is qualified to be elected a member of any rabbit board.

Mr. Sparkes: Was he not qualified before because of that?

Mr. FOLEY: I think there is a slight alteration but I am dealing with principles only now. Compared with existing sections it will be found that there is a slight alteration in some of these clauses. With regard to the qualification to vote, each resident owner or resident part-owner or manager of a holding is qualified to vote at any election of members of a rabbit board. The clause in question introduces the principle known as one man, one vote. The repealed section provides that any individual owner or general manager, as the case might be, had the right of three votes, according to the

number of sheep or cattle on the holding of which he was owner. For instance, the qualifications at present are as follows:—

	Votes.
50 and under 2,000 head of cattle or 250 and under 10,000 sheep	1
2,000 and under 5,000 head of cattle or 10,000 and under 25,000 sheep	2
5,000 head of cattle or 25,000 sheep and upwards	3

That is being altered to the simple principle, that each resident owner, part-owner, or manager, as the case might be—any of them who may desire to vote—shall have that right.

There is a slight alteration that I will explain as I proceed in the method of assessment based on the unimproved value of land and here again the same principle of one man, one vote is established.

We are making provision for alternative methods of assessment to enable the boards to acquire revenue with which to carry on their work. It was pointed out to me by a deputation that the number of stock in some districts—and this was the basis of assessment previously—has declined to a considerable extent. I propose to give a few examples. In the Leichhardt Rabbit Board area in 1940 there were 2,049,000 sheep, and that number gradually declined, until today there are only 789,000 or 1,259,000 fewer. In cattle the decline has been from 1,263,000 to 1,182,000, or by 80,000-odd. The number of horses declined from 49,000 to 37,000-odd, over 11,000 fewer. The number of assessments that were possible in 1940 has declined by 27. The same position applies in the Darling Downs area as there has been a decline of 577,851 sheep since 1940 in that rabbit board area. There has been a gain in cattle but a decline of 7,952 in horses. A similar picture is disclosed in the Moreton Rabbit Board area.

As a result of this decline and the fact that the boards were confined to assessments on the numbers of stock, we find that the revenue of the Leichhardt Board, for example, for 1948 was £8,963 and the expenditure £11,500. In 1949 the revenue was £12,000 and the expenditure £15,800. In 1950 the revenue was £17,220 and the board had reached the limit rate of 5s. a hundred cattle. Notwithstanding that, its revenue was £17,000 whilst the expenditure went to £18,084. A similar picture is revealed in the Darling Downs area where there was a deficit last year of £1,741.

We are providing alternative methods of assessment. A board can elect to assess or levy for revenue purposes on a stock basis or by a rate upon the land within its area. Only one method can be used.

Mr. Sparkes: In that particular area?

Mr. FOLEY: Only one method is to be used. If the method is an assessment on the unimproved value, the owner or the resident

part-owner of a holding or the manager of a holding is entitled to a vote. There is provision enabling the board to keep valuation rolls.

If any particular board elects to use the stock basis for rating, the owner of a holding, even though he may not have any stock on it, will still have a right to vote. For instance, he may have a holding in the district on which his main production is wheat, or some other crop. Each board will determine the method to be adopted and will apply to the Governor in Council for permission to use it as from the year beginning 1 April, 1951, and the Governor in Council will then authorise whatever method it has chosen.

Mr. Sparkes: For instance, the Leichhardt board could use a stock basis and the Darling Downs board could use a land basis?

Mr. FOLEY: Yes.

When the basis of assessment is on stock, the board may levy 1s. but not more than 5s. on every 20 head of cattle, and not more than 5s. or less than 1s. on every 100 head of sheep. This is similar to the provision in the original Act.

If the levy is on the basis of unimproved values, the Bill provides that where the method of raising funds is by a rate, that rate is not to exceed one penny in the £ on the ratable value of all land that is ratable for the purposes of the Act.

Mr. Sparkes: That is, unimproved values?

Mr. FOLEY: Yes. Land that is ratable under the Local Government Acts is to be ratable under the Rabbit Acts, with certain exceptions that are set out in the Bill. The exceptions are land used or intended for use for residential purposes, for industrial purposes, manufacturing, business or mining purposes, and situated in any town or township, land in a holding that is exempted from rating under the Rabbit Act, or any other Act, or a selection or group of selections enclosed in a rabbit-proof fence.

Mr. Sparkes: They are exempted in the original Act.

Mr. FOLEY: Some of them are. I think those exemptions are wide enough.

Provision is also made that the rate is to be levied by the service of a notice on the owner, and will be payable at the rabbit board's office within two months of the service of the notice. There is also provision for a penalty rate. If the rate is not paid by the due date it may be recovered at law, together with a penalty of 10 per cent. Provision is also made that the ratable value of any land for the purpose of the new clause is to be the ratable value thereof for the time being under the Local Government Acts. In other words, it will be in strict conformity with the values in operation in the district in which the rating takes place.

Mr. McIntyre: What about the Valuer-General?

Mr. FOLEY: Provision will be made for the Valuer-General to supply any board with any information it requires. Similarly, the local authority will supply the rabbit board with any information it requires in connection with rating.

Provision is also made that if at the end of any financial year of a board, the funds that it has obtained by the levying of a rate appear to be sufficient to carry it on for another year, the Governor in Council may exempt owners from rating for such period as he thinks fit. It may happen that in the early stages of this altered method of rating a board may not be able to estimate correctly what it requires and, as the result, may over-rate and have surplus funds, with which it may think it can carry on for another year.

A very important principle from the viewpoint of the boards relates to the consolidation of the provisions in respect of the keeping of live rabbits. The Bill will prohibit the introduction of live rabbits into any part of Queensland from any other part of Queensland without a permit from the Minister. The Bill also stipulates that a person must not liberate any live rabbits in Queensland. This is an entirely new provision and is designed to make the working of the Act a little better.

The Bill also provides that no person shall keep or have in his possession live rabbits without a permit from the Minister. That is a very desirable provision and the board is very anxious to have it, in addition to the penalty clause referred to later. The Bill will enable any person to destroy any live rabbit found at any place in Queensland, the owner of the rabbit not being entitled to recover any compensation for any loss or damage. This provision corresponds with Section 3 of the repealed Act.

The Bill also gives authority to an inspector appointed under the Act, any land commissioner, any assistant land commissioner, any land ranger, any member of the Police Force, and any person carrying the Minister's authority to enter upon land for the purpose of seeing whether there are rabbits on the land and destroying them. These provisions go a little further than those contained in the old Act. The entry may be made at all reasonable times. All the persons I have just named may enter upon any land, building, vehicle, vessel, boat, or other place if there is reason to suspect that any live rabbit is kept there in contravention of the Act. Any of the authorised persons stated above may take and retain any live rabbit found by him if he is of the opinion that it is necessary, or desirable, to take the rabbit for the purpose of producing it as evidence in a subsequent prosecution.

Hon. members well know that any person interested could, in the past, go to Stanthorpe and obtain a load of rabbits for a certain purpose but there was no power whereby a police officer could search his vehicle even though he suspected that it was carrying live rabbits. The object of the provision is to prevent a similar occurrence in the future. We know that people brought

rabbits to Brisbane simply for the purpose of training greyhounds. We had one instance very close to Brisbane in the Moreton Rabbit Board's district in which two persons were caught redhanded with rabbits in their possession, and a fine of £36 was imposed.

This Bill enacts that it will be necessary for the police or any other authorised person to procure a search warrant before entering and searching any dwelling house or building used for residential purposes. It also provides for the issue of such a warrant by a justice of the peace. The police, instead of having to make a request to a C.P.S., can approach a justice of the peace for the issue of such a warrant, and if that justice is satisfied that the police officer or person authorised under the Act has justification for the making of a search he can issue the necessary search warrant to enable him to do so.

There is also provision for the Minister to issue permits in respect of the introduction or keeping of rabbits, and that any person who does not comply with any term or condition set out in the permit is guilty of an offence under the Act. The only case in which a permit will be issued is with respect to persons engaged in university or laboratory work, or any person engaged in a properly controlled industry, such as the breeding of angora rabbits for exhibition purposes.

I now come to the provision for penalties for breaches of the Act. For the first offence the minimum fine will be £20 and the maximum £150 or six months' imprisonment, or both; that for the second offence the minimum fine will be £50, and the maximum £150 or six months' imprisonment, or both; and for subsequent offences the minimum fine will be £50 and the maximum £150 or six months' imprisonment, or both. If the Minister so directs, a person guilty of an offence may be prosecuted upon indictment, in which event the offender will be liable to a penalty not exceeding £500 or to imprisonment not exceeding two years, or both. Of course, breaches where a person has been charged on indictment will be very grave offences.

Mr. Aikens: Because of deliberate defiance?

Mr. FOLEY: Yes, because of deliberate defiance.

The penalty on conviction under the Act that will be repealed was not exceeding £50 or less than £10 for the first offence, and not exceeding £100 or less than £20 for a second and subsequent offence, so that hon. members will see that the penalties have been stepped up very considerably.

I have covered most of the principles contained in this measure. There are the usual saving clauses, and provisions as to what contraventions of the Act shall be offences, together with the machinery clauses that are contained in virtually every Bill. The main provisions in effect, confer on the

three rabbit boards now in existence greater powers to enable them to discharge their functions more efficiently.

There are parts of the State, including the western areas, where no rabbit boards are established and there the local authority is charged with the control of the destruction of rabbits under the Stock Routes and Rural Lands Protection Act, which prescribes that the land-holders must clear their lands of rabbits at their own cost and contains power to compel landowners to do so. Notwithstanding this, we find after a number of years that very little has been done. The average selector finds that once the rabbits enter his holding, although he may carry out extensive poisoning and keep them down a little, it is almost an impossibility to remove them from the holding unless it is isolated a few acres at a time and worked. The result is that the pest has developed in the south-western area to a considerable extent; and the only thing that is preventing it from going further afield is the natural barrier in the form of the black-soil plains where the rabbit finds it very difficult to burrow and exist.

Mr. Aikens: Will this Act deal with hares as well?

Mr. FOLEY: No, they are pests under another Act?

However, the area at present most affected is Inglewood, Goondiwindi and adjoining areas. The Co-ordinating Board under the Stock Routes and Rural Lands Protection Act have been giving some thought to this matter and they have already organised the councils into conference and got them to agree to certain resolutions, and recommend the appointment of three inspectors in order to enable proper inspection to be made of the fences along the New South Wales border. They have come to the conclusion that it will be necessary at some later date, when they are in a position to make a recommendation, to have a rabbit-proof barrier constructed along the southern border of the State.

Local authorities will deal also with the destruction of rabbits on stock routes and reserves and areas not enclosed with a rabbit-proof fence. The Co-ordinating Board will provide for the placing of suitable fumigants and poisons in the hands of land-holders at reduced cost. It will be some time before the Co-ordinating Board's officers will be able to make any inspection, and it is hoped that when they have full details of the condition of the fences already being controlled by New South Wales and the condition of the fences of private land-holders, in order to find out what gaps have to be filled by new fences and what repairs are necessary, we shall be able to decide whether it is possible to do something towards eradicating the pest from that area.

The hon. member for Carnarvon is well acquainted with the problem in that district and from discussions I have had with him he believes that there is no possible chance of eliminating the pest once it is established, unless you tackle it a few acres at a time, systematically. That would take many years.

I believe that had the commission that sat in 1930 extended its recommendations regarding fencing in that area we possibly might have made very great progress towards controlling the pest there. It recommended the abolition of certain rabbit boards existing at that time and left only the three now operating, i.e., the Leichhardt, the Darling Downs, and the Moreton, and thus they left the large area I referred to unprotected. Hon. members who come from that part of the State know that the pest has increased rapidly in their districts. These are matters, of course, for the future and I merely referred to them so there would be no misunderstanding on the part of hon. members opposite. We know the south-western area of the State is infected but the areas controlled by the rabbit boards are comparatively free, except for an odd rabbit that may get in unnoticed, establish a warren, and breed to a certain extent.

Mr. Sparkes: How far west do you go?

Mr. FOLEY: I should have to have a map to show that. I have available in proximity to the Chamber a map on which I can show any hon. member interested the fencing and give him an idea of the gaps that have to be filled up, when we know the condition of the existing private fences.

The policy of the Government is to find all wire-netting necessary for the repair and maintenance of the existing fences under the control of the rabbit boards. For the information of hon. members who may feel that there have been some disabilities in that respect, I might mention that in 1947 we were able to procure and supply for the Darling Downs Rabbit Board only 54 rolls, approximately 3 miles of fencing. Additional figures for that board are—

	Rolls.	Fencing. Miles.
1948	168 ..	10
1949	433 ..	26
1950	383 ..	22

Moreton Rabbit Board—

	Rolls.	Fencing. Miles.
1947	107 ..	6½
1948	53 ..	3
1949	18 ..	1
1950	71 ..	4

Leichhardt Rabbit Board—

	Rolls.	Fencing. Miles.
1946	170 ..	10
1947	175 ..	10
1949	88 ..	5

The Darling Downs Board has applied for a loan of approximately £11,000 or £12,000 to import 135 miles of netting, 10 tons of No. 8 galvanised wire, and 3 tons of No. 16 galvanised tie-wire, to recondition the fence under its control.

Mr. Hiley: Does that mean that the existing fence is virtually unserviceable?

Mr. FOLEY: I would not say that. It means a tremendous amount of expenditure to keep a big mileage of fence in repair.

If a fence can be kept in good condition naturally that expenditure is reduced very considerably. Every attempt is being made to procure wire and an allotment will be made from imported wire that will be coming to hand very shortly. Every effort will be made, now that we are making adequate provision in this Bill, to enable boards to operate efficiently. I think it will be found that within the rabbit-board areas the work will be done efficiently and prevent the pest from getting established.

Mr. Chalk: It is not your role to sponsor a loan that was asked for.

Mr. FOLEY: No, but I feel that will be all right. Naturally we should be asked for a recommendation. The hon. member need have no fear in that respect.

Mr. Hiley: Do you think it would be possible to recondition the fencing of the present line or have you to pull your fencing back?

Mr. FOLEY: It has not got to that stage. I am assured of that by the representations made to me by the various boards from time to time. There are warrens here and there but the boards got busy and wiped them out and the amount of infestation inside the fence is very little indeed. The main thing is to concentrate, through the Co-ordinating Board, on seeing whether we cannot eventually do something in that area.

I have endeavoured to explain the principles of the measure and I move the resolution accordingly.

Mr. SPARKES (Aubigny) (2.56 p.m.): I rise to speak on this Bill with somewhat mixed feelings, because I suppose no hon. member in this Chamber has had the practical experience with rabbits that I have had. I am in this Chamber because of rabbits. (Laughter). Hon. members may laugh but that is perfectly true.

Mr. Foley: It needs further explanation.

Mr. SPARKES: If the hon. gentleman will bear with me a little, I will give him that proof.

Mr. Foley: You are not referring to your electors?

Mr. SPARKES: When I first went on the land in New South Wales in my younger days rabbit infestation caused me to leave that State and come to Queensland. Another Victorian came up about the same time and bought a property adjoining mine and as we were both strangers from the South he said, "What about netting in before the rabbits come?" I said, "No thank you; I have seen enough of rabbits and if they come here I am going somewhere else." I can appreciate what the Minister proposes to do but I say quite frankly that no netting fence you can build over hundreds of miles will stop rabbits from coming into Queensland. I will enlighten the Minister a little further on that point. My home in New South Wales consisted of 27,000 acres of country. It was divided into 16 paddocks by netting and the river through

the property was netted off, yet we found it nearly impossible to clear the land or keep the rabbits out. When I went, as a youngster—

Mr. Aikens interjected.

Mr. SPARKES: The hon. member may know something about pubs but I will tell him something about rabbits. I went as a youngster onto a property containing 2,500,000 acres. It was a fair-sized lump of a holding owned by Elder Smith and was on the western Darling country. It was on a line from Wilcannia to White Cliffs. We had a 50-mile frontage to the Darling and when I was a boy we were shearing 500,000 grown sheep and had 100,000 odd lambs. That was prior to rabbit infestation, but after the rabbits came—within three years—the station shore less than 100,000 sheep and less than 20,000 lambs. One can appreciate the ruination caused by rabbit infestation.

It was decided to try to net. There is a lot of sandy country in that area. I am sorry the hon. member for Barcoo has left the Chamber, because he would have appreciated what I am about to say. It was sandy, hilly country with shifting sand and it was possible to see as many as 10 or 12 fences covered with sand and after the shifting of the sand to see 10 or 12 fences dangling in the air. That is the western Darling country, with an average annual rainfall of less than 5 inches.

To get back to rabbits and what a netting fence might do: I have seen rabbits come along in a wave to a fence fully 3 feet high, which is the height of the ordinary rabbit fence, and 6 inches in the ground, with a 1½-inch mesh, and they were so thick that when they got to the fence they piled on top of one another and went over it. I am saying this in all sincerity; there is no exaggeration in anything I say. Nobody can tell me that a netting fence will stop rabbits when they come in a wave. It would be stupid for anybody to say that it would.

The Minister said that it was intended to erect a netting fence in the southern part—

Mr. Foley: No, investigations are being carried out.

Mr. SPARKES: I am not condemning the Minister or his Bill in any way, I am merely giving hon. members the benefit of the experience that unfortunately was forced on me, although I view it with mixed feelings, because I have never regretted the day that I came to Queensland; nor have I ever regretted coming into this House.

If it is intended to follow the example of New South Wales we shall have inspectors, but I know properties in New South Wales on which £10 an acre was spent in an unsuccessful attempt to eradicate rabbits. When the rabbits came to the Darling district we made the same mistake as is being made in Queensland today. I know it is no use trying to stop the Minister from building fences, but I appeal to him to stop the laying of poison baits in Queensland. Once you start poisoning, you kill all the natural enemies of the rabbit.

Mr. Aikens: Do you mean aerial baiting?

Mr. SPARKES: We used poison carts. We poisoned millions of rabbits, and that is no exaggeration. But after we started laying poison baits it was impossible to find a goanna or a native cat or any of the birds, such as hawks, that prey on rabbits. I believe that there is a natural boundary for these pests, and I am inclined to think the same about the tick as about the rabbit. I do not know why I believe that, and I will admit quite frankly and freely that I have no idea why, but I have made a very close study of nature in many respects, and I once told a chief inspector of stock that I was prepared to build a 10-foot fence and put some ticky cattle inside it and bet that within two years the ticks would be gone. Why have not the ticks spread into that country? I am sure it is not because of our regulations. Why have the rabbits not gone to certain areas? The Minister has said that the soil there is unfavourable, but if rabbits come in a wave, as they did across New South Wales, the quality of the soil does not matter. If a rabbit-proof fence was built, it would have to cross so many rivers, gullies and creeks, that after a good thunderstorm hundreds of thousands of rabbits would get through.

Mr. Jesson: It would be pretty bad if they crossed the rabbit with the grasshopper.

Mr. SPARKES: I remind the hon. member that this is a very serious matter, as the hon. member for Carnarvon well knows. Right through the Yelarbon, Texas and Mitchell country this pest has become a very serious menace.

The Bill contains some suggestion of poisoning, but I appeal to the Minister not to resort to the use of pollard-and-bran baits. I had experience in the use of phosphorus baits and poison carts when I was a young fellow. What did we do? We killed all the natural enemies of the grasshoppers and we had no grasshopper plagues until we started to poison the rabbits and we did not have that greatest of all curses in the sheep industry, the blow-fly, until we started to poison the rabbit. It may be possible to check the invasion of rabbits into these areas, and I am not saying that it is not. I do not think there is any other hon. member in this Chamber, other than the hon. member for Carnarvon who has any real idea of the cost of eradicating rabbits, particularly in country with rivers and other watercourses. We have tried to fumigate them out, we have tried all sorts of things. I pay my taxes for the destruction of rabbits. The fence work goes along just the same, but I do not think the expenditure is worth a snap of the fingers to me. I should say that if there was no netting fence at all between Dalby and Inglewood—and that is right down into the heart of the rabbit country—the rabbit would be exactly where he is today.

Mr. Hilton: That is not correct.

Mr. SPARKES: Can my honourable friend tell me why the rabbits are not really

thick along the Darling Downs fence, where the Minister knows miles of fencing are down?

Mr. Hilton: The fences are in good order in that region.

Mr. SPARKES: If you cannot keep the rabbits under control in a small area, how can you keep them under control in the wide open spaces? Thousands of pounds have been spent in eradicating rabbits in New South Wales, and there is hardly a property in that State, in the rabbit country, without its rabbit-netting fence. When you get into the more closely settled areas, apart from that far western area of which I spoke, one finds all the rivers fenced out with the idea of keeping this pest under control. If that is so, how can you expect to keep them under control by building a fence hundreds of miles long and riding it on horseback? How will that keep the rabbits out? I am surprised that the hon. member for Carnarvon should think that it can be done in that way. In the western country of which I spoke we endeavoured to cope with the pest by the erection of netting fences, with dog-netting on the top and rabbit-netting at the bottom. That type of fence is well known to the hon. member for Gregory and the hon. member for Barcoo.

Mr. Devries: We have not got very many out there.

Mr. SPARKES: But the hon. member knows the type of fence that I describe.

Let me give you some idea of how thick the rabbits can be. Out in the far western parts of New South Wales we constructed little pits with trapdoors leading to them which caused the rabbit to plunge into the pits as he ran across the trapdoors. The rabbits were so thick and the pits filled so quickly, that it was impossible to clean them out. At times in that country the temperature was 115 degrees in the summer-time. Then it was decided to dig the pits in the yards, and again the pits became full and overflowing—the rabbits over-ran the country. That was on a property of 2,500,000 acres, and when I left it there were 190 poison carts at the homestead, which was about 70 miles from White Cliffs.

That will give an idea of the expenditure we incurred on poisoning rabbits, and yet all that was achieved was to kill the natural enemies of the rabbit.

Mr. Foley: What natural enemies can poisoning kill?

Mr. SPARKES: When the rabbits are in plague numbers nothing will stop them, but when they infiltrate in small numbers their natural enemies are the native cat, which is nearly extinct, the carpet snake and goanna, which are nearly extinct, and even the hawk. Once the natural enemies are killed the rabbit has an open slather. I have seen rabbits swim across the Darling River, a fairly big stream, at Wilcannia, just as if they were walking across the water, not in ones but in hundreds. I have had a considerable amount of experience of rabbits.

I will get back to the Bill because I shall have an opportunity of elaborating my views on that aspect of the subject on the second reading. The suggestion by the Minister for the raising of revenue to deal with the rabbit pest by means of a rate on land is better than the present system of an assessment on stock. If you inspect the stock returns of the man who looks after his property well you will find that his numbers vary very slightly from year to year, except in periods of severe drought. In such an area as the Darling Downs the fluctuation in stock numbers of the stock-owner is not great, but the dealer, and other men of that kind, who may have 20,000 sheep today and none tomorrow, usually have none when they are making their return on 1 January. Such a man has escaped from making any contribution under this legislation while the genuine man who carried on his business in the proper way and whose returns showed little fluctuation year by year has been penalised.

Mr. Devries: Couldn't you impose a levy on him according to his acreage?

Mr. SPARKES: The hon. gentleman was not present when the Bill was introduced. His suggestion is a much fairer way. The rabbit is just as big a pest to the grower of a crop as it is to a sheep or cattle man, as it may ruin his crop, nevertheless up to now he has got off very lightly. A man who has 1,000 acres of wheat may pay almost no tax, as he may have less than 20 head of cattle and 100 sheep. I am not speaking from a political angle, merely from the practical angle. It is much fairer to impose this tax on the unimproved value of land than the number of stock held, because it may happen that when the stock returns are made a man may have no stock at all.

I have only a small amount of time left at my disposal and I do not propose to devote very much of it to the prohibition contained in the Bill against the keeping of rabbits. The Bill is really tightening up the law and there can be no harm in that.

I know that in the Maranoa the rabbit is becoming a bigger menace than ever, especially round Mitchell. They have come right up the river, and I do not know what we are going to do to check them. I sympathise with the people in that area, many of whom have told me that the rabbit comes and goes. That is something new to me. I always thought that once he came he never went; and that has been the experience in New South Wales. In the Goondiwindi or Yelarbon district it would cost more to dig the rabbit out of the heavily-infested areas than the land is worth. It would cost £15 or £20 an acre because even with all sorts of modern methods you still have the hills and gullies to contend with. I was on a property on the Hunter River where they had the cracks in the stones on the hills netted off and the river was netted off. This property, comprising less than 20,000 acres, employs two men who do nothing else but travel the fences. There is not a hollow log in the whole place. Do not think I want to criticise; I do not; I am in favour of anything that can be done to deal with this

menace. I just sound a note of warning from a practical point of view against poisoning.

Hon. P. J. R. HILTON (Carnarvon—Secretary for Public Works, Housing, and Local Government) (3.17 p.m.): I wish to make a few observations because of some remarks made by the hon. member for Aubigny. Whilst I substantially agree with what he has said, I think he has a rather pessimistic outlook in regard to the usefulness of fences in keeping the rabbit plague back from certain areas. In my own electorate, in the Stanthorpe district, where the rabbit fence runs in a north-westerly direction on the southern side, there is very serious infestation but in similar country on the other side of the fence there is not a rabbit to be seen. I do not agree with the argument of the hon. member for Aubigny that the rabbit, like the cattle-tick, will seek out the country that suits him. He has already found the country that is suitable and will not thrive anywhere else in Queensland.

Mr. Sparkes: Do you mean the tick or the rabbit?

Mr. HILTON: The tick. I agree that there are certain places in Queensland where for some unknown reason the tick will not thrive; he will remain for a while and then die out. That is so on the Downs. While the rabbit has been successfully kept back from vast tracts of very good land, I agree that once he was established there he would thrive, just as he has thriven in the infested country in Southern Queensland and New South Wales. Some time ago a warren was discovered at the Warwick showground or somewhere adjacent to the town. Obviously those rabbits were brought there by some person who wanted to use them in the training of greyhounds. A few escaped, but I believe the colony, which was growing rapidly, has been eliminated. That being so, if the rabbit fences in that area were allowed to deteriorate the rabbits would come onto the Downs very quickly and you would have thousands of acres of rich land in the same sorry plight as millions of acres in New South Wales and Queensland at the present time.

Mr. Sparkes: What I want to know is what happens when the fences cross the hollows and gullies after a flood?

Mr. HILTON: Of course, the fences must be repaired. A very vigilant watch must be kept to see that there is no rabbit infestation. I agree that an odd rabbit may get over at times but by the close attention of the inspectors they can be kept down. If a fence has been washed away it must be replaced; that is all there is to it. That is a continuous job but the fact remains that a fence has been a wonderful success in certain parts of Southern Queensland in keeping rabbits back. It would be suicidal, in types of country suitable for rabbit fencing, not to pursue a policy of fencing. I agree that once there has been severe rabbit infestation it takes a mighty lot to shift the rabbits and then as I remarked to

the Secretary for Public Lands, the only effective way is to subdivide the land with netting, when netting is available, into reasonably small paddocks and wage war on the rabbits consistently over a number of years. The only effective way to wage war is by trapping at certain seasons of the year, fencing, and poisoning. There are different methods of poisoning and fumigants are very efficacious when applied by the right method. Of course, all activity in that direction is useless unless the land is subdivided and the work is repeated over each area already done.

One need only inspect rabbit-free country at the present time and compare it with rabbit-infested country to realise the vast difference in the carrying capacity of the two areas. I venture the opinion that a dozen rabbits would eat as much grass as one sheep and, more to the point, the rabbit will eat the grass seed. I made an interesting observation in that direction quite recently in the town of Stanthorpe. There are different grasses on my land and rabbits tried to establish a burrow there. One afternoon I watched a rabbit come onto the land and go to some long grass. I noticed his way of feeding. He went from tuft to tuft and ate the grass seed, in preference to the grass. It will thus be seen that a rabbit not only destroys the grass but eats the seed and that in turn destroys the pasture.

In regard to the remarks made by the hon. member for Aubigny, that in poisoning we destroy the natural enemies of the rabbits and thereby help them to increase, I make this observation. All the dingoes, goannas, and carpet snakes in Queensland can be put on 50,000 acres with rabbits and I will back the rabbits. All the natural enemies will not keep the rabbit down.

Mr. Sparkes: Do you know the rabbits are thicker now in New South Wales than ever?

Mr. HILTON: That is true, and in my own electorate in Southern Queensland, despite the fact that over the past eight or nine years it would be impossible to count the number destroyed, they are there in greater numbers than ever. The rabbit seems to have the uncanny sense of forecasting the season and regulating his family accordingly. Anybody who knows anything about the subject realises the enormous task in front of the Government and the landholders in eradicating rabbits, but to throw up your hands in utter despair and take no action would mean that the position would get worse and worse. Whilst it may seem a hopeless task, I think the measure will provide some useful action for the eradication of the rabbit, particularly in the country where it is possible to take effective action when supplies of netting are available. I should like to see co-ordinated action on the part of the Government and the landholders in subdividing, so that step by step good country might be freed of this pest.

I do not want to make further observations at present, but I commend the Minister for his action and I feel that whilst the results

achieved under this legislation might not be noticed for many years, it is a step in the right direction, and that the men appointed to carry out the provisions of the Bill will no doubt gain useful information and might be able to evolve some effective plan to help in the elimination of this menace.

Mr. McINTYRE (Cunningham) (3.27 p.m.): I come from a district that has rabbit-infested areas and clean areas, and I have interested myself in this very important question. I listened with interest to previous speakers and I am in accord with that part of the hon. member for Aubigny's speech about the poisoning of rabbits. I think it has been demonstrated, not only in Queensland but in the southern States, Tasmania, and New Zealand, that in poisoning rabbits you poison the natural enemies of the pest, and because of that and its breeding capacity you allow it to increase and become a still greater menace. I am glad to know that the Minister, in his presentation of the Bill, has made no reference to any system of poisoning and I trust that nothing of that kind will be done.

I disagree with the hon. member for Aubigny, however, about the effectiveness of netting in keeping rabbit infestation back. Through my electorate a rabbit buffer fence runs, and on one side the rabbits are thick and on the other side the land is free of them. As a result of effective policing of this fence and the keeping of it in good order, it has been possible to keep the clean area clean. I have travelled quite a lot in the thickly infested parts and I have found that many of the landholders who very early in the piece, when the rabbit was making his presence felt, took early action in netting in large holdings, have been able to keep their holdings reasonably free from the pest, notwithstanding that rabbits are thick round their boundaries. Other holdings in the south-western areas, where they developed the idea of netting-in only when infestation was bad, are having no end of trouble in cleaning their holdings. In fact, it is almost impossible to do so.

I therefore urge the Minister to do everything he can. I compliment him on the introduction of this Bill and his effort to keep the clean areas clean. It is possible to do so, and it is only those who have been associated with production who know the mighty pest the rabbit is when he is in numbers, and the way he reduces the carrying capacity and the production capacity of the country he is on.

We have rabbits not only on the mainland of Australia but in Tasmania, where they are a major problem. In New Zealand the authorities are making an experiment, which I commend to the favourable consideration of the Minister, by taking from the rabbit its commercial value. In some areas where rabbits are very thick they have a real commercial value and people are prone to view a rabbit invasion very lightly. In New Zealand, however, legislation has been introduced preventing trading in rabbits and divesting them of all commercial value. As the result, the rabbit is now regarded there as a natural enemy. If it has a commercial value, there

is a danger that people will be inclined to regard it as desirable. I think the New Zealand authorities are working on sound lines in that regard, and their action is worthy of consideration by the Minister.

As I said before, a buffer area runs right through my territory, and I know something about what is happening. The Darling Downs Rabbit Board operates in a large part of the surrounding area, and I have some appreciation of the difficulties that it is experiencing in these difficult days. I know, too, that it will be grateful to the Government and the Minister for the introduction of this measure. I compliment the Minister on informing us that he has brought this legislation forward as the result of representations made to him by these boards, which are charged with the responsibility of dealing with this very vexed question. It is good to know that the Government have responded so readily to the representations that were made. I asked a question on this matter early in the present session, and the Minister's reply was very pleasing to me, as it suggested that he was taking action along the lines desired by the boards.

With regard to some of the principles contained in this legislation, I think the principle of one man, one vote is very desirable and is a definite improvement on the present system in the control and management of the boards.

Another major principle—and this is one that has been keenly desired by the various rabbit boards—is that dealing with the basis of assessment for the raising of funds. Till now, the only medium through which boards could obtain funds was the assessment of stock owned and held on properties by the various land-holders. That has been unsuccessful in raising sufficient revenue and, what is more important, has been very unfair in its operation. For instance, on the Darling Downs, not only have stock numbers been greatly reduced, but in many areas no stock at all is raised. In the wheat-growing areas a method of farming has been reached whereby the land-holders carry no stock at all. They are the people who will receive the maximum benefit if rabbits are kept down, but because they have not stock they have been making no contribution to these funds. Therefore, I am pleased to know that the method of assessment will be based on the unimproved value of the land.

As a result of the scarcity of wire, the condition of the buffer rabbit fences has greatly deteriorated. The rabbits are certainly coming through and unless something is done immediately there is a danger that the boards will not be able to prevent the rabbits from developing on this side of the fence and getting out of hand. The controlling officers may be unable to deal with the infestation that is taking place. It has been impossible to stop all the rabbits from getting through the fence, but when one or two get through they eventually try to get back to their colony and they can then be easily caught and destroyed, but should they be able to get through in any numbers they

will establish colonies on this side of the fence and the position will then become desperate indeed.

The Darling Downs Rabbit Board has been faced with the difficulty that it has not the power to spend any money not received per medium of assessments unless the members individually and collectively accept responsibility for the repayment of the money. Notwithstanding the fact that netting has been very scarce they have informed me that they would have been able to do the job had their income not been so limited. I think the Minister pointed out that it was in the vicinity of £9,000 or £10,000 a year, but to put these fences in proper repair would cost about £30,000 to £40,000. They could not be expected to incur that expenditure and as the old method of assessment will not allow them to build up their funds, they could not finance the undertaking. Now they will be allowed to make assessments on the basis of the unimproved value of the land, which will enable them to obtain enough money to carry out this very important work without any great hardship to any section of the community.

There is a fourth point that I desire to mention that I think is worthy of consideration and that is the possibility of extending the areas controlled by the various boards. There are only three boards in Queensland—the Darling Downs Rabbit Board, the Leichhardt Rabbit Board and the Moreton Rabbit Board. If there are any clean areas not under the control of any of these boards some steps should be taken to extend the boundaries and so bring in the maximum number of people who will be in a position to make some contribution to this very important work of keeping rabbits under control. Despite what has been said to the effect that black-soil is unsuitable for the breeding of rabbits, I am of the opinion that once they get out of control and get a free run they will establish themselves in almost every part in Queensland.

There is another provision in the Bill that says that where a land-holder has enclosed his own holding with netting he will be exempt from assessment. That is a very wise provision. It is only a fair one too, because a man who has done this is helping himself more, perhaps 100 times more than under a system whereby other land-holders contribute to the revenue of a rabbit board. In the circumstances he should be exempt from assessment.

I think the valuation basis is quite satisfactory and the valuation should be comparable with the local authority valuation. That will simplify the work of rabbit boards because they will be able to get all the information they require per medium of the local authorities.

In accordance with a principle introduced in recent legislation, local authorities are compelled to budget for their estimated expenditure. That principle might be embodied in this legislation to enable rabbit boards to budget for their year's work and strike a rate accordingly. Today, under the

Local Government Act, a local authority must first budget for the work contemplated in the ensuing 12 months and strike a rate to meet that expenditure. It is expected not to show a deficit; on the other hand, it is not desired that they should show any surplus.

The principle in this Bill to place a restriction on the keeping of rabbits and for the policing of that aspect of the question is a very desirable one. If such restrictions had been imposed in the early days of rabbit infestation it might have been possible to control this pest and keep it within small dimensions.

The provision for the extension of a board's area also is very desirable. I do not altogether agree with the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Local Government as to how rabbits can be exterminated in heavily-infested parts of the Carnarvon electorate.

Mr. Hilton: I suggested that a few thousand acres should be dealt with at a time. I refer to country already heavily infested.

Mr. McINTYRE: Some system of fencing must go hand in hand with such a scheme.

Mr. Hilton: I said you must fence first into small paddocks of a few thousand acres and clean them out first.

Mr. McINTYRE: From my experience it is difficult to keep rabbits out of areas that are badly infested. I know that in the Texas area landowners are adopting a system whereby big tractors or other machinery are employed to root up the ground and burrows. That work has been proved effective but it can be done only in suitable country. The most effective way of preventing the spread of this pest is to tackle the problem the right way. The rabbit-proof fences are in a very bad way. I was pleased to hear the Minister suggest that the Government were prepared to meet rabbit boards by guaranteeing some form of loan to enable them to repair rabbit fences before they deteriorated too far.

I commend the Government for their action in this matter. The effect of the Bill will be to place greater power and authority in the hands of rabbit boards in the southern part of Queensland.

Mr. CHALK (Lockyer) (3.44 p.m.): I do not intend to enter into the points raised by the hon. member for Aubigny, although there was some logic in the advice he gave. The Bill will have the approval of rabbit boards. I know that for a considerable time they have been asking for a means to increase their revenue. They have been doing all they possibly can to eradicate the rabbit but unfortunately, because of shortage of materials and insufficient finance, they have not been able to do so. The Minister has outlined the major principles of the Bill and I believe they will certainly have the approval of the boards.

There is one question that crossed my mind while the Minister was outlining the principles of the Bill, that is, the basis on which it is intended to levy. If I understood him correctly, the Minister said that

the basis of the levy could be decided by the board or boards and it would either be on a stock basis or on the basis of land values. In other words, there will be two systems of assessment.

Mr. Foley: You have to choose one or the other.

Mr. CHALK: I appreciate that—they will have the right to choose one or the other. In my electorate I have two boards in operation and I am wondering what will be the position if as a result of this principle in the Bill, one board on one side of the range decides on the basis of stock while the other one on the opposite side of the range decides to assess on the basis of the value of land. If that does occur, I can see there will be some difficulty and some variance of opinion between the agriculturist above the range and the agriculturist below the range. I believe that at the present time the steps being taken by the rabbit boards, helped by the Government, to prevent rabbit infestation, are very commendable. I believe we must continue to give that help to keep this menace out of the State as far as we can, but if we are going to have a system of taxation whereby the dairy farmer on one side of the range is assessed on the value of his land and the dairy farmer on the other side is not so taxed there will be hardship. I believe the boards arrived at a decision amongst themselves before they made an approach to the Minister in this matter. I understand from what I have been told by members of the board in my area that these matters were fully discussed by the boards and I believe the boards arrived at a unanimous decision in favour of raising their funds on the ratable value of the land. I do not know what the viewpoint of the various boards will be when they learn of the important principle the Minister has introduced in this Bill. I feel certain, however, that he and the Cabinet have given consideration to this matter, and I hope he will have an answer to the gentlemen who constitute the boards so that they will have the full support of the people of Queensland, who are looking to the boards to do everything possible to eradicate the pest throughout the State.

The other point that was made was that rabbit fences are not altogether efficient. We agree that the fences are not absolutely efficient but I believe it would be suicidal to advocate their abolition, because I am certain that the rabbit fence has done quite a lot to prevent rabbits from coming into this State.

I was pleased to know from the Minister that consideration has been given to the proposal of the Darling Downs Rabbit Board whereby it is hoped to be able to get a further 100 miles of wire-netting for repairing damaged fences and keeping them in a good state of repair.

I think it was in 1939 that the board decided to endeavour to replace a length of the fence every 12 months, but the war years intervened and there was a considerable

shortage of netting. The result has been that in many places the fences have deteriorated considerably and it is only now, when supplies are becoming more readily available, that the boards are obtaining the netting that is vitally necessary. I know the members of the Darling Downs board very much appreciate the supply of netting made available to them in the past few months. A considerable quantity has been supplied, but there is still difficulty in getting steel posts and 8-gauge wire for the erection of the new wire supplied. However, I believe that difficulty will be overcome with the assistance of the Government. If it is done it will go a long way towards helping the board and Queensland generally.

I feel that the Bill will have the approval of the rabbit boards of Queensland. They have been asking for it for a considerable time and I am certain it will do much to help this State.

As to the penalties for bringing rabbits into the State and for having them in the State for such purposes as the training of greyhound dogs, &c., I believe that the principles written into the Bill are very good. If considerable sums of the taxpayers' money are to be spent to prevent rabbits from coming into this State, we must have courage enough to write into our legislation sufficient power to abolish completely the bringing into this State of rabbits for such purposes as I have mentioned. I believe these principles also will have the approval of the people. I feel certain that when we see the Bill, if there are any suggestions that will be of assistance to the State, the Minister will be only too pleased to give consideration to them.

Hon. T. A. FOLEY (Belyando—Secretary for Public Lands and Irrigation) (3.53 p.m.): It is very pleasing to hear the remarks of the Opposition and their favourable comments on the principles I have outlined.

The extension of the areas under control of the present boards, is, I think, beyond them at the moment. Their main concern today, owing to the changes in conditions that have taken place over the years in the areas they control, is to raise the necessary revenue to carry out their functions. It is possible that if the alternative system of taxing is more beneficial than the practice of levying on the stock, the boards may move for an extension of their areas. If they do so, I can give the Committee the assurance that the matter will have every consideration. If that is done, of course, the question arises of extending the boundaries to be fenced. Naturally, that would mean a considerable expenditure.

The suggestion of the hon. member for Cunningham as to budgeting is rather useful. We can give consideration to something on those lines and I feel the boards will be only too pleased to do something in that direction. As a matter of fact, I think a system is already in operation under which the boards are given time each year to present to the

Department of Public Lands a budget showing revenue and expenditure and the items on which it is intended to spend money. However, I will follow up the matter and see whether anything can be done.

Mr. Low interjected.

Mr. FOLEY: The boards will send out their own notices and there are the necessary provisions relating to collections and penalties for non-payment. Local authorities will be bound under the measure to help the boards with information about rateable values and anything incidental to the collection of their revenue.

A good deal has been said today about the natural enemies of the rabbit and preventing this menace from encroaching further upon the lands of this State. I can assure hon. members who care to go to the library and look up the 1930 Royal Commission's report relating to rabbit, dingo and stock-route administration, that they will find there some very interesting comments on these matters. The commission's report shows that a sum in the vicinity of £1,300,000 was spent by Queensland in an effort to prevent the extension of this pest to other parts of the State. It says—

“As the depredations of rabbits in the pastoral areas of New South Wales became known, and as the pest approached the border, alarm was occasioned in Queensland. The remedy suggested was the erection of a border netting fence to stop the invasion. The Government commenced the construction of such a fence in 1886 at a point 16 miles west of the Warrego River, and work went on until, in 1891, the fence extended to within a few miles of Haddon Corner on the western border of the State. The netting fence was subsequently extended in an easterly direction along the border to Mungindi.

“As a complete check to a rabbit invasion, the Queensland-New South Wales border fence was erected rather late. Before construction was commenced rabbits had passed north of it, and before the fencing was completed a considerable number had established themselves in Queensland. Nevertheless the expenditure on the fence was not wasted. Rabbits in New South Wales kept moving northwards in waves, and wave after wave comprising millions of the pest, attempting to enter Queensland, perished along the fence. Had the border fence not been erected, it is safe to say that the rabbit menace, particularly in the early years, would have assumed much more alarming and damaging proportions in Queensland than was the case.”

There is some justification for fencing, although the remarks of the first member of the Opposition who spoke today were slightly against that method. It is rather interesting to note the number of districts in existence prior to the 1930 commission. They were:—Warrego, Maranoa, Mitchell, Gregory North, Leichhardt, Darling Downs, Carnarvon, Burke and Moreton. In its wisdom the commission

decided to wipe out all those except Leichhardt, Moreton and Darling Downs. I think that the few odd rabbits that might get through existing fence where it has rusted or broken, or where there is a gully or a river, are the only infestation that has taken place in these districts. The boards have been able to cope with it very successfully, and we can virtually say that in Queensland the vast areas controlled by the three boards are comparatively free of the pest.

In commenting upon the differences that exist between Queensland and the southern States, the commissioners said that several factors existed that helped this State in keeping down the number of rabbits. Drought is one of the factors they mentioned. They said—

“The biggest factor in controlling the increase of rabbits has been the periodical dry seasons or droughts to which the south-west of the State has, from time to time, been subjected. Had droughts not occurred, it is safe to say that the rabbits would have eaten out that portion of the State and given the land-holder a constant fight for possession of the country. With recurring dry seasons, however, the great majority of the rabbits have died off, and after each drought period they take a few years to breed up again.”

They then dealt with wet seasons and said that they, too, exacted a toll on the rabbit and combated its tremendous breeding capacity. They dealt also with the natural enemies of the rabbit, which was mentioned by the hon. member for Aubigny. They said—

“Amongst natural enemies foxes, iguanas, wild cats, dingoes, eagle hawks and snakes account for a large number of rabbits. The principal part they play is in cleaning up isolated colonies which, if unmolested, would soon establish fresh centres of infestation. Iguanas are particularly serviceable in destroying rabbit kittens. An instance was quoted to us of an iguana which, when killed and opened, was found to contain the remains of eleven young rabbits!”

That is rather a heavy toll, so long as we have enough goannas. Unfortunately, however, once the rabbit is established he seems to outnumber his natural enemies to such an extent that, regardless of their ravages, he manages always to keep ahead of them. As the commissioners pointed out, in spite of droughts, wet seasons and other factors that nobody seems to understand, the rabbit has continued to breed.

An interesting part of this report deals with our climate, which to some extent has been to our advantage in checking this pest. It says—

“Reference has already been made to the fact that rabbits have overrun the whole of Victoria and practically the whole of New South Wales. Why has this not been repeated in Queensland? Why should any of our districts be free? Leaving aside the question of netting protection of some Queensland districts, the answer is to be found in the great factor of climate. No

doubt the position cannot be stated with scientific exactness but, just as some districts in Queensland are, owing to natural conditions, subject to tick infestation while others are not, just as Mitchell grass will grow in some grazing districts and not in others, no matter what encouragement is given to it, and just as Queensland was much more suited to the spread of prickly-pear than New South Wales, so does New South Wales seem to be much more suited than Queensland to the spread of rabbits.”

All those natural factors are operating to our advantage in Queensland, and we must be thankful that this pest has not overrun our State to the extent that it has overrun Victoria and New South Wales.

I am one of those who are not critical of the views of any hon. members who have already spoken. They have all contributed something to this debate. I feel that the basic factor on which we have to rely for the prevention of the spread of the pest and the protection of the pastures and those who have to use them is the fence already erected round the areas controlled by the boards. If we can get the necessary material—wire-netting and tie-wire—and maintain the expenditure required to administer the districts properly, I think we need have no fear whatever of further infestation of the areas controlled by the boards. The only area about which I have any fear is that in the South-West which is at present uncontrolled, but as I pointed out earlier the Co-ordinating board under the Stock Routes and Rural Lands Protection Act, consisting of practical men, representatives of the grazing industry and other Government departments, is keen to do something towards the prevention of any further spread in that area. They are concentrating on that problem today, and I feel sure that when the appointments of the inspectors mentioned in the Bill are made and the inspections contemplated take place some practical recommendations will come from the boards in the not very distant future that will in the course of a few years make the whole of Queensland free from any further scourge from this pest.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) (4.7 p.m.): I do not know very much about rabbits but I do know that in the north-western part of the State rabbit fences extend for a considerable distance. I suppose that in Queensland we must have thousands of miles of rabbit fencing and it would be interesting and probably surprising to some hon. members to know that it extends to the railway line running from Cloncurry to Selwyn and that it extends also from Malbon to Dajarra. There was a rabbit board at Cloncurry 20 years ago but I saw only a very few rabbits during the 13 or 14 years that I was working trains in that district and they were at the bottom of the Duchess bank, well inside the rabbit fence.

There may be something in what the Minister says, that the soil and the climate in certain areas is not suitable for the propagation of rabbits but I really believe that if

we are to eradicate rabbits completely the method will have to be determined by the scientists. I do not know what work the Minister is doing in that regard or what the boards are doing but I honestly believe that sooner or later the scientists, particularly the biologists, will evolve or invent some germ or wog, as it is commonly known, probably some virus or some tick or parasite, and after getting a certain number of rabbits infect them with it or place it on them and turn them loose to infect the others. I do not know from anything I have read that rabbit numbers are growing any fewer in Australia but they do not appear to be getting any more numerous. It would appear from what was said by the hon. member for Aubigny, who is usually very reliable and truthful when dealing with a subject with which he is conversant, that in the western districts of New South Wales rabbits were much more prolific 30 to 40 years ago when he was a boy than they are today. I hope that the Minister and the officers of his department responsible for dealing with the rabbit pest have not lost sight of the possibility of eradicating them by germs or disease or parasites.

Motion (Mr. Foley) agreed to.

Resolution reported.

FIRST READING.

Bill presented and, on motion of Mr. Foley, read a first time.

The House adjourned at 4.12 p.m.