

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 24 OCTOBER 1956

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WEDNESDAY, 24 OCTOBER, 1956.

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. J. H. Mann, Brisbane) took the chair at 11 a.m.

QUESTIONS.

PATIENTS FROM NEW SOUTH WALES IN
BRISBANE GENERAL HOSPITALS.

Mr. NICKLIN (Landsborough—Leader of the Opposition) asked the Secretary for Health and Home Affairs—

“Will he kindly advise the number of New South Wales residents who have been treated as patients in public wards by the Brisbane and South Coast Hospitals Board during the last financial year?”

Hon. W. M. MOORE (Merthyr) replied—

“The information is being obtained.”

HOTEL CHARGES, OLYMPIC GAMES.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) asked the Premier—

“1. Has his attention been drawn to an article in ‘The Courier-Mail’ of Saturday last, headed ‘This Week in Canberra, by Elgin Reid,’ wherein it is stated inter alia under the sub-heading ‘Games Slug’:— ‘One Queensland Minister has found that the hotel at which he stays while in Melbourne is charging £15 a day for himself and wife (without meals or bathroom). It is a room for which he would normally pay about £5 or £6’?”

“2. If so, will he inform the House what Minister or Ministers will be in Melbourne during the period of the Olympic Games, and for what reason; and whether their expenses, including those mentioned above, will be paid out of their own pockets, or will the expenses be paid by the people as ‘Ministerial Expenses’?”

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

"1 and 2. It should be evident that the article in question referred to some Queensland Minister in the anti-Labour Government at Canberra. No Minister or Ministers in the Queensland Government will be in Melbourne during the period of the Olympic Games."

LOSS ON BOWEN STATE COKE WORKS, 1956.

Mr. COBURN (Burdekin) asked the Secretary for Mines—

"Will he kindly inform the House to what factors he attributes the unprecedented loss of £45,321 at the State Coke Works, Bowen, for the year ended 30 June, 1956, and what steps he proposes to take to ensure that there will not be a recurrence of such a loss in future years?"

Hon. G. H. DEVRIES (Gregory) replied—

"Factors resulting in the losses for the financial year 1955-1956 were relatively low output of coke, high costs of repairs to plant in materials and wages and overtime in effecting such repairs, particularly to the coal handling equipment, increased interest and depreciation charges following the installation of new coke handling equipment, and the fact that a substantial price increase operated only from 1 August, 1956. A contract for the installation of new coal handling equipment has been let and, upon its installation, costs of repairs in both materials and overtime will be eliminated and production increased."

DESTRUCTION OF NOXIOUS WEED, *CESTRUM PARQUI*.

Mr. V. E. JONES (Callide) asked the Secretary for Public Lands and Irrigation—

"With reference to the noxious weed known as '*Cestrum Parqui*' which was first located in the upper reaches of the Dee River, near Mount Morgan, and has since been found between Dululu and Wura, over 23 miles downstream from its original location, and also in the township of Mount Morgan, and which, if not promptly and adequately checked, will eventually spread extensively throughout the Dawson and Fitzroy water systems, with consequent menace to livestock, a number of which have already been poisoned, will he kindly take immediate action through the Co-ordinating Board of his Department to compel the Mount Morgan Shire Council to promptly and effectively eradicate such noxious weed, and also ensure that such local authority takes all steps within its power to require private landholders within its area whose lands are affected to undertake the necessary work for eradication of such noxious weed on their respective properties?"

Hon. P. J. R. HILTON (Carnarvon) replied—

"At the last meeting of the Co-ordinating Board it was decided that the Mount Morgan Shire Council be advised of the methods of destruction of *Green Cestrum* (*Cestrum Parqui*) and that the Council be requested to take steps to destroy infestations of this plant by the recommended methods on lands under its control; the Council also to be advised that the costs of the work would be reimbursed to the Council from The Stock Routes and Pests Destruction Fund. It was also decided by the Co-ordinating Board to request the Mount Morgan Shire Council to serve notice upon owners and occupiers of holdings requiring them to take effective measures to destroy this plant on their lands. Action is now being taken to advise the Council in terms of the Co-ordinating Board's decision."

VOTING AT STATE ELECTIONS.

RETURN TO ORDER.

The following paper was laid on the table:—

Return to an Order made by the House on 2 August last, on the motion of Mr. Sparkes, showing details of voting at the State elections on 19 May, 1956, together with details of voting at by-elections held since the general election on 7 March, 1953.

PAPERS.

The following papers were laid on the table, and ordered to be printed:—

Report of the Commissioner for Railways for the year 1955-1956.

Report of the Department of Public Works for the year 1955-1956.

The following paper was laid on the table:—

Regulations under the Stock Acts, 1915 to 1954.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACTS
AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

Hon. E. J. WALSH (Bundaberg—Treasurer) (11.7 a.m.): I move—

"That the Bill be now read a second time."

I gave a fairly extensive outline of the principles of the Bill earlier, and hon. members have had a copy of it for some time. It contains only two clauses, one being a machinery clause. Data on the administration of the department has been made available to hon. members. I am sure they perused it with interest. It gives a good idea of many of the administrative difficulties that confront the department, and the extensive benefits that accrue to injured workers under the Act.

I have nothing further to add at this stage.

Mr. NICKLIN (Landsborough—Leader of the Opposition) (11.8 a.m.): As the Treasurer has pointed out, the Bill is a comparatively simple one. It has virtually only one principle. The power to supply an artificial member is important, but not as vital administratively as the second principle.

During the initial stages hon. members fully debated the operations of the State Government Insurance Office. The Treasurer furnished interesting information which will be of great value to hon. members and other interested persons. It was agreed generally that this office is doing a very fine job. The administration is efficient and effective and all claims are sympathetically considered.

The Bill deals with the liability of the Insurance Commissioner for payment of certain hospital and medical expenses of injured workers. The relevant section was inserted in 1944. It rendered the Commissioner liable to pay, in addition to compensation, medical expenses of the injured worker up to £25 and hospital expenses up to the same amount. In 1949 these limits were raised to £50 in each case. However, in the case of artificial members, the Commissioner was made liable for the actual cost of any such member. As pointed out by the Treasurer in his introductory remarks the cost of artificial limbs has caused the Commissioner a certain amount of administrative trouble in getting suitable limbs because the artificial limb factory in Australia was overloaded with work. The opportunity was taken to import artificial limbs from overseas. These imported limbs are particularly expensive and some not altogether suitable. As the Commissioner is responsible for the cost of artificial limbs it is only right that he should have some check to ensure that the cost is reasonable and that the type of artificial limb, imported or made in Australia, is suitable.

Mr. Walsh: And if it is not suitable it can be satisfactorily serviced.

Mr. NICKLIN: That is important. Naturally, limbs made in Australia can be adequately serviced by the factories that make them here. There are not always facilities available to service imported limbs. The amendment is desirable. It gives the Commissioner power to exercise supervision over the cost of artificial limbs and it ensures that the members provided for injured workers are suitable and can be adequately serviced. The effect of the amendment is that the Commissioner is no longer liable for the actual cost, only the reasonable cost. He cannot escape liability, but he may determine the extent of his liability. No hon. member will object to that.

The Treasurer explained fully why it was necessary to bring in this legislation and there can be no objection to it. It is

assumed, of course, that the Commissioner will use his discretionary power wisely and in the best interests of the injured worker.

There is also the provision dealing with the extent of the liability of the Commissioner for medical expenses of injured workers. The previous limit was £50 and it has been increased to £70. It is the first increase since 1949. In the meantime costs of medical treatment have risen considerably and an increase of £20 seems to be reasonable particularly when hospital services are free. I do not know whether the Commissioner makes a payment to hospitals for medical and hospital treatment given to persons in receipt of compensation. Is that the case under the free hospital service of the State?

The section made the Commissioner liable to a maximum of £50, for what was reasonably appropriate to the medical treatment, having regard to reasonable necessity for such treatment and the customary charge to persons other than injured workers. The new provision is for calculation of medical expenses at the "prescribed rate or rates of payment therefor to medical practitioners and others." Hence, the rate in future will be laid down in the regulations, which will include power to "prescribe the duties of and fees to be paid to medical referees and other medical practitioners under this Act." All regulations and Orders in Council come under the scrutiny of Parliament when they are tabled.

The Bill follows the termination of the agreement between the Insurance Commissioner and the B.M.A., which has operated since 1945. On the introductory stage I questioned whether it was to the advantage of the injured worker that the agreement, which had operated over the years and with reasonable success, should be replaced by one under which the injured worker will be treated by the doctor as a private patient and charged accordingly. The injured worker now will have to submit his claim to the Insurance Commissioner according to the scale laid down in the regulation. There will be a variation between the rates charged by doctors to private patients and those payable by the Insurance Commissioner. I am wondering whether the injured worker will be placed at a disadvantage.

Mr. Walsh: In what respect?

Mr. NICKLIN: By the variation in the rates. An injured worker will be charged the same fee as any other patient, but when he lodges his claim with the Insurance Commissioner there will be a difference between the fee he has paid to the doctor and that payable by the Commissioner.

Mr. Walsh: The doctor will have no legal right to claim anything above the rates set out in the regulation.

Mr. NICKLIN: But he will be treating the injured worker as a private patient, and he will be entitled to charge him the same

fee as any other patient. However, the Insurance Commissioner's liability will be limited by regulation.

The Treasurer read a good deal of correspondence that had passed between the B.M.A. and the Insurance Commissioner on the termination of the agreement of 1945. Admittedly some doctors failed to help the Commissioner. They omitted to give him full information about a worker's injury, but surely those things could have been adjusted by negotiation instead of taking the drastic step of using the provision that the agreement could be terminated by either party on six months' notice. When the B.M.A. sent the Commissioner the letter that was read by the Treasurer, it gave him the chance to end the agreement.

Mr. Walsh: Doctors make many mistakes.

Mr. NICKLIN: They certainly made a mistake in the wording of that letter and the Insurance Commissioner took the opportunity that was handed to him on a plate and ended the agreement. However, I am concerned not about the argument between the B.M.A. and the Commissioner but about the effect the new arrangement will have on injured workers. An instance was quoted of an injured worker who went to a private doctor; he sent him straight off to a hospital and charged him one guinea.

Mr. Walsh: I quoted that. He would not treat him as a compensation case. He gave him a letter, sent him to the Brisbane Hospital for advice and charged him a guinea for the letter.

Mr. NICKLIN: I suppose he was entitled to charge for the consultation.

Mr. Walsh: It is getting close to abuse of the profession.

Mr. NICKLIN: I am a bit the Treasurer's way but if a private patient consulted a medical practitioner and was referred to a hospital, he would be charged a consultation fee.

The question is: will the new arrangement be as good for injured workers as the agreement between the Commissioner and the B.M.A. was? The Commissioner may have had some justification for wishing to end the agreement. No doubt many doctors failed to give vital information, but it must be remembered that the agreement covered a period when doctors were extremely busy and many of them were months behind in sending out accounts to private patients. Now that the position is easing, with more doctors available, the tardiness in forwarding returns could be overcome and an agreement between the B.M.A. and the Commissioner would facilitate the handling of compensation cases. It would be better than the system of having compensation cases treated as private patients and having the workers meet the difference between the fees payable by private patients and the

amount allowed by the Commissioner. The doctor who treated compensation cases under the old agreement knew what the fee was because it was laid down in the agreement. As things now stand the doctor has to look to the injured worker for payment of his account. Admittedly the doctor was on a good wicket before inasmuch as he had to look only to one source, the Commissioner, for payment. His payment was assured.

Mr. Walsh: His payment was guaranteed at all times.

Mr. NICKLIN: Yes, it was assured. He knew he would get it. However, doctors felt themselves bound by the terms of the agreement and accounts were limited to the scale under the agreement.

The Minister might well be asked what is the present position of the injured worker. He is liable for payment of fees normally charged for private patients. Such fees have been in excess of those fixed by the agreement, and will probably exceed those to be fixed by regulation. If the injured worker pays the doctor the normal private patient's fee he will be entitled to reimbursement from the Commissioner only at the prescribed rate. If the prescribed rate is below the doctor's fee the injured worker will be out of pocket to the extent of the difference if he pays cash for his consultation. The same position would arise if the alternative method were used and the injured worker authorised the Commissioner to pay the doctor at the prescribed rate. He would still be liable to the doctor for any balance. There is no doubt about that, despite what the Treasurer says.

I doubt very much whether the new method will be as advantageous to the injured worker as the old agreement between the Insurance Commissioner and the B.M.A. Rather than terminate the agreement because of some unsatisfactory conditions, it would have been far better to hold a conference between the B.M.A. and the Commissioner to draw up a new agreement tightening up any looseness there may have been. I do not blame the Commissioner for wanting to terminate the agreement. He wants to run his office as efficiently as he can. He cannot run it efficiently and finalise claims unless doctors' accounts are received promptly, giving all the details. Doctors are noted for their lack of business management. They were hard pressed with work during the period the agreement was in force; their book work got behind.

I hope that the new provisions will eventually prove no disadvantage to the injured worker. An effective and efficient agreement between the Commissioner and the B.M.A. would have been far better. All we can hope is that it will work out all right, but if it is to the disadvantage of injured workers I trust the Minister will recommend a further amendment of the Act.

There is a slight mistake in the wording of paragraph (f) of the Bill. The words to be repealed are shown as "in respect of hospital treatment under this section." The actual words of the relevant paragraph, as enacted, are "in respect of hospital treatment under this subsection." The Bill should be amended so that instead of "section" it will read "subsection," and thus be in conformity with the Principal Act.

The provisions in the Bill are interesting. I hope that the new arrangement in regard to the payment of doctors for medical treatment given to injured workers will work out as the Minister and the Commissioner hope it will, and that there will be no disadvantage to the injured workers as a result of the change. I have grave doubts on the matter but I hope that it will work out all right.

Dr. NOBLE (Yeronga) (11.32 a.m.): I am glad to be able to take part in this debate.

Mr. Walsh: You heard what I said by way of interjection?

Dr. NOBLE: No.

Mr. Walsh: That doctors make a lot of mistakes.

Dr. NOBLE: During the introductory stage the Minister mentioned fees paid by the Insurance Commissioner to doctors for compensation victims and he made the claim that because the Insurance Commissioner paid the fees the medical men had no bad debts. I am not certain about that point in my own practice, but I got a letter from two practising radiologists on Wickham Terrace who wrote to me as follows:—

"Dear Dr. Noble,

"I am informed that it is reported in Hansard that the Treasurer, Mr. Walsh, stated that the Insurance Commissioner pays the doctors and that there are no bad debts. We have them back to 1952 running into some hundreds of pounds.

"I thought this might be informative to you should you desire to mention it."

If bad debts have been sustained in one case in treating of compensation cases there are probably others. I bring the matter to the Treasurer's notice. I shall let the hon. gentleman have the letter afterwards. The Treasurer also said that the fees paid by the Insurance Commissioner to the medical men amounted to 15s. a visit or a treatment. I was not certain whether that was correct, therefore I did not interject at the time, but since then I have looked at the published schedule of fees payable and I find that although they are paid 15s. for the first visit

and the second visit, if there are only two visits, that there is a sliding scale after that. The scale is as follows:—

		Previous fee.	
		£ s. d.	s. d.
"Specialist Fees:			
Consultation fees:			
First attendance	..	2 2 0	
Subsequent attendances	1 1 0	15 0
General Fees:			
Subsequent attendances	12 6	10 6."

There is a charge of 15s. for the first visit, and 15s. for the second visit, but for subsequent visits there is a sliding scale to 12s. 6d. When a patient is treated over a prolonged period, a weekly scale is introduced. The payment for the first week is £3 3s., for the second week £2 2s., and for succeeding weeks £1 17s. 6d. Under that schedule a medical practitioner could be treating a patient for 5s. 6d. a visit. I inferred from the Minister's statement that the fee for each visit was 15s.

The Minister said that in future a patient may pay the doctor and be reimbursed by the Commissioner, or the bill may be presented to the Commissioner.

Mr. Walsh: Or he can give authority to the Commissioner to pay the doctor.

Dr. NOBLE: That is a very good system. It will be of advantage to the Commissioner and medical practitioners. I have treated very few compensation cases in latter years, but I always have difficulty in determining the fees. The nurse never seems to know what to charge. Eventually I arranged that she record the treatment given and let the Insurance Commissioner fix the fee. That was the easiest way. The new method is a big improvement.

I am not speaking on behalf of any section of the community on my next point. As I stated previously, the fees under the Earle Page health scheme are fair. They should be 10 per cent. above the amount paid at present under that scheme. Those fees or subsidies are set at 90 per cent. of the amount a patient is charged, in order to discourage excessive visits by patients.

Mr. Walsh: I gave that comparison.

Dr. NOBLE: I think that is a fair basis. It would remove a doubt that has existed in the past and would be more suitable to medical practitioners.

Hon. E. J. WALSH (Bundaberg—Treasurer) (11.38 a.m.), in reply: Generally speaking the Leader of the Opposition commended the provisions of the Bill. He expressed concern about the effect the new arrangement had on an injured worker. It was the same under the agreement. I have no doubt that the Commissioner in his usual

sympathetic way will see that no disadvantage is suffered by a worker, but, if there are any legal limitations to prevent his satisfying legitimate claims by an injured worker or a doctor for medical fees or hospital expenses, the position will have to be given further consideration. I have not the fears expressed by the Leader of the Opposition. I do not deny that what he claimed could take place will happen in isolated cases, but I trust to the good sense of the great majority of doctors and believe they will do the right thing.

If the new fees overcome the complaint of certain specialists, there should be no complaint about the administration of the policy. I said earlier that doctors in different parts of the State were quite happy to enter into an agreement with the Commissioner. The Commissioner does not desire to come into conflict with the B.M.A. That association lays down policy for its members, and the Commissioner does not want to undermine that organisation, as long as it is working in the public interest. If there are any abuses—and I say quite frankly that there will be some—and they are brought to the notice of the Commissioner I suggest that he brings them to the notice of the B.M.A. or under my notice. I will see that the matter goes to the responsible people to handle the matter.

Dr. Noble: Too frequent attendances?

Mr. WALSH: If the B.M.A. cannot handle the situation and it becomes one which demands legislation, we shall have to take that course. We will not have the legislation undermined by a few avaricious doctors. Nor, do we want to make the matter too difficult. The injured worker has to have service to justify his claim on the Commissioner. I can say quite frankly that only a limited number of doctors engage in this sort of thing.

Dr. Noble: They spoil the rest.

Mr. WALSH: Yes. I have particulars concerning a case but I will not mention the doctor's name or where he resides. On 26 March the claimant saw the doctor and there was a series of consultations ultimately ending in an operation. The sum of £21 10s. was involved. There were nine consultations before the operation. The Commissioner considered that it was a case of over-treatment and the claim was reduced by approximately £4. I have another case in connection with the same doctor who was dealing with an injured person who was supposed to have bruised ribs. There were six consultation fees plus a charge for strapping, £4 1s. 6d. It was a case of bruised ribs. Ultimately an account came in from a radiologist for five guineas which the radiologist was unable to collect from the claimant. That might be one of the cases the hon. member for Yeronga referred to. The Commissioner saw a certificate indicating bruised ribs but nothing in the history of the case showing anything to do with the head and shoulders.

The claim for five guineas by the radiologist was for an X-ray of the head and shoulders. At no stage did the certificate show anything to indicate that this was required. There was a little unsatisfactory relationship in the same area which involved the payment of a substantial amount. Hon. members can understand the Commissioner's objecting to a lot of these things. Although there was some doubt in regard to the matter the Commissioner paid it with some reluctance. That meant that he was not going to continue the argument and he was not going to hold the other doctor out. It might have been due to a misunderstanding. There are cases like that.

As to the matter raised by the Leader of the Opposition, I shall satisfy him during the Committee stage that the amendment is in order.

Motion (Mr. Walsh) agreed to.

COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Clark, Fitzroy, in the chair.)

Clause 1—Short title—as read, agreed to.

Clause 2—Amendments of s. 14D; Liability for payment of certain hospital and medical treatment by Commissioner—

Hon. E. J. WALSH (Bundaberg—Treasurer) (11.46 a.m.): For the information of the Leader of the Opposition, I am advised that the Bill is quite correct as it stands. Sub-section (7) deals with the recovery of hospital fees payable under that section, so that it is probably a matter of re-wording the paragraph. The Parliamentary Draftsman assures me that the Bill is quite correct.

Clause 2, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

FRUIT MARKETING ORGANISATION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Tablelands—Secretary for Agriculture and Stock) (11.47 a.m.): I move—

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

The Bill is a very simple one. I gave a full explanation of it on the introductory stage, and I do not intend to elaborate on my remarks.

Mr. NICKLIN (Landsborough—Leader of the Opposition) (11.48 a.m.): The Bill, although simple, is very important as it involves a vital principle. I shall trace briefly the history of the C.O.D. that led up to the necessity for the Bill. The C.O.D. was formed in 1923, although it did not actually begin operations till 1 January, 1924. It was born really from the activities of the Council of Agriculture, which had been divided into various branches. It was

realised that the powers given to local associations and district councils did not altogether fit in with the requirements of the fruit industry, and the then Director of the Council of Agriculture, Mr. L. R. Macgregor, called a conference of local producers' associations in the old Trades Hall, where the formation of a separate body to control the fruit industry was discussed. A plan was put before the meeting by Mr. Macgregor and it was unanimously adopted. It was agreed to by the then Secretary for Agriculture and Stock, the late Hon. W. N. Gillies, in July, 1923, and in November of that year he introduced legislation setting up the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing. The Committee of Direction is often referred to as a Government instrumentality, but it is not; it operates under a charter given by the Government.

Mr. Collins: On the same principle as any company. All companies act under a charter.

Mr. NICKLIN: The Government did not finance the Committee's initial operations. It began with a £2,000 overdraft with the E.S. & A. Bank. It was fortunate in being able to take over the general manager, and portion of the staff and organisation of the Queensland Fruit-Growers' Co-operative Society, especially for the transport of fruit.

The story of how the Committee of Direction came to be called the C.O.D. is amusing. When the committee began it was the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing.

Mr. Collins: It was not "cash on delivery," was it?

Mr. NICKLIN: The Minister has hit the nail on the head. The agents in the markets were rather upset about the activities of the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing and derisively termed it the C.O.D., the "Cash-on-Delivery" organisation. The name stuck and in the trade and elsewhere the Committee is referred to as the C.O.D.

It was appointed for a certain number of years and its continuance was to be subject to the periodic decision of the growers. Under the Act power was given to hold a poll if a certain number of growers signed a petition. Until 1929 there was no demand for a poll, but the Committee of Direction itself thought it should receive from the growers an indication of whether they thought its activities were worth while. It organised a petition signed by just over 700 growers, a poll was held and 87.2 per cent. voted in favour of the continuance of the C.O.D., only 476 voting against it.

One of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Fruit and Vegetables, under Mr. Justice Philp, was that the Committee of Direction should be appointed a body corporate and should not be subject to periodic polls. The Act was amended accordingly. The opponents of the C.O.D. have often said that its compulsory powers gave

it a distinct advantage over those trading in competition with it, but that is not so. Its only powers of compulsion are in the issue of directions for the handling of factory fruit. All directions may be challenged by the growers. The C.O.D. has to comply with exactly the same conditions as private traders. It has no advantage whatsoever.

Mr. Collins: Having got that power from the growers it is able to direct the fruit to its own advantage.

Mr. NICKLIN: Only factory fruit.

Mr. Collins: Only factory fruit.

Mr. NICKLIN: It can exercise a direction to keep low-grade fruit off the market at certain times—such as during the tomato season. It does not give it any advantage over any other trader on the market. What the C.O.D. has done in the establishment of selling sections throughout Queensland and on the Albury, Sydney and other New South Wales markets, is not the result of any powers given under the Act but solely as a result of its service to the growers. The C.O.D. now handles the bulk of the Queensland fruit on the Sydney markets. Growers greatly appreciate the service and the better average return by the C.O.D.

Only two directions for the handling of factory fruit have been challenged. The first was in 1925, concerning pineapples and the other was this year regarding strawberries. The challenge to the strawberry direction was a test challenge, comparable with the test challenge made to the continuance of the operation of the C.O.D. in 1929. This year strawberry-growers are guaranteed 2s. a pound for all the fruit they can produce and send to the factory. There is no necessity for any direction whatsoever. The manager of the C.O.D. was opposed to any direction being issued but the growers considered that direction should be continued. They voted very largely in favour of the continuation of strawberry direction. Although it is not enforced it is there when required.

The interstate and intrastate transport arrangements of the C.O.D. have gained great advantage for the fruit-growers of Queensland. There is also the fast fruit train service for the North and the Stanthorpe-Brisbane service. Unfortunately the Railway Department has been unable to provide the required facilities and the rail service has been challenged by road transport. Nevertheless the C.O.D. has done a great transport job.

On the experimental side it was responsible for the introduction of the modern banana-ripening methods now in use in the Queensland trade. It spent much money on refrigerated transport on the railway. It made material contributions from time to time to the Department of Agriculture and Stock for special investigations into various aspects of the fruit industry. Possibly the greatest

contribution it has made to the industry—possibly it could be challenged if this legislation were not enacted—is the development of the canning industry in Queensland. It began with the canning of pineapples but many other fruits are canned now. Its Golden Circle products have a world-wide distribution. They are held in high regard in all corners of the world. It comes from the initial activities of the Pineapple Sectional Group Committee of the C.O.D., aided by other sections of the fruit industry in the first place when it was necessary to find capital to start that magnificent industrial achievement at Northgate.

It is indicative of the co-operation in the fruit industry. Every section put every bob that it had behind the pineapple-growers in the establishment of the factory. The Government rightly and wisely backed that organisation and now they have an asset worth £1,147,900 of which £646,275 was provided by the growers themselves—a very considerable contribution. A debenture loan guaranteed by the Government for the C.O.D. was granted by the A.M.P. A further debenture loan for £25,000 to assist the Cairns growers out of their difficulties in the operation of their cannery was also raised. It was done by the growers themselves, supported by a Government guarantee. That gives the lie to the oft-repeated statement that the C.O.D. is a Government instrumentality. It is not. It is an instrumentality built up with the hard cash and support of the fruitgrowers themselves. Mr. Justice Philp, chairman of the Royal Commission on Fruit and Vegetables, was responsible for three main recommendations. The first was that the Committee of Direction should control vegetables as well as fruit.

Mr. Power: Does the hon. gentleman suggest that they should bring in potatoes too?

Mr. NICKLIN: Potatoes are not brought in under the Act but the C.O.D. is one of the largest sellers of potatoes on the Sydney market. It handles great quantities of them.

Mr. Power: Would you suggest that the growers be directed to send all their potatoes through the C.O.D.?

Mr. NICKLIN: I would not suggest that while the price-fixing Minister is about, because I know how he would quickly ruin any marketing activities by poking his nose into things that he did not know anything about. (Opposition laughter.)

Another recommendation of the Fruit and Vegetables Commission was that the C.O.D. should be a body corporate, and that also has been written into the Act. The third suggestion was that there should be a consumers' representative on the board. From the propaganda and public relations point of view that might have some value. At times when the price of fruit is high—because of drought and other things—the

public blame the C.O.D. for putting up the price. The Minister in charge of prices knows that it is most difficult to regulate the price of fruit and vegetables. The only way to do it effectively is according to the law of supply and demand.

Mr. Power: It is hard to track some of these fellows down for the tricks they play.

Mr. NICKLIN: I told the Minister some time ago that he would learn something when he started on marketing control.

Mr. Power: The Leader of the Opposition would be surprised at the number of prosecutions for overcharging for fruit.

Mr. NICKLIN: That may be so.

Mr. Power: Would the hon. gentleman be surprised to know that every person who buys fruit from the market has to be given a docket showing what he paid so that he can work out his margin of profit.

Mr. NICKLIN: It is not worth the paper it is written on. A buyer in the markets may use half a dozen names. I should say that the bulk of the fruit sold in the markets is not listed under anybody's name. The purchase is made and initials only are used.

Mr. Power: That also has been altered. We have caught up with them.

Mr. NICKLIN: The action mentioned by the Attorney-General is not very effective. The men at the markets will always be a jump ahead of him. The price of fruit and vegetables can only be fixed by competition, by the law of supply and demand. Admittedly the profit margins on fruit are higher than they should be, that there is not now the competition of previous years.

Mr. Power: The retailer is doing it.

Mr. NICKLIN: I know that. The retailers were spoilt during the war years when they could get any price they cared to charge for fruit. They think that system should continue.

The Act of 1945 provided for the appointment of a consumers' representative on the board. I commended that provision and said that it would ensure a liaison between consumers and the board. We hear many complaints when prices are high from people who have no knowledge of the cause. During a drought only small quantities are available and naturally prices rise. People who do not know the position rush to the Commissioner of Prices and ask him to fix a lower price. A consumers' representative on the board may have a propaganda or public relations value—he is a person to whom complaints can be made.

Although provision was made for the appointment of a consumers' representative, no appointment has ever been made. The

Minister said that the actions of the C.O.D. could be challenged as the board is incomplete. The section of the Act providing for the appointment of a consumers' representative is now amended to give the Minister power if he so desires to appoint a consumers' representative, and also to validate past actions of the board. It is a very desirable provision. The Bill is simple but most important. The C.O.D. operations are Australia-wide and any legal action to invalidate its decisions over the years could be very serious. The Bill removes that weakness in the Act. I commend the Minister for introducing it.

Mr. MORRIS (Mt. Coot-tha) (12.9 p.m.): I join with the Leader of the Opposition in commending the Minister for introducing the Bill. It is a simple one, but it is of great importance.

The Leader of the Opposition gave a very interesting explanation of the operations of the C.O.D. It was particularly interesting to me. The Bill appears to be important. I have a distinct recollection that my father was actively interested in the formation of the C.O.D. Those responsible for its formation have very good cause to be proud of their work, including the Leader of the Opposition, who at the time was a fruit grower, not a Member of Parliament. My father used to speak of Frank Nicklin as one of the prime movers. The latest challenge to the C.O.D. occurred early this year in regard to strawberries. Whilst I do not think that a general policy of direction is desirable in all fields, it is very desirable for the fruit and vegetable grower. Over the years the C.O.D. has been very satisfactory for pineapple, strawberry and tomato growers. But for this organisation and its powers which we are strengthening, the previous policy of catch-as-catch-can which never worked to the advantage of anybody, would still operate. I commend the Minister for introducing the Bill and I record our appreciation of the ground work by many people who made the organisation possible. They worked without thought of self or personal gain to develop it and we gladly acknowledge our appreciation of their wonderful work.

Hon. H. H. COLLINS (Tablelands—Secretary for Agriculture and Stock) (12.13 p.m.), in reply: I am glad that the Bill meets with the full support of the Committee. That is as it should be. I appreciate the clear outline of events that led up to the introduction of the C.O.D., the Leader of the Opposition's reference to the so-called title of "Cash on Delivery." The hon. gentleman is well equipped to speak on the ramifications of fruit marketing. He was a fruit grower for many years and he took an active interest in the formation of the C.O.D. There is a mistaken idea in the minds of many people concerning our marketing legislation, the formation of the Council of Agriculture and the consequent legislation relating to

commodity boards. Some people seem to think that the C.O.D. is a Government organisation, perhaps in the mistaken belief that any organisation, company, or co-operative association under any law was a Government organisation.

Active participation or direction by the Government in the activities of the C.O.D. is limited, although they have a say in what the C.O.D. does. That is justifiable, because Government funds are involved. Had it not been for the action of the Government in guaranteeing the C.O.D. a large sum of money, the big cannery at Northgate, which is operating so successfully in the export of canned pineapples, would never have come into being. That is why the Government have a direct interest in the C.O.D. and its cannery.

In about 1944 the Government began an investigation into the requirements of the fruit-growers of Queensland. A Mr. Williams, who was the manager of a cannery at Leeton, was brought to Queensland, and he made a very interesting report on the canning of tropical fruits in this State.

Mr. Morris: Conditions have changed a good deal since then.

Mr. COLLINS: The actual conditions may have changed, but the same principles remain.

Canneries in the South handle all the fruits grown in cold climates, such as peaches, pears, apricots, plums, and so on. Although they grow those fruits in abundance they have not the same range as Queensland, which can grow not only the cold-climate fruits but the tropical fruits as well. Mr. Williams pointed that out in his report. He said that in addition to an export market, there was a big market within Australia for canned tropical fruits, and he recommended that every encouragement be given to the tropical-fruit industry. He suggested that a cannery to handle tropical fruits be erected in Brisbane. Of course, that was some years before the Northgate cannery was built. He suggested also that the range of canned tropical fruits be widened by the establishment of fruit canneries in both Central Queensland and North Queensland. He said that Rockhampton and Townsville were suitable places for the establishment of fruit canneries. He did not say that Townsville was the only suitable centre in North Queensland; he merely said that it would be a suitable place.

As time went on, the Committee of Direction decided to build a cannery at Northgate. It held funds accumulated from profits made during the war. I am not sure of the amount but it was about £300,000 and that went a long way towards building the cannery.

The Leader of the Opposition will be able to keep me straight on these matters because he has been very closely associated with the activities of the C.O.D. I have been associated with it in a more distant way, not as a supplier of fruit.

The position would have been quite hopeless if the Government had not been willing to back the C.O.D. with a very substantial guarantee. I do not know what it is now but it is well over £1,000,000, not only for the cannery but also for the marketing of fruit.

Mr. Nicklin: Actually it is about £470,000 on the cannery itself but the Government guarantee the overdraft for working the cannery.

Mr. COLLINS: That is so, and for the marketing of fruit. That probably calls for a bigger guarantee than the actual canning.

Mr. Nicklin: Definitely, much more.

Mr. COLLINS: When I was in Leeton I was told that the cheapest item in the cost of producing a tin of peaches was the peaches themselves. Many people think the C.O.D. is a Government concern mainly because the Government support it so much with finance.

The C.O.D. built a fruit cannery in Rockhampton, giving employment to many people—and highly-paid employment because of its seasonal character.

Mr. Low: I think when the Government guarantee a loan the people may be misled.

Mr. COLLINS: I think so. The Government's guarantee is greater than the amount subscribed by investors.

However, the Committee is building up its own assets. The growers supplying the Northgate factory have subscribed a large sum to the cannery.

Mr. Nicklin: Yes, £600,000-odd.

Mr. COLLINS: That is all to the good. Whether they are getting enough interest on the money invested, I do not say. That is not for me, but for them, to raise.

The Committee has gone further afield and undertaken the erection of a cannery in North Queensland. Its knowledge of the canning business is equal to that of anybody. The Agent-General says in his report that the Golden Circle brand is recognised as being of the highest standard of quality of canned fruits available in London. Pineapples are holding their own on the London market. Cairns has been selected as the site for the new cannery because pineapple-growing received such a great impetus there after the war that it is now the main centre of the industry. When the three factories are working, the C.O.D. will be handling tropical fruits from Cairns to Brisbane.

Mr. Nicklin: Unfortunately overseas prospects are not as bright as they should be.

Mr. COLLINS: They are not over-bright. But suppose we were going to encourage many other industries, could you say that the overseas market was attractive?

No. Would that justify any Government in refusing to assist growers or an organisation to can something as natural to the country as pineapples and as tropical fruits are to Queensland? Are we to be frightened to do anything simply because the market at the present time is dead? We must take some notice of the market nowadays, but if we make too factual an examination we certainly will never take the initial steps to ensure that when the tide turns as it invariably does, the industry will be profitable. We could not say that the meat industry was one in which to invest money if we look only at the overseas market. The same could be said about the wheat industry and many others. The Government have come in behind the C.O.D. because it is a co-operative organisation. The speculator is being kept out to the greatest possible extent. The Government's policy is assistance to co-operatives, whether they are primary or secondary producers. That is the reason for the Government's getting right behind the C.O.D. In turn the C.O.D. warrants all confidence the Government have placed in it from time to time. The growers have expressed their complete confidence in their own organisation.

The pineapple cannery controlled by the C.O.D. uses much fruit from southern States. In times of glut purchases are made in the South. Thus the C.O.D. is a great employer of labour in the canning of fruit not grown in Queensland. Its activities are still expanding.

Mr. Nicklin: We must have a full range of products.

Mr. COLLINS: That is very necessary, particularly when we are disposing of our products, as we have to, on the overseas market. Certain things are most essential to attract buyers. The starting point is high quality. Our quality must be as high as everybody else's—not nearly as good, but just as good. We have achieved that thanks to the management of Mr. Flewell Smith, Mr. Brown, and the growers' elected representative in their control of the C.O.D. pineapple cannery. Continuity of supply is most important. Purchasers do not want to have to go somewhere else and say, "We have run out of the fruit we used to buy and consequently we would like to buy some of yours." It might be a product from Africa, Hawaii or anywhere else. Once they go to other people they are inclined to stick if the product is up to standard. The C.O.D. is not losing its markets but gaining in the markets already established. That is why it is so desirable that it can southern fruits. It is just as desirable that it should go further north to Rockhampton and northern Queensland. Papaw is one of the finest of canned tropical fruit.

Mr. Nicklin: They have not enough papaws available at the present time.

Mr. COLLINS: It is a fruit that grows quickly, particularly in the North.

Mr. Low: Do you think they will be able to produce good canned bananas?

Mr. COLLINS: I am not in a position to say at the moment, but anyone who says that we cannot is under-estimating our capacity. Hon. members will remember that we could not can pineapple juices at one time but we do it very successfully now. I have tasted canned bananas which were very good.

I wish to refer to the retrospective provision in the Bill. I do not think that any hon. member is enthusiastic about retrospective legislation, but in this instance it is to obviate any legal doubt as to the validity of the actions of a company that is turning out over £10,000,000 worth of goods a year on behalf of the farmers. We want to avoid any legal doubt as to their right to do this or that. Retrospectivity in this case is more than justified, and I am sure it is supported by all people who do not ordinarily support retrospective legislation.

Motion (Mr. Collins) agreed to.

COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Clark, Fitzroy, in the chair.)

Clauses 1 to 3, both inclusive, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Clark Fitzroy, in the chair.)

Clause 1—Short Title—as read, agreed to.

Clause 2—Amendment of s.7 (7); Voters' Roll.

Mr. LOW (Cooroora) (12.36 p.m.): This clause amends paragraph (ii.) of Section 7 (7) by repealing the words "on payment of a sum not exceeding two shillings for every copy thereof." The preparation of a shire electoral roll is not an easy matter, particularly when there are divisional boundaries. The roll is usually prepared from the State rolls for the areas. Local authority elections are held during the month of April. The State electoral rolls close on 31 December prior to the poll. The short intervening period adds to the difficulties. There are many misunderstandings about whether certain people are entitled to vote or not. The position is not similar to State elections, as State rolls close approximately a month prior to the State elections. The returning officer has a lot of extra work to do.

Printing costs are usually in excess of 2s. a copy. By resolution a council will now be able to determine the price or whether the

copies are to be supplied free of charge. Printing is an expensive item in a local authority budget, particularly at election time. In some local-authority areas votes are recorded at the ballot boxes. Other local authorities have postal voting.

Mr. Walsh: The price can now be fixed by resolution, but it must not exceed the cost of production.

Mr. LOW: I agree with that. A person who wants a copy of the roll is entitled to it at the lowest price. Rolls are required to indicate those entitled to vote.

Mr. Walsh: We should get some interesting comparisons between the cost of production in different shires.

Mr. LOW: Yes. Some local authority rolls are roneed, others are printed. In up-to-date and progressive shires, such as the one with which I am associated, the rolls are roneed and they do not cost very much. If they are printed the cost is greater and, having regard to the small demand, the price for each copy would have to be increased considerably. When State elections are held the police make a very thorough check to see who are entitled to vote and who are not. However, local government elections are not held at the same time as State elections and it would be a good idea if the Treasurer issued instructions to the police to make a house-to-house canvass in November or December so that people would have their names and a change of address on the rolls before local authority elections.

Mr. Walsh: My jurisdiction does not extend to that.

Mr. LOW: I know, but the Treasurer is in charge of local government. He could ask the Attorney-General to do it. It would be a great advantage.

Mr. Walsh: There is a pretty good check now.

Mr. LOW: Yes, but it could be improved. The position is difficult when State electoral boundaries do not coincide with local authority boundaries. Take for instance the Maroochy Shire. It covers a part of three State electorates, Landsborough, Marodian, and Cooroora. It is a hard job to prepare the roll when the divisional boundaries are in three State electorates and when we have to deal with returning officers in different parts. Similar positions must obtain in other areas. There is nothing more encouraging or desirable than an up-to-date roll, one that can be relied upon.

Mr. Walsh: The Shire of Diamantina covers 38,000 square miles, it has 80 electors and a revenue of £20,000.

Mr. LOW: You could keep the electors under control in that area. Nevertheless it would have its difficulties, too.

Mr. Walsh: They wanted to shift the shire office from Birdsville to Betoota and they wanted me to arbitrate on it.

Mr. LOW: If the matter was left in the hands of some people they would pull the shire office down and shift it from place to place. Perhaps what is desirable is a mobile shire office, one that could be dragged round on a trailer, to be at various centres for a week at a time.

There are many very interesting problems associated with local government. I am pleased that the Treasurer has given this Bill a great deal of thought. I am sure he has tackled the problems with much satisfaction to local governing bodies. I am glad to know that the suggestions submitted to him have had his serious consideration. It is appreciated to the full. When a Minister gives every submission his keen consideration he soon wins full credit from the people.

Mr. Walsh: How many electors are there in your shire?

Mr. LOW: Over 10,000. The population of the shire is 19,000, the electors number 10,000.

Mr. Walsh: How many are there in the Cooroora electorate?

Mr. LOW: A little over 11,000. There would be about 20,000 people in the electorate. The Maroochy shire is perhaps the most closely settled rural shire in Queensland.

Clause 2 of the Bill is very desirable, and I am sure it will meet with the approval of all local authorities.

Progress reported.

The House adjourned at 12.47 p.m.