

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Tuesday, February 19, 1974

The PRESIDENT (Hon Sir Lyell McEwin) took the Chair at 2.15 p.m. and read prayers.

PETITIONS: SODOMY

The Hon. R. C. DeGARIS presented four petitions in identical terms signed by 73 persons praying that the Bill proposed to be introduced to legalize sodomy between consenting adults should not be passed by Parliament until it had a clear mandate from the people to introduce such legislation by way of referendum at the next periodic South Australian election

Petitions received and read.

QUESTIONS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARIES

The Hon. R. C. DeGARIS: I seek leave to make a short explanation prior to asking a question of the Minister representing the Minister of Local Government.

Leave granted.

The Hon. R. C. DeGARIS: The Royal Commission appointed by the Minister of Local Government to inquire into and report upon the question of local government boundaries in South Australia is at present taking evidence on this matter in the South-East. As the Government has given no information to the Parliament as to its intentions once a report is made to the Minister of Local Government by the Royal Commission, will the Minister of Health ascertain from his colleague the answers to the following questions: (1) Will the Government submit the whole of the report of the Royal Commission in the form of legislation to the Parliament for debate? (2) If the Government does not follow that procedure, will it submit the parts of the report with which it agrees in the form of legislation to the Parliament for debate? (3) If the Government does not submit legislation to the Parliament, will the Government utilize the procedures in section 23 of the Local Government Act seeking an address to the Governor from both Houses for the total submissions of the Royal Commission or seeking an address from both Houses for the submission of those parts of the Royal Commission's report that the Government agrees to?

The Hon. D. H. L. BANFIELD: I shall be happy to refer the honourable member's questions to my colleague.

SUPERPHOSPHATE SUBSIDY

The Hon. C. R. STORY: I seek leave to make a short statement before asking several questions of the Minister of Agriculture.

Leave granted.

The Hon. C. R. STORY: I ask the Minister to inform the Council on several aspects of the effect of the Commonwealth Government's decision to terminate the \$12 superphosphate subsidy from the end of 1974. My questions are as follows: first, did the Minister have any prior notice, from the Prime Minister or from the Minister for Primary Industry, of the Government's decision, secondly, was the matter discussed at the recent meeting of the Agricultural Council attended by the Minister; thirdly, does the Minister agree that the removal of the subsidy will have a most detrimental effect on primary production in this State, fourthly, has the Minister investigated the likely effect on the cost of living and the employment situation of the proposed action of the Commonwealth Government; finally, what action has the State Government taken to date to rectify the situation?

The Hon. T. M. CASEY: I shall be as explicit as possible in reply to the honourable member's questions. The answer to the first question is that no prior notice was given to me by the Commonwealth Government. Secondly, the matter was not discussed at the last Agricultural Council meeting held in Hobart. As to the detrimental effect on primary production in this State of the removal of the subsidy, let me say that if I had had the task of removing the subsidy (which in this case deals with superphosphate) I would not have done it in the way announced by the Prime Minister. I have said that publicly, and I say it again today. Honourable members must realize that a subsidy given to any industry is normally on a short-term basis; the whole idea of a subsidy is to encourage an industry to overcome the problems with which it is faced at any time. It would be bad policy for any Government to maintain a subsidy to an industry that did not require it. For example, we could say that the need for the \$12 subsidy on superphosphate does not apply now as it did two or three years ago, when our oversea prices for agricultural commodities were not high. Today, our wool prices are high, as are our sheep prices, and wheat prices are very high. We have reached a situation where we must decide whether the subsidy means something to the industry at this juncture. Quite candidly, I would say from my own point of view that the removal of the subsidy would hurt many primary producers in South Australia.

Whilst agricultural commodities have brought high prices recently, only a short time ago the prices of those commodities were at a deflated level. Such a subsidy should be phased out over a period to give the industry an opportunity to see where it is going. That statement, too, I have made publicly, and I repeat it. As to the likely effect on the cost of living and the employment situation, I have not been in touch with any economists on this matter, and I think it would be inappropriate for me to make an assessment of that situation at this time. However, I do not agree with the statements attributed to some people who have said that the cost of agricultural commodities will be increased by 25 per cent. The honourable member asked what action the South Australian Government had taken to rectify the situation. I have been trying to get Commonwealth Ministers on the telephone this morning to express my own point of view but have not succeeded. However, I shall be trying again later this afternoon.

The Hon. M. B. DAWKINS: I seek leave to make a short statement prior to asking a question of the Minister of Agriculture.

Leave granted.

The Hon. M. B. DAWKINS: My question, like those of the Hon. Mr. Story, refers to the projected loss of the superphosphate bounty to South Australian farmers in particular, and the effect thereof. Since this announcement by the Prime Minister, there has been some trenchant criticism of the removal of the bounty. That criticism has been voiced by many people, and in particular by the Chairman of the Federal Primary Producers Committee (I think it is called) and the Commonwealth Government Whip, Mr. Duthie, who, I believe, indicated his considerable opposition to this move. He also said that in his opinion an announcement from Cabinet without reference to the Federal Primary Producers Committee was an insult to the members of that committee. Does the Minister think that Mr. Duthie was justified and fair in his criticism of the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Cabinet in this shock announcement, and is he prepared to defend and support Mr. Duthie in his efforts on behalf of the primary producers to see whether the subsidy can be restored?

The Hon. T. M. CASEY: I have no intention of interfering with what my Commonwealth colleagues in Canberra do and I do not expect them to interfere with what I do in South Australia, so I shall not buy into that part of the issue one iota. As I told the Hon. Mr. Story, I believe the total removal of the subsidy is a bad move. I will see what I can do but, if the Commonwealth Government in its wisdom thinks the subsidy should be phased out at this time, I am in agreement with that being done over a period of time. I have already expressed that view.

TEACHERS' ACCOMMODATION

The Hon. J. C. BURDETT: I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking a question of the Minister of Agriculture, representing the Minister of Education.

Leave granted.

The Hon. J. C. BURDETT: In many country areas there is a great shortage of departmentally provided teachers' houses. In many cases representations by school councils have been made to the department, and promises to provide more housing have been made; but many of those promises have not yet been fulfilled. Will the Minister say what steps are being taken to overcome this shortage in teachers' housing in country areas and when the promises already made will be fulfilled?

The Hon. T. M. CASEY: I will refer the honourable member's question to my colleague and let him have a reply when it is available.

FLOODING

The Hon. A. M. WHYTE: I seek leave to make a short statement prior to asking a question of the Minister of Lands.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. M. WHYTE: According to a radio report some days ago, the Prime Minister has appointed or will appoint a committee to study flood devastation in Queensland. Since the North-East of this State at present is in the throes of similar devastation, has the Minister approached the Commonwealth Government to allow that committee to assess also the position in South Australia? Secondly, as there is a grave possibility of stock being marooned by floodwaters, have any preparations been made for flying in feed to those areas, as has been done in Queensland?

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: We have not approached the Commonwealth Government in regard to the flood damage in the north-east corner of the State. We are trying to assess the problem, but we are experiencing difficulty in getting to the area and in dropping feed for the cattle that may be there. The following report may answer the question asked by the honourable member:

Heavy summer rains commenced on January 16 and continued for about two weeks. Falls varying from 12in. (304.8 mm) to 20in. (508 mm) occurred over an area extending from Lake Eyre north to Queensland and east to the New South Wales border; falls in south-west Queensland were substantially heavier. The pastoral areas adversely affected are mainly restricted to the flood plains of the Diamantina-Warburton and the Cooper-Strzelecki River systems. All these areas were subject to abnormally heavy local flooding, which has been aggravated by the very extensive flood waters coming from the south-west Queensland catchment areas.

Information in regard to losses sustained by pastoralists is very sketchy but it is confirmed that one station homestead has been washed away, one station homestead is totally inundated, and two station homesteads have suffered damage through partial inundation, with waters still rising. As yet no reports have been received of the extent of stock losses but these can be expected.

On February 5 the Chairman of the Pastoral Board made an aerial reconnaissance of the Cooper-Strzelecki area

extending into south-west Queensland. Yesterday, February 18, the Pastoral Board, together with the Superintending Engineer Rural of the Highways Department, was turned back at Leigh Creek by a total weather close-down of flying throughout the flood affected area. The board had commenced a two-day detailed aerial inspection, which has been temporarily deferred until weather conditions improve.

I have stated that funds can be made available for pastoralists, who need assistance arising from the floods, under the Primary Producers Emergency Assistance Act. Information in regard to eligibility and how to apply will be forwarded to residents of the affected area as soon as possible. It should be realized that communications within the area have been almost wholly restricted to radio, as all roads have been cut since January 16, and flying has been severely restricted by weather conditions and the critical shortage of aviation fuel within the area. The board has been maintaining communications by telephone and radio with the pastoralists affected. A message just to hand states that further falls of rain of from 3in. (76.2 mm) to 5in. (127 mm) have been registered up to 9 a.m. today in the Cooper/Diamantina catchment areas. The full effect or extent of the rains is not yet known.

Once we can get to the area and inspect it, we intend to organize the dropping of necessary parts, which some people need for their machinery. As soon as we know the extent of the loss we will study the situation and decide whether it is appropriate to seek Commonwealth Government aid. I remind the honourable member that in all these matters (whether flood or drought relief, and the same applies to Queensland, whose experience would be much the same as ours) the State must provide \$1 500 000 worth of assistance before the Commonwealth Government will provide funds. As we must first inspect the extent of the damage and assess the assistance that is needed, we are doing all in our power to get to the area to assess the damage that has been done. As most of the people involved are lessees under the Pastoral Act they certainly have this Government's greatest sympathy, and as far as I am concerned I will do everything I can that is necessary to assist them.

ROCK FOUNDATION

The Hon. M. B. CAMERON: Some time ago I asked the Chief Secretary a question about the setting up of a rock foundation in Adelaide. The Minister intimated that the matter was being considered. Can he now tell me whether it has been further considered and whether any definite policy has been formulated?

The Hon. A. F. KNEEBONE: I do not have the information the honourable member requires at my fingertips, but I shall endeavour to get it for him and bring down a reply.

COUNCIL RATES

The Hon. C. M. HILL: I seek leave to make a short statement prior to asking a question of the Minister of Health, representing the Minister of Local Government.

Leave granted.

The Hon. C. M. HILL: Serious concern has been expressed by members of local government bodies in recent weeks about a proposal, which I understand was announced by the Minister of Local Government recently, concerning the possibility of introducing quarterly rating for the payment of council rates. These people made two points with considerable emphasis to me: first, that the costs that would have to be passed on to ratepayers would considerably increase within council areas if councils were compelled to introduce a quarterly rating system; secondly, many councils have made arrangements voluntarily with ratepayers to allow them to pay their rates by instalments

if those ratepayers are unable to pay in a lump sum. Can the Minister tell me his intention regarding this matter?

The Hon. D. H. L. BANFIELD: I shall be happy to refer the honourable member's question to my colleague.

EUROPEAN CARP

The Hon. J. C. BURDETT: I seek leave to make a brief explanation prior to directing a question to the Minister of Agriculture, representing the Minister of Fisheries

Leave granted.

The Hon. J. C. BURDETT: The Murray River has recently been inundated with possibly teeming millions of European carp, which were introduced when a Victorian lake was flushed into the Murray. The department concerned was apparently unaware of the presence of the carp. These carp multiply and grow rapidly, and as they are bottom-feeding fish they stir up mud to a gross extent from the bottom of the river. I have been told that in Victoria the presence of these carp can be detected in the rivers by the colour of the water. The feeding method of the fish fouls the river, kills the weed and upsets the balance of nature in the river. Not only are native fish likely to be destroyed but also, and much more importantly, it has been suggested that the carp may pollute the Murray River and endanger Adelaide's water supply by making the water undrinkable. Will the Minister report on this matter and also confer with his colleague, the Minister of Works, concerning the danger to our water supply?

The Hon. T. M. CASEY: I will refer the question to my colleague and bring down a reply.

EYRE HIGHWAY

The Hon. A. M. WHYTE: Will the Minister of Health, representing the Minister of Transport, find out how much of the money originally allocated to the western division of the Highways Department was eventually transferred to expedite the construction of the Eyre Highway?

The Hon. D. H. L. BANFIELD: I will get the information from my colleague and bring down a reply.

ENCEPHALITIS

The Hon. R. C. DeGARIS: I seek leave to make a brief statement before asking a question of the Minister of Health.

Leave granted.

The Hon. R. C. DeGARIS: There has been a good deal of publicity in the press recently in relation to cases of encephalitis occurring in the Murray Valley. I commend the Public Health Department for the manner in which it has handled its press releases and for what it has said to the public on the matter. Has the Minister any comment that he would like to make on the subject?

The Hon. D. H. L. BANFIELD: One case of Murray Valley encephalitis has occurred in South Australia. The patient died on February 18, 1974; she was 76 years of age. Nine cases have occurred in Victoria, and in two of those cases the patient has died. The organism is a virus found in water birds in some seasons, and it is transmitted to people by mosquito bites. Many people become infected in areas where the virus is present, but most of those infected have no illness and remain quite normal. Very few people (perhaps one in every 5 000 to one in 10 000 of those infected) suffer inflammation of the brain, consisting of unusually severe headache, drowsiness, and coma. There may be other signs of damage to the brain.

It is not feasible to eradicate mosquitoes from such wide areas as the Murray River, the Murrumbidgee River and the Darling River systems. Nor is it feasible for persons in these areas to avoid completely mosquito bites. However, it is simple and worth while to control major sources of mosquito breeding, especially near houses and schools, by regular treatment of water tanks and septic tanks and other small collections of water. Local boards of health and community service clubs in the Riverland area, with the help of a mosquito control expert from the Public Health Department, are doing this work directly and assisting householders to do it for themselves.

Other points that need to be emphasized are that the disease does not spread from person to person, there is no danger in handling or eating birds, and pets cannot pick up the disease or bring it home. We urge people to take preliminary precautions, because the disease can lead to death. However, there is no fear of any epidemic, and the media reports have been out of all proportion. We have had only one case in South Australia, and we are hopeful that no further cases will occur.

CHARTER BUSES

The Hon. J. C. BURDETT: I seek leave to make a brief explanation before directing a question to the Minister of Health, representing the Minister of Transport.

Leave granted.

The Hon. J. C. BURDETT: I understand that country bus operators rely for their profit entirely, in some cases, and in others almost entirely, on city charter work. Most country bus services run at a loss and if the operators lose the city charter work these services will cease. With the proposed take-over of metropolitan private bus services, does the Government intend to terminate existing permits for charter work in the city by country bus operators or to decline to renew such permits when they expire?

The Hon. D. H. L. BANFIELD: I will refer the honourable member's question to my colleague and bring down a report as soon as possible.

OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT PARKING

The Hon. C. R. STORY: I seek leave to make a short statement before asking a question of the Minister of Health.

Leave granted.

The Hon. C. R. STORY: It has come to my notice that a difficult situation exists at the Royal Adelaide Hospital for outpatients who must attend daily for treatment. As the Government has provided most of the equipment and buildings there, will the Minister have some inquiry made into the matter? Some people who need to attend the outpatient department of the hospital daily must be transported there by relatives, because generally they cannot afford taxis and it is impossible for them to use the bus services. Could temporary parking or some other facilities be made available so that patients, particularly elderly or crippled people, can attend the outpatient department without the harassment that takes place at present, I understand, through their being unable to park vehicles there?

The Hon. D. H. L. BANFIELD: I am well aware of the shortage of parking facilities at or near the Royal Adelaide Hospital, but I will inquire whether some relief can be afforded.

PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE REPORTS

The PRESIDENT laid on the table the following reports by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, together with minutes of evidence:

Hope Valley Water Treatment Plant,
Kilburn Community College,
Lock to Kimba Pipeline Completion,
Mount Gambier Outfall Sewer,

Nailsworth Co-educational High School,
Nuriootpa High School (Additions and Alterations),
Nuriootpa Primary School (Replacement),
Port Pirie Harbor Deepening,
Woodville High School Additions.

ADJOURNMENT

At 2.56 p.m. the Council adjourned until Wednesday,
February 20, at 2.15 p.m.