

SECOND READING SPEECH

by

THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, CANBERRA, WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 1961

WESTERN AUSTRALIA (BEEF CATTLE ROADS) BILL, 1961

The purpose of this Bill is to seek the approval of the Parliament to a grant of financial assistance to the State of Western Australia for the carrying out of certain road and bridge works in the northern part of that State, connected with the transport by road of beef cattle.

In introducing a similar measure relating to roads in Queensland I mentioned the several steps being taken by the Government to assist in the development of roads across the north of Australia. I referred also to the importance of general development and expansion of the beef industry, and the significant role which roads could play. I need not repeat what I then said, as the remarks have general application to Western Australia as well as to Queensland and the Northern Territory.

The assistance proposed for Western Australia is a grant of £500,000 in respect of expenditure by the State in the financial year 1961/62 on two specified roads and two specified bridges in the Kimberleys. The four projects are inter-related in that both roads lead from beef cattle areas to the meat works and port at Wyndham (from Nicholson in one case, from Halls Creek via Turkey Creek in the other), while the two bridges will allow the Wyndham-Nicholson road to be taken across the Ord and Dunham Rivers and so eliminate an existing low level crossing over the Ord, which puts this road out of commission in times of flood. Incidentally, the bridges (one of which is to be superimposed on the Ord River Dam at Bandicoot Bar, which itself is being constructed with the assistance of Commonwealth funds), and the improved road between the Ord Dam and Wyndham, will be of great assistance in the development of the areas opened up for settlement by the Ord project.

When we discussed the question of roads with the Western Australian Government, we were impressed by the amount of self help in developing communications in the north being undertaken by the State from its existing road funds. As I announced at the time we agreed to assist the State, the Commonwealth grant is "matching corresponding provisions by Western Australia in relation to roads in the Kimberleys". This concept is written into the Bill, which requires the State to undertake to spend not less than £500,000 from other sources on road works in the northern part of the State (defined as north of 20 degrees of south latitude) during 1961/62. I might add that this is by no means an onerous provision, as the information provided by the State indicated that its 1961/62 programme of road works included an allocation of more than £1million to that area, including over £800,000 in the Kimberleys.

The detailed arrangement is that the Commonwealth will provide 50% of expenditure on the two bridges in 1961/62 (estimated at £320,000, calling for a Commonwealth contribution of £160,000), and the whole of the expenditure, also in 1961/62, on improving the two roads. If the expenditure on the bridges accords with the estimate, this will mean that £340,000 is available for the road works. However, within the agreed limit of £500,000 we have not specified expenditure limits on either of the two groups.

I might mention also that the availability of the Commonwealth grant will allow the State to release, for other road works in the area, the funds already allocated in its programme to the two roads, plus half of the amount allocated to the construction of the two bridges.

Other provisions in the Bill are similar to those in the Queensland measure, including the power of approval of standards of design or construction which the Treasurer may exercise.

Western Australia is receiving very substantial assistance from the Commonwealth in its railway plans, which essentially will benefit the southern part of the State. This measure provides for a considerably smaller, but nevertheless significant, grant of assistance for the development of the beef cattle industry in the far north.

I commend the Bill to the House.