

POTATO AND ONION (GRADING) BILL.

Second reading.

The MINISTER of AGRICULTURE (Hon. J. Cwan)—This Bill is introduced at the request of the majority of the potato growers of the South-East, and is an attempt to place the potato and onion industry in that district on a better footing. This is largely a question of the marketing of the produce, and in this regard the Victorian Fruit Act, 1927, has had considerable influence on the industry in this State. Under the Victorian Act provision is made for the grading of potatoes and onions, and as a consequence the South-Eastern products have suffered in competition with Victorian products. Owing to the lack of proper grading in the South-East the whole of the products, whether first grade or otherwise, have been lumped as second grade, and have only received second grade prices. The growers of the South-East have, therefore, requested the Government to take steps to provide for Government inspection and grading of potatoes and onions produced in that part of the State. In order to carry out this request it is necessary to introduce legislation making it compulsory on all growers in the district concerned to comply with the requirements fixed. This Bill is, therefore, introduced in order to achieve this purpose. Under clause 2, the Act will apply only to the potatoes and onions grown within the portion of the State to which the Governor by proclamation declares that the Act shall apply. Clause 5 provides that no person is to pack any potatoes or onions intended for sale in a package unless the potatoes or onions are packed and graded as prescribed, and the package is marked as prescribed. The clause further provides that no person is to sell any potatoes or onions contained in a package if such potatoes or onions are not packed and graded as prescribed or if the package does not comply with the provisions of the Act. Penalties are imposed for any contravention of the provisions of the clause. Under clause 16 the Governor is given extensive powers to make regulations prescribing such matters as the standard and methods for packing and grading potatoes and onions and generally for regulating the marketing of these products. Power is also given to prescribe fees payable for inspection of potatoes and onions by inspectors. Clauses 6 and 7 give to an inspector appointed under the Act power to enter any

place for the purpose of inspecting any potatoes or onions, and to detain or otherwise deal with any potatoes or onions which do not comply with the requirements of the Act. Clauses 8 and 9 impose penalties on persons obliterating any marks made in pursuance of the Act on any package of potatoes or onions, or who obstruct any inspector in carrying out his duties under the Act. Under clause 11 it is provided that if an offence for which a vendor is liable for a penalty has in fact been committed without his authority by some agent or other person, then the agent or other person is to be liable to the like penalty as if he were the vendor. If proceedings for an offence against the Act are instituted against any vendor and he is able to show to the court that he used due diligence to enforce the execution of the provisions of the Act, and that the offence was committed without his knowledge, consent, or connivance, and in contravention of his orders, the vendor shall be exempt from any penalty, and the person actually committing

the offence shall be convicted of the offence. The remainder of the Bill contains evidentiary and administrative provisions which require no special mention. This morning I was interviewed by a man who is probably the largest potato grower and dealer in the State, and he expressed the wish that the passing of this Bill should be expedited so that this year's crop might be dealt with under it. I believe they start the harvest about the middle of December. The Bill will be of great advantage to those concerned in growing potatoes, particularly in the South-East, because of the disadvantages they have been placed under in competing with Victorian produce. I move the second reading.

The Hon. Sir DAVID GORDON secured the adjournment of the debate until November 22.

ADJOURNMENT.

At 4.37 p.m. the Council adjourned until Tuesday, November 22, at 2 p.m.