

1905.
VICTORIA.

R E P O R T

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS

ON THE QUESTION OF

RAILWAY COMMUNICATION

WITH THE

COUNTRY NORTH-EAST OF LAKE TYRRELL (ULTIMA EXTENSION).

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 27th June, 1905.

By Authority:

ROBT. S. BRAIN, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.

RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT, No. 1.—[61.]—5373.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY.

WEDNESDAY, 31st AUGUST, 1904.

5. RAILWAY EXTENSION TO MALLEE COUNTRY NORTH-EAST OF LAKE TYRRELL.—Mr. Bent moved, pursuant to notice, That the question of connecting the Mallee country to the north-east of Lake Tyrrell by means of a railway with the existing railway system and of loading the land which will be enhanced in value by the construction of the railway be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for consideration and report.

Debate ensued.

Question—put and resolved in the affirmative.

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(*Seventh Committee.*)

The Hon. G. GRAHAM, M.L.A., Chairman ;

A. S. Bailes, Esq., M.L.A.,
The Hon. Dr. Embling, M.L.C.,
P. McBride, Esq., M.L.A.,

The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C.
(Vice-Chairman),
E. C. Warde, Esq., M.L.A.

APPROXIMATE COST OF REPORT.

	£	s.	d.
Compilation*			
Printing (700 copies)	4	10	0

* The compilation was a portion of the work of the Secretary of the Railways Standing Committee who is paid by annual salary.

REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the Mallee Country to the north-east of Lake Tyrrell by means of a railway with the existing railway system and of loading the land enhanced in value by the construction of a railway, has the honour to submit the following Report:—

1. The proposal placed before the Committee by Mr. M. E. Kernot, Acting Engineer-in-Chief of the Victorian Railways, to serve the district desiring railway facilities, was the extension of the Ultima line in a north-westerly direction to Eureka, a distance of 27 miles. That extension was estimated to cost £63,450, or £2,350 per mile, although mallee sand was to be used to ballast the line. The railway from Quambatook to Ultima cost but £1,500 a mile. Mr. Kernot explained, however, that the increased cost of the suggested extension, as compared with the railway referred to, was due to new rails being used instead of second-hand ones, there being none of the latter in stock; to wages being higher than when the line to Ultima was built; to there being more cuttings on the Eureka extension, the grade being 1 in 75, as against 1 in 100 on the Quambatook to Ultima railway; and to sleepers costing more, because they would have to be brought from more distant forests.

Cost of proposed railway.

2. An extension of the Swan Hill railway into the country north-east of Lake Tyrrell was not advocated, because that line would for the first 15 or 20 miles have to compete against steamers trading on the River Murray.

Extension of Swan Hill line.

3. The country from Ultima to Waitchie—which is 12 miles north-west of Ultima—is all settled, and about half the mallee scrub has been removed and the land brought under cultivation. To the north-east of Waitchie the country is sparsely populated. The land in the parishes of Wewin, Polisbet, and Turoar, being mostly of inferior quality, consisting largely of poor plains and salty areas, is still in the possession of the Crown. To the north-west of Waitchie are two salt lakes known as Lake Timboram and Lake Wahpool. Beyond those depressions is the Eureka and Day Trap country lying to the north-east and north of Lake Tyrrell. It consists of very good mallee land, and when cleared of the mallee-scrub would be suitable for wheat-growing, if the rainfall could be depended upon. Further north is the parish of Manangatang, which also contains some first-class mallee country. Mr. J. M. Reed, Surveyor-General, informed the Committee that there was an area of about 200,000 acres around Eureka, Day Trap, and Manangatang suitable for settlement, if railway communication and a supply of water were provided.

Description of country.

4. Nearly all the parish of Eureka, which contains about 45,000 acres, has been taken up by settlers under either perpetual lease or agricultural allotment licence. About one-third of that area has been classified by the Lands Department as either first or second class land, and the remaining two-thirds have been placed in the third class. Although the land has been held by settlers for four years very few have resided on their allotments or done anything to improve the holdings. The absence of any signs of settlement on so many of the allotments was attributed to the successive years of drought and to the distance which wheat grown in the Eureka country would have to be carted to a railway station. It was stated that the charge of 2s. 3d. per bag to deliver the wheat at the nearest railway station was an effectual bar to the development of the district. If, it was said, the cartage could be reduced to 1s. a bag by the extension of the railway, wheat-growing would become profitable, and those holding the land would be encouraged to clear and cultivate it.

Settlement and production at Eureka.

Day Trap
country.

5. So far the Day Trap country has not been made available for settlement. It is in the hands of the Mallee Agricultural and Pastoral Company, Limited, which also holds the lease of the Tyrrell Downs country, which was settled and brought under cultivation, under the shares system, a few years ago. Recently the company asked the Honorable the Minister of Lands to vary the conditions of its lease of the Day Trap country. Under the existing agreement it had the right to clear the land of the mallee scrub and take five successive crops off it. As experience has shown it is necessary, if mallee land is to be successfully cropped, that it must be fallowed every alternate year, the company sought to have its tenure over the cleared land extended from five to ten years, so that it might take five crops off the land during the latter period. The Honorable the Minister, however, after consulting his colleagues, decided not to grant the application for an extension of the lease. Mr. E. H. Lascelles, managing director of the company, informed the Committee that if the lease were extended from five to even eight years, so as to allow after the first two croppings a season's fallowing between each of the next three crops, he would do his utmost to have the Day Trap country cleared and sown down with wheat, provided Parliament agreed to extend the Ultima railway to Eureka.

Extension to
Waitchie.

6. It was urged that if the railway were extended as far as Waitchie, a distance of 12 miles from Ultima, it would not only serve the settlers near Waitchie, but would also meet the requirements of the cultivators around Tyrrell Downs homestead, who would then be within 10 miles of a railway station. That short extension, however, would not result in the development of the Eureka and Day Trap country, because the settlers would still have from 15 to 20 miles to cart their wheat, and the cost of cartage would make wheat-growing by them unprofitable.

Revenue and
expenses.

7. The Committee obtained from the Commissioners of Railways estimates of the cost of extending the Ultima railway to Waitchie; the annual interest charges and working and maintenance expenses; and also an estimate of the traffic that would be carried over that extension. The estimates were as follow:—

Twelve miles of construction from Ultima to Waitchie	£	28,200
at £2,350 per mile
Four per cent. interest on £28,200	...	1,128
Working and maintenance expenses	...	911
Total annual expenses	...	2,039
Annual revenue, based on local rates, between Ultima and Waitchie	...	527
Annual loss	...	£1,512

8. Similar estimates were obtained from the Commissioners of Railways for a line 20 miles in length, terminating between the north end of Lake Timboram and the south-east corner of the parish of Eureka. They were as follow:—

Twenty miles of construction from Ultima towards Eureka at	£	47,000
£2,350 per mile
Four per cent. interest on £47,000	...	1,880
Working and maintenance expenses	...	1,487
Total annual expenses	...	3,367
Annual revenue, based on local rates between Ultima and terminus of the line	...	594
Annual loss	...	£2,773

Population.

9. Mr. C. Macaw, traffic officer of the Railways Department, who visited the district to report on the probable traffic, stated that the population to be served by the proposed extension of the Ultima railway totalled 565.

Rainfall.

10. In estimating the traffic no allowance was made for the additional areas which would, in all probability, be put under wheat if the railway were extended to Eureka. The experience in other parts of the Mallee country has been that when railway facilities were provided there was a large increase in the

acreage cultivated, and if good seasons prevailed the lines in a few years became paying ones. But, in the opinion of the Committee, it is extremely doubtful if a similar experience would follow the extension of the Ultima railway into this arid district. Since 1896 the average rainfall at Tyrrell Downs and Eureka has been under 10 inches per annum. That is much less than the average in other parts of the Mallee country which have been devoted to wheat-growing. Mr. E. H. Lascelles, when giving evidence before the Committee, said—"The further north you go, the worse the rainfall. You may lay that down as a matter of certainty. I would far rather have the Hopetoun country than Tyrrell Downs, because you get a better rainfall at Hopetoun. The further west and south you are the better the rainfall. It is good country around Eureka, but it is a dry belt." That statement was supported by information supplied to the Committee by the Water Supply Department, showing the average rainfall over the Mallee country.

11. Mr. Howard, manager at Tyrrell Downs, writing to the Mallee Agricultural and Pastoral Company towards the close of 1904, said—"There seems to be nothing but loss in wheat here; I consider this season decides that question very clearly. I am now in a position to estimate how much wheat our 6,000 acres will yield, and I will be very near the mark when I state 600 bags. It is a most cruelly disappointing result, and I am afraid you will be just about full of trying much more agriculture on Tyrrell." Having regard to the numerous bad seasons which the district seeking railway communication has experienced, the Committee is not prepared to indorse the view expressed by Mr. Lascelles that, because good autumn rains have recently fallen at Tyrrell Downs and Eureka, the long period of drought is at an end, and that a cycle of good seasons is about to be entered upon. Prospect of better seasons.

12. If the railway were extended into the district, interest on the capital invested, amounting to £1,100 or £1,800 per annum, according to the length of line constructed, would have to be paid in bad seasons as well as in good ones, so that even if the extension were not worked in a year of drought the loss arising from the interest charge alone would represent a large sum. Interest charge.

13. As the greater part of the 200,000 acres of good Mallee land around Eureka, Day Trap, and Manangatang suitable for settlement is below the level of the River Murray, at Tooleybuc, Mr. Reed, Surveyor-General, was asked if that land could not be irrigated from the Murray. He informed the Committee that the matter had been investigated by a Board consisting of himself, Mr. Catani, Engineer for Roads and Bridges, Public Works Department; and Mr. Kenyon, one of the engineers of the Water Supply Department, and they had come to the conclusion that a few limited areas only could be irrigated. "The greater part of the district is," he said, "too undulating for irrigation. The country does not lend itself to irrigation. You would want an enormous volume of water to flood the country. It is proved now that the volume of water is not sufficient. There are so many demands on the River Murray to meet other schemes that the available water would not render irrigation possible." Irrigation.

14. The Board, however, believed that the survey now being made would show that the whole of the 200,000 acres could be supplied with water for stock and domestic purposes from the Murray, at Tooleybuc. It was stated by settlers at Eureka that there were good catchment areas throughout that district, and that if tanks were excavated on suitable sites the rainfall could be stored for domestic and stock use. In view, however, of the limited rainfall in that portion of the Mallee, the Committee considers it would be unwise on the part of the Government to encourage settlement there until an assured supply of water from the Murray was obtainable. Domestic and stock supply.

15. The Committee cannot at present recommend the extension of the Ultima railway to either Waitchie or Eureka. It considers that the construction of the line should be deferred until the prospect of better seasons in that part of the Mallee is more encouraging, and, also, until the survey of the Tooleybuc scheme has been completed and the Government knows what quantity of water will be available from the Murray to supply the northern Mallee. Recommendation

16. Evidence was taken by the Committee concerning the question of "loading" the lands which would be enhanced in value by the extension of the Ultima railway. Mr. Kernot, Acting Engineer-in-Chief of the Victorian Railways, stated that if the lands which would be served by the extension were loaded to the extent of 3s. 8d. per acre, sufficient money would be contributed to pay the cost of building the line. Some of the settlers said they would rather submit to the "loading" than go without railway facilities, but others objected to the proposal. The latter, while admitting that the extension of the Ultima line would increase the value of their holdings, stated that, considering the risk of bad seasons, the distance from the sea-board, and the amount they had to pay each year in rent to the Lands Department for land that was of little value without fertilisers, they thought they were sufficiently taxed without being further burdened by having their land "loaded" for railway purposes.

17. An opinion obtained from the Crown Solicitor showed that the Land Act allows Mallee lands to be "loaded" for railway and water supply purposes, but the "loading" for both purposes has to be done simultaneously. There must be one such operation only. If the railway were constructed first, and the land "loaded" for that work, it could not be subsequently "loaded" again for water supply purposes. That opinion strengthens the view taken by the Committee that the questions of railway construction in the Eureka district and of bringing a supply of water into that area from the River Murray, at Tooleybuc, should be determined at the same time.

GEO. GRAHAM,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 20th June, 1905.