WOOL RESEARCH BILL, 1957.

Comments By: Malcolm Fraser, Member for Wannon.

In the last week of the Session, a small Bill called the Wool Research Bill, 1957, was passed through both Houses of the Federal Parliament. It had the unanimous approval of every Member of both Houses.

The main purpose of the Bill was to make sure that there would be sufficient funds available for research in the future. Some people may think that with the export income from wool running into about £500 million this year, research is unnecessary, but nothing is further from the truth.

Wool provides more than 50% of all our export earnings. Upon it depends the prosperity not only of wool-growers but of the many hundreds and thousands of people who provide goods and services of one kind or another. In addition to this, it is our wool income that makes it possible for us to buy the overseas goods that this country needs for its continued development and progress.

I agree that, if possible, we should make ourselves less dependent upon wool by increasing our exports of other commodities — of secondary industry goods and of metals in particular. But that does not mean that we should neglect wool and that we should not make sure that we can get all the income that is possible for the wool that we sell to the markets of the world. To do this, we need to increase our production and to improve our quality — the quality not only of wool as it is grown on the sheep but the finished quality of the woven fabric.

In the past we have at times been frightened of the threat of synthetics and as the price of wool rises, so the possibility of competition from synthetics becomes more real because the price margin in favour of wool is lowered.

There are some things that synthetic cloths and fabrics can do that woollen ones can't at the present time. Some synthetic cloths can be made creaseless or very nearly so but this advantage has not yet been found in any woollen material.
People interested in synthetics are spending £20 million a year on research and they are constantly improving their product.

It is vital for everyone concerned in the wool industry and the Australian Government to take the matter of research most seriously so that we may constantly and forever stave off the challenge of synthetic fibres.

This new Bill will increase the funds available for research. The Government's contribution will rise from 2/- to 4/- per bale and the wool-growers' contribution will remain at 2/- a bale. Based on current levels of production this should give the Wool Research Fund about £1.7 million each year and this is slightly in excess of the current level of expenditure on research.

In addition to this 6/- that is going to be spent on research, the 4/- growers' contribution for wool promotion remains. We will now have the two activities running side by side—wool research and wool promotion—both are of course vitally important and are complementary to each other.

A new Wool Research Committee has been set up comprising nine members appointed by the Minister for Primary Industry. On that Committee two members will be nominated by the Australian Wool Growers' Council; two will be nominated by the Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation; the Chairman of the Australian Wool Bureau will be a member and there will be a representative from the Associated Woollen and Worsted Manufacturers of Australia in addition to one from the Universities which engage in research relating to wool, and finally, there will be a representative from the C.S.I.R.O.

This Bill will make sure that research in the woollen industry will be maintained at an adequate and high level to ensure a continuing flow of funds to such bodies as the C.S.I.R.O. who will carry out research work.

Australia still rides on the sheep's back and looks like doing so as far as we can see into the future. It is up to us to make sure that our technical knowledge of these matters remains superior to that of any other country. Only if this is done will wool continue to be of great and lasting benefit to Australia.

28/5/1957.