GOVERNMENT MEMBERS' COMMITTEES

One of the first things members began in the new Parliament was to reform various Government Members’ Committees. Two of the most important of these are the Wool and the Food and Agriculture Committees.

During the next few months it is the intention of the Wool Committee to hold several meetings and to invite representatives of different sections of the Industry to discuss current problems relating to the Industry. The Chairman of the Wool Bureau, Mr. Gunn, has already attended one of the meetings. The Committee will also be asking representatives of manufacturers and of our Research Organisation so that members may have a comprehensive knowledge of current problems relating to promotion and research. When it has carried out its investigation the Committee will hope to place a report before the Government Parties which, we hope, will bring to light some way in which the Government can more actively help in wool promotion. Furthermore, marketing problems will not be ignored.

The Committee will enquire into the possible alteration to the method of selling wool in addition to examining the auction system to see if improvements cannot be made in it.

However, there is no doubt that over the last few years the promotional side of the wool industry has been the weakest from every point of view, and it is the Committee’s hope that it may be able to make some contribution to the Wool Bureau’s efforts to bring energy and initiative into this sphere.

The other Committee whose activities have a direct relationship to Wannon is the Food and Agricultural Committee. This Committee examines any agricultural problems not covered by the Wool Committee. In actual fact probably 80% of its meetings and discussions have concerned the dairy industry. During the last Parliament dairy industry representatives were invited to Canberra to put their points of view on what has been called the crises in the dairy industry. Very largely as a result of these meetings the Government initiated a new guarantee for
dairy farmers and, at the same time, in his policy speech the Prime Minister promised a thorough and expert review of all dairying problems; this review will be of the utmost importance to the industry.

The membership of the Committee will be announced soon, and whilst I have no inside information on this matter I hope the dairy industry investigation committee, which the Prime Minister promised in his policy speech, will be kept small. Its membership should not be drawn from the industry itself. It would be very difficult to get adequate representation of all sections and groups of the industry and, at the same time, avoid permanent differences of opinion in the body of the committee. Perhaps I can make it clearer in this way — the Committee may well recommend that the Government should take some steps to convert a dairy industry in a certain area to some other form of production, this could be especially true in the high cost areas of Queensland. This kind of conversion could well be to the benefit of the farming section in the dairy industry. On the other hand, if there were a butter factory in this particular area the butter factory representatives may prefer to have an extension of dairying so that the output through the factory would be increased.

This shows one way in which there could be a conflict of opinion between people in the industry. If the committee is composed of people who have no direct and personal interest in the industry but are capable of taking an overall view of the problems, then agreement on the committee itself would be more easily obtained. I would hope that all sections of the industry, whether they be the dairy farmers or representatives of butter factories or the consumers, will be given an opportunity to give evidence before the committee when it is finally established.
The Government Members Food & Agricultural Committee will be watching the work of the special committee promised by the Prime Minister most closely. Its findings will be of the utmost importance to the Dairy Industry as a whole. The hope is that the committee will recommend a course of action which, over a period of time, will bring the dairy industry out of its present difficulties.

The Government Members have already invited various people to Canberra to discuss general dairying problems. These discussions will be an extension of those that were held last year, and will enable members to review or criticise sensibly the findings that will be made by the special Dairy Industry Committee.

Quite apart from the fact that these Government Members Committees serve a useful function by enabling Members to educate themselves and bring some thought to bear on Government policies, they also serve as a very useful liaison between private industry of different kinds and their Parliamentary representatives. This is an important function of these Committees which should not be forgotten.
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