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WIND erosion has removed about two feet of soil from this paddock. Stumps, once cleared to ground level, are now exposed.

LAND CLEARING CONTROL IN THE EASTERN WHEATBELT

By G. H. BURVILL, Commissioner of Soil Conservation

DURING the last ten years, very large areas of new land have been cleared in the agricultural areas of Western Australia. The latest statistics show that the cleared land now totals 20,000,000 acres compared with 14,000,000 ten years ago.

A large part of this extra land is in the wheatbelt, and the Eastern Wheatbelt has contributed an important share. For the past five years land clearing in the Eastern and North-Eastern Wheatbelt and stock districts has been subject to control by regulations under the Soil Conservation Act. Nearly 1,600 applications for clearing permits have been received from farmers in these areas during the five year period and, in almost every case, permits have been issued, subject to certain small restrictions. The total area of land covered by these applications and permits is 909,000 acres. You can see that this has been a period of great development, comparable with the development of the wheatbelt in the period after World War I, and prior to the 1930 depression.

In that earlier period of wheatbelt development very large areas of forest country, as well as some mallee and scrub land, were cleared. In the last ten years, most of the new clearing has been on scrub and mallee country where the soils are usually of light texture. Sandy-surfaced soils are common in our scrub plain and mallee areas, though many of them have clay in the subsoil. There is quite a common feeling that the extensive clearing of sandy-surfaced soils may result in widespread wind erosion and drift of this soil. There have been many cases in these eastern districts where such soils have drifted on to roads and fences and rendered them useless, especially when dry seasons and low prices caused farms to be abandoned. Soil erosion must certainly be avoided, and I am sure it can be if farmers adopt suitable farming practices.

In order that farmers who might be clearing land would be subject to some control, and could be given specific advice and warning about possible dangers, it
was decided to make regulations to control land clearing. For this purpose, two soil conservation districts were declared under the Soil Conservation Act. One of these, the North-Eastern Soil Conservation District, is made up of the Road Board Areas of Koorda, Mount Marshall, Mukinbudin, Westonia and Yilgarn, while the Eastern Soil Conservation District embraces Wyalkatchem, Kununoppin-Trayning, Nungarin, Kellerberrin, Merredin, Bruce Rock, Narembeen, Kondinin and the eastern part of the Kulin Road Board district. If your farm is within these areas, land clearing is not allowed without a permit.

The land clearing regulations which apply in these districts, and to these districts only, require that a landholder give three month's notice in writing to the Commissioner of Soil Conservation of his wish to clear land. Clearing shall not be done without permit from the Commissioner of Soil Conservation. Arrangements are made to inspect the area to examine the general nature of the land proposed for clearing, and to discuss with the farmer the need for any strips, or other areas, to be left uncleared as a safeguard in case soil drift commences, and becomes a hazard to roads or fences. The regulations do not aim to stop or greatly restrict clearing, except where it is believed that clearing could cause a difficult soil erosion problem.

It is important to realise that control of clearing cannot be expected by itself to prevent soil erosion. The way in which land is farmed or grazed over the broad acres mainly determines whether soil erosion by wind or water will occur. If soil conservation is to be effective, full attention to all aspects of farming practices on any area of land is necessary. Over-grazing and over-cultivation are two major causes of soil erosion, especially of
light lands. When light lands are first cleared, not more than two grain crops should be grown before the area is turned over to grazing for a period of years. Volunteer pastures of capeweed and brome grass usually develop on the lighter soils, but consideration should be given to the introduction of Wimmera ryegrass and barrel clover or subterranean clover, where the rainfall is suitable. Work going on at the Merredin Research Station on light land, similar to much of the scrub country in the eastern wheatbelt, indicates that there are possibilities for the development of improved pastures on light land, even where the average annual rainfall is only 12in.

The advantages of liberal dressings of superphosphate on new land are appreciated by many farmers. The need for the trace elements, copper and zinc, has been widely demonstrated also. If suitable pastures can be established for use in a mixed farming programme, these light lands will play a very big part in extending safe and profitable agriculture in the eastern wheatbelt. There is no need to expose them to serious erosion hazards if grazing management and cultivation are done with consideration of the liability of these lands to erosion. Bare fallowing should not be used on soils which show any tendency to drift over the summer period. The implements used and the speed of working should be such that fallowed land is not left too flat and smooth. Rather should the fallow be rough and trashy.

Treat your cleared land well, and if you plan to clear more, apply well in advance for a permit to the Commissioner of Soil Conservation, Department of Agriculture, Perth. Application forms are available from your district Road Board Office.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST FOOTROT

The campaign against footrot inaugurated in this State underwent a severe testing period during 1955, owing to the abnormal seasonal conditions which had been extremely favourable to the spread of the disease.

It was pleasing to report that the majority of the properties which have been freed from infection have remained footrot free.

Department of Agriculture Stock Inspectors have regularly attended sheep markets in the metropolitan area, and in country districts, farm to farm surveys are being conducted and flocks in which eradication measures were practised during the previous summer have been examined for release from quarantine. Further eradication programmes have been arranged for the summer and autumn of 1956.

During October and November, 27 properties were released from quarantine, but 26 new quarantines were imposed. A large proportion of the new infections stemmed from districts previously considered to be "safe." These were districts in which no out-breaks had occurred in previous years, and in which the presence of the infection was unsuspected. It can only be assumed that footrot carriers were present in the flocks from which the sheep originated and that the infection flared up and spread rapidly when they were transferred to areas more favourable to the footrot organisms.

These outbreaks emphasise the insidious nature of the disease and the difficulties associated with its eradication. The strict application of control measures over a period of several years will probably be necessary before infections of this nature can be eliminated.

The new quarantine yards at Midland Junction became available on November 7, and have since been used for sheep forwarded for slaughter under Quarantine Permit. These yards are equipped to receive sheep forwarded both by rail and road transport.

Sheep known to be infected with footrot have thus been excluded from the main saleyards from which store sheep are purchased by graziers and this move should assist in limiting the spread of infection.

POULTRY DISEASE CONTROL

The demand for infectious laryngo-tracheitis vaccine in this State has shown a marked decline, and only 1,600 birds in three flocks were immunised during the current season.

As in previous years freeze-dried I.L.T. vaccine was supplied by the Department of Agriculture at cost and vaccination was supervised by officers of the Poultry Branch.

Satisfactory "takes" were obtained in all flocks and it may be therefore accepted that effective immunity has been established.

A proportion of the known infected flocks have been disposed of, and in others the disease has disappeared and may have been eliminated as the result of repeated annual immunisation. No out-breaks have been reported during the current season.
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