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1920.

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

SELECT COMMITTEE

ON

SEA CARRIAGE.

THIRD INTERIM REPORT

(DATED 1ST OCTOBER, 1920).

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THIRD INTERIM REPORT.

The Select Committee appointed on the 15th April, 1920, to inquire into and report upon—

- (1) The organization and control of Inter-State shipping;
- (2) Oversea shipping in relation to Australian products for oversea markets and imports generally;
- (3) Methods to improve mail cargo and passenger service with oversea countries,

have the honour to submit their Third Interim Report as follows:

As a Bill to amend the *Quarantine Act 1908-1915* is now before the House of Representatives, your Select Committee deem it expedient to place before the House the result of their investigations into the matter of Quarantine so far as it affects shipping within the waters of the Commonwealth.

During the time the Inter-State vessels were under requisition to the Commonwealth Government, they were mulcted in enormous expenses owing to the Quarantine Regulations imposed in consequence of the influenza epidemic. Evidence has been submitted to your Select Committee showing that on a single trip between Melbourne and Tasmania one vessel alone was called upon to pay £1,162 for quarantine expenses, in addition to which she was detained at Portsea for seventeen days, during which time her expenditure, including crew's wages, maintenance of passengers and crew, insurance, &c., was going on, and no revenue whatever was being earned. Numerous other instances have been submitted to your Committee where vessels have suffered detention with very heavy quarantine expenditure.

Mr. W. E. Moxon, whilst giving evidence on behalf of the Australasian Steam-ship Owners' Federation, stated that private enterprise could not afford to run ships under these conditions, and if there were a recrudescence of infectious disease and similar restrictions were imposed, the whole of the Inter-State passenger services would immediately cease. The effect of such a calamity from the point of view of isolated portions of the Commonwealth is apparent. In addition to the stoppage of all passenger traffic to Tasmania, the far north of West Australia and North Queensland, the mail and cargo steam-ship services throughout the Commonwealth would also be seriously affected with consequent stagnation of trade.

Under section 59 of the Quarantine Act of 1908, the expenses of quarantine are payable by the ship, and any contract made with passengers whereby the responsibility is placed upon the latter is null and void. This section of the Act, in the opinion of your Select Committee, places a very heavy burden upon the steam-ship companies, particularly when compared with the practice obtaining on the Railways. In both cases the passengers are Australian citizens originating and completing their journeys in Australia, yet, in the case of the Railways, trains are allowed to proceed from State to State with little or no detention or expense, the passengers being compelled to pay their own expenses during detention in quarantine, whilst in the case of ships the owners have to pay the quarantine expenses, and bear the loss occasioned by the detention to the vessels.

As all restrictions which are imposed by the Quarantine Department upon ships are intended for the protection and benefit of the Commonwealth as a whole, your Select Committee recommend that provision be made in the Quarantine Act empowering the Government, in the event of an outbreak of infectious epidemic, to make fair and reasonable financial arrangements with the shipping companies, by which the stoppage of Inter-State sea carriage shall be obviated.

R. W. FOSTER,
for the Chairman.

1st October, 1920.