



A MODEST MEMBER

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Why the wheat industry leaders are no pin-up boys

I'm getting rather tired of writing about wheat and I also seem to be making myself unpopular in my electorate, and this is distressing. However, Eccles says that there is still worse to come.

I started things up again with him by asking what he thought about the two pools scheme for wheat. He said that he thought it was just silly.

Evidently the idea is that quota wheat would go into one pool to be sold as flour wheat and the non-quota wheat would go into the second pool to be sold cheaply as fodder wheat — either in Australia or overseas.

This has the immediate attraction that all non-quota wheat would be received by the Wheat Board so that farmer would not have to worry about storing it.

But what happens to it then? Evidently it is to be “de-natured” by spraying it with a dye — black, I suppose, to fit it for the black market.

But if it is to be sold, it must be either in Australia or overseas. If it is to be sold cheaply in Australia then it would compete with the other fodder grains, such as oats, barley or grain sorghum and so lower the price of these.

Or if it is to be sold overseas it must weaken the International Grains Arrangement which, goodness knows, is under enough stress at the moment. Eccles says that the whole idea is the product of people who don't know what they are talking about. But then of course he is rather bitter about these things.

For once, I was able to agree wholeheartedly with Eccles as I know that the leaders of the wheat industry agree with this. For once, I felt, I was on safe ground. I went on to point out to Eccles what wonderful people were the leaders of our wheat industry — how statesmanlike and responsible they were and how I relied on their advice and guidance.

This seemed to irritate the man. He pointed out that just about a year ago, the leaders of the wheat industry made two fundamental mistakes when designing the new wheat scheme.

First they pressed for (and got) the cost of production price of \$1.72 a bushel and secondly, they demanded a first advance of \$1.10.

According to Eccles the home consumption price was far too high and was an inbuilt inducement for black marketing. And it also keeps the bread price unnecessarily high and so effects the cost of living.

And the knowledge that the first advance (last year) was to be \$1.10 was the green light to a lot of people to prepare land for wheat, because a lot of people would continue to grow wheat if they got a first advance of \$1.10 and no advance thereafter.

I can't help having a lot of sympathy with the leaders of the industry. After all, they are in a similar position to me.

If they do things they know are right, but which are unpopular, they will lose their positions in their organisations and their successors may do rather worse.

This is the way I rationalise things when I don't want to make myself unpopular, so I understand how they feel.

But this is not an excuse acceptable to old Eccles. He is all for everyone being as unpopular as possible. It makes you worry about regarding the judgement of industry leaders as edicts from high, as I have always done.

It is a disturbing thought that they may be seeking popularity, the same as I.

I must admit that if you listen to what the wheat growers are saying about the size of their quotas, which were, after all, fixed by the industry, you must admit the exercise so far hasn't exactly made these industry leaders the pin-up boys of the wheat growers.

I am sorry for them but very glad they had the lousy job and not me!