

# Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly on the Mental Deficiency Bill, Western Australia

17 September 1929 – 16 October 1929

## Details

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The 'Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly on the Mental Deficiency Bill' was set up on 19 September 1929 to investigate a bill that was firmly based on eugenics principles, seeking to protect the community from the disease of 'mental deficiency'. Key issues for the Select Committee were segregation and sterilisation. The Bill lapsed due to lack of support.

The progress of the 'Mental Deficiency Bill' was described in the index to the *Parliamentary Debates* in 1929:

*A Bill to make provision for the care of feeble minded and other mentally defective persons and for other purposes [was introduced] by the Minister for Public Health (Hon. S.W. Munsie), 14th August, 1929. Referred to a select committee and reprinted in accordance with the committee's recommendations. Received in the Council, 30th October. In the Committee stage the Chairman was moved out of the Chair and the Bill was lost. At a later stage a motion was moved by the Honorary Minister (Hon. W.H. Kitson) to revive the committee stage, but it was defeated.*

In concluding his second reading, which explained the Bill to the Legislative Assembly before it was referred to the select committee, the Minister for Public Health reflected that the WA parliament spent a lot of time dealing with 'protecting or improving the breed of animals' and should give as much attention to the people in the State:

*J.H.Curle, in his book 'To-day and To-morrow' says –*

*Australians still have it in their power by excluding colour, limiting entry to the best whites, and preventing the unfit from breeding, to become and remain about the finest white strain in the world.*

*I agree absolutely with that sentiment...(Hansard 17 September 1929, p.747)*

Arthur Lovekin MLC, former owner of *The Daily News*, was greatly in favour of sterilisation. Edmund Gray MLC raised the issue of children with intellectual disabilities. If parents couldn't manage these children at home, they had to be sent to Claremont Hospital for the Insane. This was not desirable, but Gray was concerned that if Western Australia invested in a purpose-built institution for these children people in other States without such places would dump their 'mental defectives' in WA. This would, he felt, place an undesirable economic burden on

WA taxpayers.

The Bill lapsed on the basis of lack of support for sterilisation and a lack of desire to invest money in facilities and treatments for 'mental deficients'. Nonetheless, the debates that surrounded the Bill give great insight into the beliefs and practices to which Western Australians with intellectual disability were subjected in the first half of the twentieth century.

## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Related Glossary Terms

- [Eugenics \(1890s - 1950s\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Claremont Mental Hospital \(1903 - 1972\)](#)

### Resources

- *Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly on the Mental Deficiency Bill*, Minutes and votes and proceedings of the Parliament ... with papers presented to both Houses., 1929
- [Bill - Mental Deficiency. Second Reading \[Hansard p739-747\]](#), Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 17 September 1929
- [Bill - Mental Deficiency. Second Reading \[Hansard p823-826\]](#), Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 19 September 1929
- [Bill - Mental Deficiency. In Committee \[Hansard p1080-1082\]](#), Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 22 October 1929
- [Bill - Mental Deficiency. In Committee \[Hansard p1119-1128\]](#), Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 23 October 1929
- [Bill - Mental Deficiency. Third Reading \[Hansard p1242\]](#), Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 30 October 1929

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