

EDITORIAL:**THE POLL**

WHATEVER else may have occurred during 1959, no one will deny that the most important event for the South Australian Ornithological Association was the controversy that came to be called simply "the poll." Feelings ran high, but fortunately the friction generated not only heat but also enough light for the appraisal of opposing viewpoints and an assessment of the esteem in which they are held by the membership as a whole.

While a detailed blow-by-blow account of even an important controversy has little to commend it, some record should be made of an affair which was weighty enough to engage members' attention for a whole year if its lessons are not to be quickly forgotten.

The trouble began in March, 1959, with the moving without notice of a series of motions designed to strengthen the Animals and Birds Protection Act, particularly those sections dealing with the trapping of birds, by tightening the conditions for the granting of permits, increasing penalties for breaches, and the addition of a Fifth Schedule.

These proposals could only be regarded as an expression of major policy, and the minority who opposed them at the meeting when they were introduced could reasonably claim that insufficient time had been given for considering them. The majority of those present thought otherwise; the motions were passed, and the Committee of Management was instructed to act on them.

At the next meeting, in April, the tables were turned; the minority, having now become the majority, rescinded the resolutions out of hand. A demand for a poll of the whole membership was refused by the President in the chair; however, the Committee of Management, on the grounds of the illegality of this refusal, decided to take no action on the rescission resolution until a poll of the whole membership had been held.

Several months elapsed while the terms of the poll were drafted. Meanwhile, the background changed, and the original alternatives were lost sight of, the consequent irregularities causing further discussion until they were eliminated. At last a satisfactory formula was drawn up and sent out to all members, who were asked to vote by post in favour of one of the following choices:—

- (A) The original March motions as they stand in Motions A to E inclusive (for details see Newsletter, June, 1959).
- (B) That a letter be sent to the Minister of Agriculture to this effect:
 - (i) This Association notes with satisfaction the new attitude of the Fisheries and Game Department toward wild life preservation.
 - (ii) Therefore this Association feels no further need at this time to press for the addition of a Fifth Schedule to the Animals and Birds Protection Act 1919-58.
 - (iii) This Association recommends that the Minister consider issuing no permits for the taking of the birds in the appended list.
 - (iv) This Association wishes to express the view that the powers under the present Act are adequate if enforced.

Bird List

Mallee Fowl
Brown Quail
King Quail
Painted Quail
Redbreasted Quail
Plain Wanderer
Cape Barren Goose
Little Lorikeet
Glossy Black Cockatoo
Gang Gang Cockatoo
Orange-breasted Parrot
Swift Parrot
Ground Parrot
Night Parrot
Pink Cockatoo
Regent Parrot
Blue Bonnet
Beautiful Firetail
Diamond Firetail
Red-browed Finch
Apostle Bird
Spotted Bower Bird
Western Bower Bird
White-winged Chough
Spotted Quail-thrush

- (C) A rejection of both the above choices (A) and (B).

The result of the voting was declared on March 7, 1960, as follows:—

In favour of (A)	1
In favour of (B)	60
In favour of (C)	41

A letter was therefore sent to the Minister of Agriculture by the President, Mr. G. B. Ragless, and the following reply was received:

Mr. G. B. Ragless,
President,
South Australian Ornithological Association.

Dear Sir,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 11th March and regret delay in replying.

The results of your Association's vote have been closely examined, and I wish to thank you for those comments.

Although a certain number of permits may be allowed in 1960/61 for birds appearing on the list that you sent, these are to be very greatly restricted and the use of the permit will be closely checked. The matter will also be under constant review.

I wish to thank the members of your Association for their keen interest in the whole question.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) David Brookman,
Minister of Agriculture.
28th April, 1960.

During the progress of the controversy, it became evident that the original motions, as proposed in March, 1959, and finally presented to the whole membership as (A), although entirely consistent with the aims of the Association, were not acceptable to the Government; therefore those who favoured them were urged to transfer their support to the more practical (B). A substantial—but as the vote showed—minority body of opinion opposed both (A) and (B) on the grounds that they would be ineffective, and that the correct approach to conservation is adequate preservation of habitat and that the energies of the Association should in future be directed along those lines.

Although the result of the poll showed that the advocates of stricter measures of protection are supported by a clear majority of members, the voting in favour of (C) was heavy enough to indicate that many members prefer a different approach. In so far as the approach is consistent with the declared aims of the Association, an effort should now

be made to reconcile the two points of view. Each has much to recommend it; and to accept a chronic state of party strife, when the aim of both sides is conservation, can do good to neither, nor to the Association.

The controversy made it plain that the rules needed altering to prevent contradictory motions being brought forward without notice from meeting to meeting. It also became evident that the rules should be amended to provide a code relating to the holding of polls without recourse to the rules of common law. A motion for changing the rules was therefore proposed, and both amendments were agreed to by the requisite majority, and the rules as amended are published elsewhere in this issue. The effect of the amendments is that no matter of major policy may any longer be decided by a snap vote, but must be submitted to the whole membership for consideration. Power of decision will be shared equally between those who are able to attend meetings and those who are not. It is to be hoped that the latter, newly enfranchised as it were, will accept the responsibility that goes with their power by using their vote on all issues that arise. In that way, the internecine struggles that convulsed the Association in 1959 will be avoided. For no pressure group, whatever its power, can withstand the vote of the whole membership.

—B. C. Newland.