

## BEEF FROM THE NORTH.

From the earliest days one of Australia's chief problems has been the conquest of distance. Tonight I want to say a few words about new developments in our far northern cattle territories that will greatly increase the quantity and quality of our marketable beef.

The present method of getting cattle to the markets from Western Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Kimberleys has followed a set pattern for many years. Cattle are bred in the more remote areas to be driven to fattening properties nearer meat works or railheads when they are three to five years old. Many stations that can fatten their own stock have to buy refuelling depots nearer the markets. Land used for this purpose does little more than put back a little of the beef that has been walked off an animal in what is often a hundred days trek. The system is wasteful of land and of beef. Many animals that would be readily marketable by modern transport never reach market because they never became heavier enough to stand the wastage en route. In one year a station in the Kimberleys shot five thousand scrub cattle, a great many of which would have been marketable had it been possible to get them to meat works without walking one to two hundred pounds of beef off their backs. The land now used for fattening or refuelling cattle from the inland will be able to be used for production on its own account when the problem of getting beef out of the inland is solved.

Since the war two separate schemes have been begun to overcome this problem of wastage. Air Beef has been operating in the Kimberleys since 1949 from an inland abattoirs at Glenroy which is supplied by cattle from neighbouring properties which cover an area of over 8,500 square miles. Air Beef has advantages that are not found by other methods of transport. Wastage from "bruising", a major factor in rail and road transport is eliminated thus increasing the percentage of first class beef. No refuelling or resting stations are required. Cattle can be marketed three to four years old instead of from five to seven. The air transport scheme is quicker and easier to get into operation and requires a smaller capital outlay than any road or rail transport system.



Six years ago the North Australian Pastoral Co. began trucking cattle by Leyland transport and trailer the one hundred and twenty miles from Marion Downs - a fattening property in Western Queensland, to the railhead at Dajarra. Last winter seven trucks and six trailers were in operation. The complete unit made two trips a week and was kept in operation by a team of engineers stationed at Marion Downs. Each truck and trailer carried twenty three bullocks which were rested a few days at the railhead to recover from road transport bruising. At the rate of one thousand a month it was hoped to get off between six and seven thousand head. The first three thousand averaged over nine hundred pounds killed weight. The average age was from four to six years.

Besides breeding its own cattle Marion Downs acts as a fattening property for <sup>stockmen</sup> ~~properties~~ in the Northern Territory. The chief merit of this system of road transport is that roughly one hundred pounds of beef are saved on every animal and that is a lot of beef when six or seven thousand head are being handled.

The roads in this part of the world are almost non-existent and if road trains were to supply the whole need of our northern cattle areas vast sums, that could only be financed by governments, would have to be spent in development and maintenance. On the other hand the capital necessary to extend the air beef scheme could be raised by private enterprise and could be implemented much more quickly, in five instead of about twenty years. An air transport scheme would, however, be incapable of evacuating cattle from drought-stricken areas - a thing that road transport could readily do.

Whether one system or the other or a combination of the two eventually becomes the accepted means of moving beef from the north is a question that the next decade will solve but we may be sure that as the problem of distance is solved for the north so too will the quality and quantity of our beef production rise.