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Rob Katter MP

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Wednesday, January 27 2016

RE: Submission to Queensland Racing Integrity Commission Bill

OVERVIEW

The importance of the Queensland Racing industry is highlighted by its enormous contribution, both as an employer of tens of thousands of people, and its benefit to the state's economy. From jockeys, trainers, owners, breeders, veterinarians, veterinary products suppliers, suppliers and manufacturers of animal racing tack, horse fodder producers, manufactured animal feed suppliers, transport operators, yearling sales agents, wagering organisations, as well as the many who supply goods and services to the regular and carnival race meetings – the industry is an integral employer of Queenslanders. Those employed within the industry – both directly and indirectly - rely on a strong industry for their livelihoods.

In country regions, the racing industry makes an even more profound impact with its social and cultural contribution. There is also a significant level of tourism and benefit to the economy derived from major tourism events, such as the Brisbane Racing Winter Carnival, Magic Millions race-day and yearling sales, the Birdsville Cup and the Cairns Amateurs. The flow-on benefits also reach to a wide range of industries such as media and advertising, airlines, hotels, taxis, restaurants and caterers.

If we can keep the industry healthy, it will also sustain the employment and economic benefit derived from the industry.

On the racetrack, it's a similar scenario with TAB turnover making a direct impact on the Queensland economy. Improved TAB turnover can only be sustained by a healthy, thriving industry with more horses racing and larger race fields at meetings.

Stimulation is needed to restore confidence in the racing industry, and curb the recent downturn which has left Queensland racing well behind Victoria and New South Wales.

Strong leadership and planning is required to keep the industry competitive with other states.

OPPOSITION TO THE QUEENSLAND RACING INTEGRITY COMMISSION BILL

I do not support the implementation of the Queensland Racing Integrity Bill. I believe there has been a knee-jerk reaction to the live-baiting scandal by the State Government, to the detriment of the thoroughbred and harness racing industries. Disappointingly, Queensland was the only state where all racing codes were penalised in the live-baiting debacle, which was a national issue.

The recommendations from the McSparran Inquiry were focussed on the greyhound industry, meaning the thoroughbred and harness industries should be exempt from change. The Terms of reference within the McSparran Inquiry recommendations are unequivocal and, as described in items 75 and 76, are limited to the greyhound industry. The Executive Summary must reflect the focus on the greyhound industry, and be similarly limited to that sector of the racing industry. Without justification nor evidence, the recommendations have extended into the harness and racing industries.

I also strongly oppose the proposed structure of an All Codes Board, and believe it is ludicrous to suggest that only three of the seven members need experience in the racing industry. This will likely result in mismanagement due to a lack of industry knowledge. The racing industry is complex and unique, and as such, requires the leadership of those with intricate knowledge. It is most crucial for the board to have racing industry knowledge, as well as a strong business and marketing mind.

I strongly oppose the isolation of racing participants from any influence or control of the industry they sustain. It is unacceptable for control bodies to oversee the industry without expertise or experience in the field. It is timely to remind the committee of a corporation previously controlling the industry when Bob Bentley was the controlling shareholder in Racing Queensland Ltd in the period 2007-2012. It was during this period that 10 people were referred to the ICAC.

I also believe that it is unacceptable for the racing industry to suffer as a result of the touted \$28million cost of the Integrity Commission. This is a commission that nobody in the industry believes is necessary, yet industry participants will be forced to pay the price for it with cuts to prizemoney and race meetings to compensate for it. In any other industry, there is supervision for compliance with the Acts and Regulations under which they operate - the racing industry should not be treated differently and I believe the costs for compliance should not be passed on to the industry.

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COUNTRY RACING

There is also significant concern around the impracticable proposal to standardise racing. For example, to have a remote racecourse in the North West subject to the same compliance standards as Eagle Farm is completely unacceptable and unworkable. We are concerned this will provide Queensland Racing with the ability to make country race clubs unsustainable. Many factors need to be taken into account, such as different size tracks, attendance rates, TAB/Non-TAB meetings and other circumstances that make each race meeting unique. It would almost certainly spell the end of racing in many country areas. There needs to be sufficient consideration given to the range of circumstances in which racing is successful conducted. Most notably, it needs to be recognised that the industry in Queensland stretches far wider than metropolitan racing at TAB racetracks. Country racing needs protection and certainty for the future and the proposal of “one standard fits all” would almost certainly signal the end of racing in rural and remote areas.

There must be greater certainty given to the future of country racing, particularly strategic race clubs. Whilst we are thankful that once-a-year non-TAB country race meetings have been given a lifeline for the short-term in 2016, there needs to be more security for the future of strategic race clubs such as Mount Isa, Cloncurry and Richmond. Any future minimisation in subsidies and prizemoney to rural and remote race clubs would mean revenue is stripped from local communities and livelihoods lost.

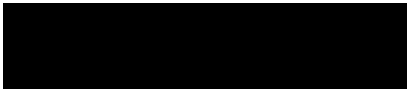
A priority for the future of country racing must include the direct cultural impact and social importance of racing in rural and remote areas. Country race meetings are the lifeblood of regional communities and the importance of their future must be considered when planning the future of the industry. The benefits of country race meetings flow on through the whole community. As a primary employer in Queensland, country racing facilitates the employment of numerous roles varying from horse trainers, jockeys, breeders, owners, vets, transport, fodder suppliers, farriers, among many others. The future for country racing must support the livelihoods and employment associated with the industry.

The reform process must consider alternative funding measures, such as consideration to the utilisation of the Gambling Community Fund, or redirecting funding from the Department of Communities, in line with recognising the social impact from country race meetings.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this submission, I would also like to state my support of the Queensland Racing Unity Group (QRUG) in gathering industry support against this Bill. Importantly, the opposition from QRUG has banded industry participants together to fight for a sustainable and successful future for racing in Queensland. We support the very comprehensive and detailed submission made by QRUG. The racing industry requires strong leadership and management, and we trust that the State Government recognises the wide-spread industry opposition to the Bill. There is sufficient concern regarding the matters raised within this submission that we recommend that the Bill is withdrawn.

Sincerely



Rob Katter

Member for Mount Isa