



Speech by

Mr G. HEALY

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Hansard 25 August 1998

TOOWOOMBA GREYHOUND RACING CLUB

Mr HEALY (Toowoomba North—NPA) (7.25 p.m.): This morning during question time, the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing made certain statements in relation to the greyhound racing industry in Toowoomba. I feel that it is appropriate to set the record straight on a number of matters. Yesterday, the Minister also issued a media release titled "Gibbs guarantees Toowoomba Greyhound Club survival". In the release and this morning the Minister announced new race dates for greyhound racing in south-east Queensland, the result of which is that the Toowoomba Greyhound Racing Club will revert from its current Friday twilight timeslot to Wednesday night.

According to the media release—

"The recently resigned Greyhound Racing Authority Board appointed by the Borbidge Government had originally planned to close the Toowoomba club."

That statement is simply untrue. The Minister claims to have the proof, and I know what he refers to: it is the letter from the previous chairman of the board that he tabled today. There is no formal recommendation from the board to close the club. That letter merely reflected the KPMG strategic plan recommendation, which states—

"This configuration set out above in table form reflects the fact that in conjunction with the KPMG Strategic Planning exercise recently completed as presented to you, the Board is seeking to maximise the return to stakeholders of the race programming calendar.

The Industry cannot avoid the need for a decision."

I suggest that the Minister has a look at the minutes of the special board meeting of 11 August, which contains a clear recommendation that Friday twilight greyhound racing at Toowoomba continue. I am advised that the board at no stage made any formal recommendation to close the Toowoomba club.

This morning, the Minister also seemed to suggest that when he was the Racing Minister the member for Crows Nest knew that the board was trying to close Toowoomba and that he did everything that he could to stop it. I have spoken to the member for Crows Nest, who informs me that at no stage did the board discuss with him the possible closure of the Toowoomba club. Why would the board want to close the club when it had just advanced to its account the sum of \$27,000 to keep it going?

Following the change of Government, as a responsible body should, on 24 July 1998 the board raised the Toowoomba club's continuing liquidity problems with the current Minister in that letter from the then board chairman requesting a meeting with him to discuss the issue. There was no response to that request. Again, I reiterate that I am advised that there was no formal recommendation by the board to close the club.

At a meeting at the Toowoomba showground on 18 August, attended by some 70 licensees and interested people involved in the Toowoomba greyhound racing industry, it was unanimously resolved to reject any suggestion of racing on a Wednesday night. It was also resolved that a deputation be elected from the meeting to meet with the Minister as a matter of urgency to explain the reasons why, and there are some very good reasons why.

On 18 August, I wrote to the Minister seeking his consideration of a meeting with that deputation. To date, no reply has been forthcoming. I reject totally the statement in both the media release and in the Minister's contribution this morning that both my colleague the member for

Toowoomba South and I ignored Toowoomba greyhound racing while the board conspired to close the club. The GRA did not conspire to close the club.

The facts are that the recommendation to close the club was contained in the KPMG strategic plan, as was a recommendation that the Beenleigh club race at the Parklands complex on the Gold Coast and the Beenleigh complex close. Of course, that all coincided with Sky Channel's decision to allocate another four meetings that it intended to cover. I am advised that the board rejected the KPMG recommendations and sought further discussions with the Minister to canvass a range of issues in relation to future race dates for clubs in south-east Queensland.

The really frustrating thing for the people involved in the industry of Toowoomba is, firstly, a story that appeared on 6 August in the Toowoomba Chronicle, which states—

"A spokesman for Racing Minister Bob Gibbs has squashed rumours regarding the Toowoomba Greyhound Racing Club losing its Friday night time slot."

That relates to its twilight meeting. The report continues by quoting the spokesman stating—

" 'There are definitely no plans in place to close the Toowoomba Greyhound Club down or move it to a Wednesday time slot,' the spokesperson said.

'We are here to preserve race clubs, not close them down and we are hoping SKY Channel will soon be broadcasting out of Toowoomba on Friday night.' "

How ironic that the new dates announced by the Minister this morning coincide almost exactly with those contained in a letter to the authority's CEO dated 22 July from a meeting of secretary managers of Beenleigh, Ipswich, Albion Park and Parklands clubs, which I table. In other words, these clubs have decided what is best for Toowoomba. Again, I urge the Minister, as a matter of urgency, to consider seeing the deputation from Toowoomba and at least hear its case.
