



Speech by

Mrs J. GAMIN

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Hansard 22 October 1998

PRIVATISATION OF TAB

Mrs GAMIN (Burleigh—NPA) (6.39 p.m.): This Parliament has a responsibility to do all it can to protect Queensland's very proud racing industry. That is why I support tonight's original motion, as moved by the member for Toowoomba North, calling on this Parliament to give its endorsement to the privatisation of the TAB. The Opposition has no problem with the amendment moved by the member for Tablelands, but we cannot support the amendment moved by the member for Gladstone, as supported by Government members.

The issues are quite clear and we do not need further procrastination. Tonight's original motion presented a unique opportunity, because it would have allowed the Premier and the Minister for Racing to stand by their word and support the State coalition. The carriage of the original motion could have united both sides of politics for a common good.

The racing industry contributes \$298m to Queensland's gross domestic product—that is based on 1996-97 figures—yet it is estimated that the industry contributes a further \$700m in flow-on terms. In addition, the racing industry accounts for the creation of 14,200 full-time or equivalent jobs in Queensland—6,800 created directly and 7,400 created from the industry's flow-on effect.

There is little doubt that the racing industry is an enormous economic and employment contributor to our State but, most importantly for all Queenslanders, the industry promotes an enormous amount of recreational opportunities. It is estimated that racing attracts an audience second only to Australian Rules. On the Gold Coast, where I come from, the racing industry is second only to the tourism industry in size. That is why it is important for this Parliament to stand by the job, revenue and recreational contribution the racing industry provides. That is why it is important that we support the privatisation of the TAB.

This is not a political agenda; it is an industry agenda. The privatisation of the TAB offers the industry autonomy and responsibility. Even more importantly, it offers the industry security. The Racing Minister himself has admitted in the media that, unless we proceed down the track of privatisation, Queensland simply will not be able to stay on an equal footing with New South Wales and Victoria. The TAB's Chief Executive, Dick McIlwain, also has been quoted in the press as saying that jobs will be lost to the industry unless we proceed down this track. As the former Minister for Racing, Russell Cooper, so correctly pointed out, the privatisation of the TAB would allow the racing industry to be in the driver's seat. It would allow the industry to determine its own future.

Under the former Borbidge Government, privatisation was well on track, with Stage 2 of the plan scheduled to be implemented in the second half of this year. Since the minority Beattie Government was elected, all we have seen is procrastination. Week after week it has put this decision on hold. Now it has decided to leave it to ALP conference delegates to decide. That decision has been viewed with dismay in the racing industry as the greatest insult.

Effectively, the minority Beattie Government has said to the industry, "It's not your call. What would you know? We will leave it to our conference to decide—a conference that knows nothing whatsoever about your industry or its future." By contrast, the State coalition has always shown a strong commitment to racing. That is why, when the industry itself said that it wanted a privatised TAB, we said we would back it and we would make it work. The former Minister embarked on extensive consultation

with representatives from the three racing codes—the thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing industries.

After Cabinet gave approval for the first steps towards privatisation in October 1997, the then Minister put in place a five-year interim privatisation deal which protected developmental race clubs. Part of that deal was to ensure that developmental clubs would have at least \$5.8m in financial support—equal to the current level of funding. This funding commitment gave clubs and communities confidence that their local race clubs would be safeguarded through the transition program. This was a particularly important issue in rural and regional areas, which account for up to 40% of the revenue generated by the racing industry.

The plan put in place by the former coalition Government ensured the maintenance of a strong and viable wagering and racing industry which maximised returns to the taxpayer. The program put in place provided certainty for potential investors, TAB employees and stakeholders in the community and in the racing industry. If the coalition motion were to be passed tonight—as it should be because the Premier and the Minister have already given their public support—then honourable members could be assured that the racing industry is ready.

Time expired.
