



Speech by

Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 22 October 1998

PRIVATISATION OF TAB

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (6.17 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"Delete all words after 'That', and insert the following—

'given the importance of the racing industry of Queensland and particularly the implications of any change to the TAB to the racing industry, that the issue of privatisation requires a full and informed debate as part of a formal legislative process.'."

My main reason for moving the amendment is that this is a very important issue. I do not dispute that there has already been a great deal of debate, discussion and research into the privatisation or non-privatisation of the TAB. However, because of its importance to the industry, this is not a decision that we should be making in a one-hour debate at 6 o'clock on this sitting night, when no preparatory work has really been done. My last briefing on TAB Queensland was probably 12 months ago with the previous Minister. We had a well-informed discussion and he certainly had every suit from around the place in the room. They told me about their aspirations for the TAB. However, some concerns remain.

I have a personal opposition to the privatisation of public assets. The racing community in my own electorate has a split view on the privatisation of the TAB. In the last little while I certainly have not discussed their current views with them, because I was not expecting this debate to come up. I certainly have concerns about the effect of privatisation on country racing, especially the smaller racing clubs. We may see the demise of some of the country clubs. The Calliope club has about four race meetings a year, which are terrific. Gladstone City has a very active racing community. How will it affect them? I have received anecdotal advice that they will be better off, but I have yet to be convinced that that is the case. I have yet to hear the views of my own electorate on the issue.

From briefings and information that I have received in the past two years it would appear that the TAB is in financial trouble, and that its returns will deteriorate over time and will continue to deteriorate. However, in the last financial report for the TAB, its returns had increased. I still have not received a logical reply or response as to why that is occurring. If in the last 12 months there has been such a huge amount of pressure on TAB from southern betting, why is TAB Queensland still returning a healthy profit?

I have read the comments of the Premier, the Honourable Mr Beattie, regarding the TAB sale. I have also had a number of meetings with Janice Mayes from the union, who holds grave concerns about the employment stability for workers in the TAB. Again, this is an issue that we keep talking about. We keep talking about the need to retain jobs for people, and yet historically privatisation processes almost guarantee that jobs will disappear. We have to look very carefully at any guarantees with respect to the long-term work force in the TAB.

I notice that the Premier's position has changed on the privatisation of the TAB. Even if he is not going to address us on that subject tonight, he will in the very near future. I am not saying that this matter has to be put aside for months and months to come, but I reiterate that I do not believe it is an issue in respect of which we have had adequate time to be informed after its being raised this morning without notice for debate this afternoon. There are a lot of new members who may or may not have been briefed on the matter. I believe it is important that in the process of making a final decision on this matter we are fully informed, that we have a full and open debate, and that all of the information relating to the matter is available to all members. I commend the amendment to the House.