



Speech by

Mr G. HEALY

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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PERFORMANCE OF MINISTERS

Mr HEALY (Toowoomba North—NPA) (6.19 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Burnett, and in doing so I wish to highlight the disastrous performance of the Beattie Labor Government and the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing in the handling of the TAB privatisation fiasco.

As many members would realise, we have just begun the most important and exciting period for thoroughbred racing in this State—the beginning of the annual Queensland Winter Racing Carnival. This is a time when the racing industry comes alive in this State and when the nation's best horseflesh gathers for some of the most prestigious and lucrative prizes on the Australian racing calendar.

At the start of the carnival last Saturday, at the Courier-Mail Classic, the talk at racetracks around south-east Queensland was not about the future champions of the turf; the talk was about the botch that this Government has been making of TAB privatisation.

Before I go on, I want to make a point about a letter to the editor written by the Premier which appeared in today's Courier-Mail. The letter was in response to a Courier-Mail editorial of 24 April. The Premier is trying to justify the Government's position on TAB privatisation. Part of the letter reads—

"It is not my TAB. It is owned by the people of Queensland, who have not extracted one cent of profit from it in its many years of operation."

That statement clearly shows just how out of touch this Government is if it takes that attitude. The TAB is not owned by the taxpayers of this State—it never ever was. It is owned by the racing industry of this State.

Let us go back to a bit of history. In 1961, the then Deputy Premier of the day, Tom Hiley, announced a plan to assist the racing industry by diverting a proportion of the money invested in betting for the use of the race clubs. The Government had a minor role. No public funds were to be used—and they were not—and the establishment costs were sought from private sector financing. The racing industry did all that. Since that time it has enjoyed a net profit from the TAB and the money goes back to the racing industry.

The TAB is industry owned. It is not like the electricity industry, or Telstra, or Queensland Rail. It is owned by the racing industry. It is only right that the industry group that should be given the most consideration in any negotiations over a future privatised TAB is the racing industry, and in particular the main player, the thoroughbred racing industry.

But what has happened in the last couple of months? The main player, the thoroughbred racing industry, through its governing body, the Queensland Principal Club—the democratically elected representative body of the thoroughbred racing industry set up by Minister Gibbs—dares to suggest that the TAB privatisation package offered by this Government is not going to secure its future for at least the next 15 years. It dares to disagree with a Government, a Premier and a Racing Minister who will not even acknowledge that the racing industry deserves every consideration in a TAB privatisation deal.

Remember the words of the Racing Minister last year: "The industry is too greedy." We certainly remember the words of the Premier a few weeks ago when he said—

"If we can't get agreement with the Queensland Principal Club on this issue we will simply deal directly with the individual clubs."

I am led to believe that this arrogant exercise has already begun. The bottom line is that if the Minister is not going to attempt to broker a deal with the QPC—if he is not going to continue to negotiate—

A Government Member: You're better on radio.

Mr HEALY: I was great on radio. If the Minister is not prepared to negotiate, and if he is going to deal with the clubs on the most important issue to affect the racing industry in 150 years, what does he need the QPC for?

This morning I asked a question of the Minister. It was a very simple question. It was not all that hard. I simply asked whether the Minister was planning to abolish the QPC—yes or no. He refused to answer the question.

What is the industry saying today? Let us take one example. I refer to an article in the Sunshine Coast Daily. The article reads in part—

"The Sunshine Coast racing community is baffled by the stalemate between the State Government and Queensland Principal Club over the TAB's proposed privatisation.

Owners and trainers are frustrated by the high cost of starting horses at Queensland meetings, with many opting to send runners to more lucrative southern events."

Minister Gibbs says that the bottom line has been reached and there is nothing more that the Government can give. I say this to the Minister: he should start living up to his reputation as a head kicker. Go back and talk to Treasury. I am sure that there are people in Treasury who either do not care or do not have a clue about the importance of the racing industry. I know that the Minister cares——

Time expired.
