



Speech by

**HARRY BLACK**

**MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY**

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Hansard 27 August 1999

**TAB QUEENSLAND LIMITED PRIVATISATION BILL**

**Mr BLACK** (Whitsunday—ONP) (3.22 p.m.): Privatisation is an issue generally in conflict with One Nation policy. Privatisation is at the heart of economic rationalist thinking, where the emphasis is on the almighty dollar and there is scant regard for the people involved. Economic rationalism dictates that profit comes before people. It is no coincidence that the current unemployment epidemic and much of the associated human tragedy in our society coincides with the rise of economic rationalism. Already, high regional and rural unemployment levels are exacerbated every time a Government entity is privatised or part of its operations are hived off and ultimately rationalised.

Rural and regional Queensland is particularly vulnerable in any program of rationalisation due to the fact that it comprises many small communities. The volume of business transacted at any one centre is, in most cases, naturally lower than in the more populated cities. The bean counters seize upon such statistics to justify the withdrawal of those services that have a lower total usage. I ask: isn't a Queenslander in outback Queensland just as important as a Queenslander in Queen Street? We are realistic enough to understand that there will always be an imbalance between facilities and services. It is just not possible to provide big city facilities throughout the State and I can only hope that the tracks in Bowen and Mackay can keep going and prosper. They are wonderful facilities for the community. Facilities such as the local TAB agency form a vital part of many small regional communities and any pressure to rationalise some of them out of existence would be an enormous blow to the social network of those communities.

We also have major concerns in relation to the jobs of the TAB staff. In many cases, the loss of even one or two jobs in a small community has a shattering effect on the whole community. If there is any population drift away from small towns, the flow-on effect can cause further rationalisation of other services.

Although we strongly oppose the principles of privatisation, our research and our many discussions involving all interest groups has convinced us that the ramifications for the TAB, for its staff, and for the people it serves would be worse if the current situation were to continue. We have been convinced that the best outcome for all of those involved in the TAB itself as well as in the racing industry and in the community served by the TAB can be achieved only by privatising the operation. It is apparent that the Queensland TAB would struggle to compete against the aggressive marketing of privatised interstate TABs. There is also the threat of advanced technology and interactive electronics that will impact on staffing levels. Unfortunately, it appears inevitable that jobs will go, but at least this Bill addresses some of the problems in relation to these jobs.

We also approve of some measures instituted in this Bill that will ease the transition from Government to corporate ownership. I would like to commend the architects of this Bill for including the provision to retain headquarters in Queensland, the stabilising effect of the limitations on the cornerstone investor, the 10% maximum limitation on any one shareholder and the requirements for probity checks on any shareholder exceeding 5%. I am also pleased to see staff receiving preference in the share allocations.

Again, I confirm my opposition to the principles of privatisation, but acknowledge the exceptional circumstances in the case before us. I also acknowledge the attempt to frame this Bill in such a way as to minimise some of the negative impacts of privatisation. Accordingly, I will be supporting this Bill.