



Speech by

**JEFF KNUTH**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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Hansard 26 October 1999

### **GREYHOUND RACING**

**Mr KNUTH** (Burdekin—IND) (7.15 p.m.): I rise to bring to the attention of the House the deplorable actions of a racing authority the responsibility of the Honourable Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing. I refer to moves by the Queensland Greyhound Racing Authority to rob north Queensland greyhound clubs of close to \$400,000 in order to fill the coffers of inefficient southern clubs. The deluded rationale provided by the GRA's hierarchy is that the money is needed to bolster the prize money offered to owners and trainers for TAB race meetings in the south-east.

The GRA wants to cut the Lower Burdekin Greyhound Racing Club's funding from about \$128,000 a year to just \$53,000 a year. This will essentially force the cutting of the number of race meetings held each year from 22 to 12. What will it take to make this Government realise that country areas need our support, not a wave of funding cuts to intensify the north versus south funding imbalance? Even the City of Townsville is having its funding cut by the GRA from \$235,000 to \$190,000 a year. This translates to an annual drop in race meetings from 46 to 40.

When questioned about why Mackay would keep its present number of race meetings, the GRA bosses, who are answerable to our very own Racing Minister, said that, unlike Townsville, Mackay is a progressive city. I wonder whether the Premier would clarify whether the Government considers Townsville to be not a progressive city? I constantly see Ministers and their sidekicks applauding the development of the Townsville Strand, the establishment of the Sun Metals zinc refinery and the plans for a naval base at the city, but apparently Townsville is not a progressive city and needs its greyhound racing funding cut. Perhaps the Racing Minister could explain why the position of the GRA does not match the rhetoric of his own Government?

Far from being a Townsville wind-back, I totally support Townsville in its attempts to gain TAB status. Townsville is the second-largest city in Queensland, yet southern clubs including Toowoomba, Beenleigh, Ipswich and the Gold Coast have gained this status ahead of Townsville, confirming that the south-east corner is the only area under consideration when it comes to decision making.

Should Townsville ever succeed in becoming a TAB track, its prize money would need to be increased to guarantee increases in district greyhound populations. The granting of TAB status to Townsville would in turn lead to the necessity for the Lower Burdekin club in my electorate to remain open. Furthermore, it would be essential for the Lower Burdekin club to race fortnightly to act as a feeder track to help Townsville cope with the additional dogs which would come with TAB status and additional prize money.

When the Lower Burdekin Greyhound Racing Club budgeted for its operations for the year ending on 30 June 2000, it was assured that funding would remain at \$128,000. After operating for four months under this assumption, the club finds that this may not be the case. That is extremely disappointing.

The GRA's plan to slash north Queensland's racing funding is in direct opposition to requests by north Queensland's representative on the QRA board, Mr Warwick Richter. In his report of 8 April 1998 on a racing industry strategic plan, Mr Richter recommended "a minimum of 20 per cent increase in prize money for country clubs to overcome the obscene gap between city and country clubs". Can the Government explain why it is allowing moves that go directly against this advice? I believe that stealing money from north Queensland tracks to boost their southern counterparts is nothing more than a bid to glorify the privatisation of the TAB.

Some will argue that these changes are being made in the name of efficiency. For those who take such a view, I give an example of the differences in efficiency between the southern and northern clubs. Townsville holds races 50 times a year—about once a week—and spends less than \$100,000 annually on wages. We should all ask the Racing Minister why Albion Park, which has races twice a week, spends \$525,000 on wages each year. Where is the accountability? In comparison with Townsville, Albion Park should be spending no more than \$200,000. In the Racing Minister's own electorate of Bundamba, which has 100 races a year, the club's wages bill is a whopping \$415,000. Any of the northern country clubs could run these clubs efficiently—at half their current wages bill.

I am fed up with the south wasting its funding at the expense of the services and facilities of north Queensland. Why has this been allowed to happen, one may ask. The Greyhound Racing Control Board and various other boards have a long record of appointments on a "jobs for the boys" system, rather than qualifications. The current board is headed by a former police officer who resigned because he was unable to put forward a business plan for the industry. His deputy was the president of a prominent country club from 1995 to 1998. When this deputy first took on the role of club president, the club was solvent. When he left—without attending the club's annual general meeting or furnishing a president's report—the club's liabilities exceeded its assets.

Time expired.

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