



Speech by

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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GREYHOUND RACING INDUSTRY

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (11.08 p.m.): It is more than disappointing that tonight I speak in defence of yet another group of people who appear to have been targeted by some in the Government for disadvantage. Over a long period, many of us here have expressed our concerns about the potential disadvantage to the rural and regional racing industry with the privatisation of the TAB. We have argued that, when the almighty dollar becomes a focal point for decision making, the populated areas take over and rural Queensland gets nothing. Perhaps to be kind, Cairns for tourism, Townsville for population and Rockhampton for politics may get a guernsey. However, the rest of the State outside the south-east corner gets zero.

However, tonight I am not speaking of the turf racing industry, which is very important in my electorate and is worthy of support. I refer to the greyhound racing industry that operates throughout the regional areas of the State. Initially, I was approached by a family from my electorate. That family is very concerned about the direction that greyhound racing is being forced to take. I would have to say that the family members are staunch supporters of the Labor Party. They are hardworking people who are focused and very warm. Harold, the husband, has not enjoyed the best of health during the last few years. He and his wife are very close. Together they have put a great deal of energy and money into their greyhounds. Those are not just dogs; they are an important part of their daily lives.

Neither Gladstone nor Calliope has a greyhound racing track. Supporters and participants travel to Rockhampton to participate in the greyhound racing program at the Rockhampton Jockey Club. The RJC charges a 52-week fee for half that number of meetings. Charges for the sound system remain at the full program level, and still the greyhound racing fraternity works. The greyhound racing program has been almost halved, yet the enthusiasm and support for greyhound racing continues.

Now the Greyhound Racing Authority tells them to prove their viability while giving them absolutely no help. Prize money has been cut, and still the supporters struggle on. To have a TAB supported race meeting, the local association has been told that it must have a full racing card. The Rockhampton club has one dog short of the required 80 entries when one includes the reserve entrants in each of the races currently run. Still no TAB racing is allowed. What do these people have to do? Like turf racing, it is not just about the work that is done on the day of the races. Owners, trainers, fodder suppliers and an entire range of people are involved in the industry.

The ultimate indignity came in September/October when the Queensland Greyhound Association announced that \$400,000 was to be taken—I would say "stolen"—from regional greyhound racing and reallocated to the south-east corner. When this was announced, the racing fraternity in my area erupted. I was inundated—as were, I am sure, many other members of the Parliament—by constituents who were angry at this action.

I spoke with a representative from the Greyhound Racing Association who said, "The regional areas will benefit once the south-east corner gets back on its feet." That is bull! There will not be a regional racing industry then. The south-east corner will eat the country areas alive if they think it will ensure that the south-east corner will survive. People in our electorates who are fully supportive of the greyhound racing industry are not being considered in this decision. I spoke to the Premier's office about this theft. To date, I have not heard back. I can only hope that they are busy kicking butts and that that is why they have not had time to call back.

I implore the Minister for Racing not to do this to regional and rural racing. I ask the Government not to be so selfish in its attitudes. Regional greyhound racing deserves more than what it has been handed. I call on the Minister to reverse the decision to bleed the dollars from regional Queensland. Supporters of this industry deserve better. Regional greyhound racing is an important part of our community and people involved in regional greyhound racing contribute greatly to the local economy. I call on the Government to support regional greyhound racing on this issue.
