



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

Hansard 3 March 1999

MINISTER FOR RACING

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (6.21 p.m.): I second the motion. As a previous Racing Minister who came through the two-stage process with the racing industry between 1996 to 1998, members can certainly imagine my disappointment and the disappointment of many people involved in the racing industry. Unfortunately, and sadly, this Government has mishandled the racing industry. A few Government members support privatisation. They wanted it, and they have said so. However, I am afraid that the majority ruled, and that meant the prospective demise of the Queensland racing industry and all that goes with it. That is tragic. For this Government to put its own ideology in front of an entire industry, and all of those jobs and the increased value that it was going to mean to the racing industry—and most Government members know that—is a disaster. People in the racing industry know that, and they will vent their spleen when the time comes.

Members can imagine my disappointment when I read in the newspapers and hear from people just how concerned the industry is that it is not being consulted. I am sure that they can imagine my disappointment and that of most people to hear the Minister, time and time again, putting hurdles in the way of TAB privatisation. He is putting hurdles in the way of protecting jobs in the Queensland racing industry.

When I was the Minister for Racing, I listened to people in the racing industry. It was their decision; it certainly was not ours. I said to all three codes of the entire racing industry, "It will happen if you can get your act together." It was a massive job. Uniting intra-code as well as inter-code was extraordinary. Ian Brusasco and others such as Kevin Seymour in the industry actually started to weld it together and got a unified, uniform decision from the racing industry. As the then Racing Minister I said, "It's not my decision, it's yours. You go away and sort yourselves out. Have all your meetings and come back with a common purpose", and they did. It was a miracle that they did that. I was proud of the industry—and I believe that most people were—that it could make that decision to proceed with privatisation.

It then fell to the coalition Government and the industry to work together to make sure that everything went smoothly, and we did. It fell to us to make sure that we protected the developmental race clubs, and we imposed conditions to do just that. It fell to us to make sure that we protected the thousands of Queensland jobs from the prying hands of the then to be privatised TABs in New South Wales and Victoria. It fell to us to make sure that we had all the processes properly in place to ensure a smooth and successful transition.

After the State election, it fell to the Beattie Labor Government to take the last simple steps—and that is all it was—to see all that hard work come to fruition. But they failed, and they let down the industry. When confronted with that final decision, both the Premier and the Minister for Racing blinked. They allowed all of that work to go down the drain. They allowed the Queensland racing industry and its over 14,000 jobs to hang in jeopardy.

On 14 October 1997, the former Borbidge Government made a decision to proceed with the privatisation of the TAB. At the same time, Cabinet approved the two-stage package to ensure that the industry was properly restructured in time for privatisation to proceed. We put that package in place only after having worked hand in glove with the racing industry. As a result of that package, it was estimated that the level of TAB-sourced funding would jump from \$91m to \$109m, representing a jump of \$18m in one year.

As part of that package, we decided to change wagering taxation by implementing a staged reduction of the tax rate from 34% to 25%. This would have made the Queensland TAB more than competitive against the 28.2% tax level in New South Wales and Victoria. In other words, the Queensland TAB was not only going to make up ground against our interstate competitors, we were going to take the lead.

As I have said, during the time that we were in office, both the Racing Minister and the Premier, Mr Beattie, supported privatisation. That is the message that they have sent out to the racing industry. But unfortunately, as was mentioned before, people like Janice Mayes and others won, and they won against the odds as far as the racing industry is concerned, because the racing industry is feeling the effects of this and will continue to suffer unless the Government proceeds with privatisation. I honestly do not know why the Government is not proceeding with it. I know that it would like to. I just wish that it would on behalf of the racing industry. Then we would have an industry that not only was united but was successful and flourishing and could compete with Victoria, New South Wales and other States. I believe that every member of this House knows that.

Time expired.
