



Speech by
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RACING AND BETTING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (3.37 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Racing and Betting Amendment Bill. I say at the outset what a great industry the racing industry is for Queensland. It is one of Queensland's greatest industries, in fact. When I speak of racing I refer to not only the thoroughbred racing industry but also the harness and greyhound racing industries. The racing industry employs some thousands of people.

As some members have already indicated, in this Bill we are not just talking about one facet of the industry but also looking at veterinarians, at the saddlery, at the growing of grain and various other food crops for the horses and greyhounds and so on, and at the building structure. All of this has to be considered, along with the trainers, strappers, jockeys and the myriad other people who go to make up the racing industry right around this State.

The racing industry is one of the great employers in this State. Wherever we travel in this State, whether it be in Brisbane or to very small country towns, we see that the racing industry has a very significant role to play. It is easy for us to forget the significance of the racing industry. People complain about such-and-such closing and moving away from their towns. If the racing industry were not functioning in a number of these small country towns things would be a lot bleaker than they are.

The legislation refers to bookmakers and a number of other aspects of the Racing and Betting Act. I agree with the previous speaker: it would be a sad day to see bookmakers disappear from our tracks, although they are under a little bit of what I call unfair competition these days, because everything seems to be slanted towards the TAB. The Minister might be helping out with a few crumbs in some respects, but at the end of the day it will not represent the major assistance that the bookmakers need to survive in the longer term. I hope that they do survive, because bookmakers bring colour, interest and vibrancy to our racetracks. I have been to the tracks in New Zealand and other places that do not have bookmakers, and they are terribly dead and colourless. What people do between the races, goodness knows. I think people tend to gravitate towards the bar in greater numbers than they otherwise would, because there is not much to do.

Bookmakers are a breed of their own. They are part of the folklore of the racing industry. They bring so much to the racetrack and provide that competition which I believe is so important for punters, whether it be the small punter or the big punter, because the TAB offers only certain aspects of betting. It does not offer the full range of betting that Queenslanders want and certainly have had in the past. It is sad to see so many bookmakers disappearing from our tracks.

Some of the previous speakers have mentioned the importance of a number of tracks around Brisbane, including the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Clifford Park at Toowoomba and the Bundamba track. They are probably the four major near-Brisbane tracks. They are very important, and we must make sure that they continue to function. It is unfortunate that Toowoomba has experienced a setback, as outlined by the member for Toowoomba South a few moments ago. Toowoomba, after all, is the racing capital of provincial Queensland. If one discounted the two metropolitan tracks, Toowoomba would be the racing capital of Queensland. The breeding industry is centred on Toowoomba. The things that the breeding industry brings with it—the grain crops, the food crops and

so forth—are so important. Toowoomba is a very important centre and has been the home of some of the greatest horses not only in Queensland but also in Australia.

I want to touch upon the importance of the two Brisbane tracks, a subject which has not been referred to thus far. The last time I checked, two-thirds of the TAB revenue came from the two Brisbane racetracks, the Queensland Turf Club track at Eagle Farm and the Brisbane Turf Club track at Doomben. Both tracks have been turned out during the Winter Racing Carnival in superb condition and in a very colourful way indeed. Having said that, can I say that the committees at both tracks are in need of some infrastructure funding support. Both tracks require some dollars to be pumped into them.

Over the years people predicted that the privatisation of the TAB would bring humungous dollars to the racetracks. That did not turn out to be the case, because too much money was taken out of the TAB in order to get the float going and there was not enough in the TAB at the end of day for the racing industry. So the Queensland industry in the longer term will not benefit from the TAB in the way that the New South Wales and Victorian industries are benefiting now and will continue to benefit in the future. Therefore, the Government will be required to put extra funds back into racing, particularly the two metropolitan tracks, not only by way of infrastructure but also by way of prize money. I say that because I noticed the last time I did the figures the average prize money was about \$23,000 or \$24,000 for a race in Brisbane, whereas in Sydney or Melbourne it is something in the order of \$45,000. I know that since I have taken those figures out the latter figure has increased significantly. It is probably up to \$50,000 now.

There needs to be more prize money injected into the system to keep owners in our industry. I mention owners first because there is no racing without them. Then there are the trainers, the jockeys, the strappers and so on—the industry as a whole. We need to get that prize money in there, because everyone realises that very few horses that are purchased at sales actually get onto the track to race; even fewer run a place, let alone win, particularly on the metropolitan tracks in Brisbane; and very, very few of those ever make the large sums of money that we read about and hear about so often—the million-dollar races, the half-million-dollar races or the Melbourne Cup.

To assist the people in the industry, we need to provide greater support. That will come back to the Government—there is no way around it—because the industry is not getting the funds coming through. It does not matter what I say today; it is happening, and it will happen at an even greater rate in the future unless further assistance is provided to the racing industry in terms of prize money. It is a fact of life. If we do not provide further assistance, the Sydney and Melbourne tracks will get further in front with bigger prize money—not just for the big race days but also for the average race days—compared with Brisbane and the average money on offer here.

Speaking of prize money, I congratulate the Brisbane Turf Club on its Super Saturday day, with the Doomben 10,000 and the Doomben Cup. I understand that was extremely successful for the club. I congratulate also the Queensland Turf Club, which has its wonderful Queen's Birthday weekend of racing on the Saturday involving more than \$1.5m worth of prize money. The richest race day in the State is held on that Saturday with the Stradbroke, the QTC Derby and various other races, and, of course, the Brisbane Cup on the Monday. They are two wonderful racing events in this State, and both clubs are to be congratulated on them.

Returning to the need to provide assistance—I am not talking necessarily about the big-dollar races. The clubs are securing the sponsorship for those. As tough as it is in the corporate arena, they are securing those sponsorships, and they are to be congratulated on that. They are lifting the prize money on offer. Sure, we do not match the prize money on offer in Sydney or Melbourne, and we will not do so, but the point I make is that we have to get close to Sydney and Melbourne with the average race day prize money we offer so that we can attract owners and their horses and ensure that they do not drift to Sydney and Melbourne for the normal races. The average-type races that we have in Brisbane will keep the tracks going, will keep the punters here and will keep the industry alive. It is vital that we maintain the average prize money on offer at the two Brisbane tracks to keep the industry alive and well in Queensland, because then they will feed off the network of clubs around and ensure that the smaller clubs in the State will also be kept viable. Without that effort, it will simply not happen.

We are not seeing it to date, with respect. The sell-off of the TAB has not produced the windfall that was expected, and it will get worse in the next four or five years. The prize money position will deteriorate further. In light of the revenue earned by the TAB, it is terribly important for the Queensland TAB, the bookmakers, and, importantly, the owners and others involved in the industry that we lift the prize money across-the-board for average races.

There is a need to pump in cash for infrastructure purposes. It is all very well to put up \$260m or \$300m for Lang Park and other venues, but we cannot ignore the revenue that the racing industry brings into the State. The Government must do something about the infrastructure at the metropolitan racetracks. The stands and many of the other facilities at the two tracks are tired and need major reconstruction, particularly at Eagle Farm, which has probably received less funds in more recent times. There needs to be an injection of funds there. I understand that the QTC is currently working on a

program aimed at trying to improve the facilities at that track. But I know that it will need Government support and assistance.

No matter which track is under consideration, the Government must provide funding input for infrastructure upgrades, whether that be from the TAB or wherever. The facilities needing attention are not only the stands but also the dining areas, the toilet facilities, the bookmaking areas, the members' and non-members' areas and so on. In this day and age, it is great to be able to attract young people and families to the races. However, permanent facilities are needed at both tracks in order to attract more young people and families to race days.

There is one other issue I wish to raise in relation to the racing industry and that is the problem of gambling addiction. There is no real problem in this area in relation to racing; it is more related to poker machines. Nevertheless, Government is now involved in a greater range of gambling opportunities. We have the TAB as well as oncourse and offcourse betting at the races. Telephone betting makes it so much easier. This is probably the area in which we will have problems with gambling addiction.

I encourage people to go to the racetrack where they can gamble an amount which they can afford. One can relax and enjoy oneself at the races. Some people go to the races to look at the fashions. Nevertheless, more and more members of the community are affected by the glamorisation of gambling. They become caught up in the gambling problem.

I realise that poker machines are not covered by this legislation, but there is some reference to the Gaming Machine Commission. Recently, the Treasurer talked about a gambling strategy. Unfortunately, that strategy related, in the main, to poker machines. The strategy was somewhat light in substance.

The Minister for Tourism and Racing has a responsibility in relation to the issue of gambling addiction because it is a growing problem. There are members of the community who are unable to control their spending habits. I do not want to prevent people from having a pleasant afternoon at the races. However, the Government will find problems with people having the opportunity to gamble off track.

We have already seen that personal bankruptcies in Queensland account for 80% of all bankruptcies in the State. Fewer than 20% of bankruptcies are business bankruptcies. Most people find these statistics almost impossible to believe. These personal bankruptcies have been brought about as a result of gambling, drugs and other issues.

The problem of gambling needs to be confronted. We must ensure that we have in place a responsible gambling strategy. Not many years ago one would not see an advertisement for gambling on television. These days we see advertisements for scratchies and a whole range of other avenues for gambling. People become addicted to gambling and, as a result, families are losing their homes and are plunged into major debt.

I would have hoped that the Minister might have taken some action in this direction. Racing is a very important industry in this State. Last year the receipts from the operation of gaming machines in Queensland increased by 28%, or \$52m. The Government is receiving a huge cash windfall from gambling. The Government must expend further funds to ensure that counselling services are provided to people who have problems with gambling.

I look forward to the Minister taking up the issues I have raised because they are issues of major importance. An article that appeared in today's Australian newspaper highlighted the problem of gambling. The article referred to the lower socio-economic groups, but gambling can affect people right across-the-board. My comments are not aimed at one section of the community.
