



Speech by

Mrs J. SHELDON

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Hansard 4 December 2001

RACING AND BETTING AMENDMENT BILL [No. 2]

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—Lib) (3.39 p.m.): In contributing to this debate today I would like to draw particular attention to the race club in my electorate of Caloundra, Corbould Park, which is acknowledged as one of the best race clubs in Queensland and, I would say, in Australia. It is a track of substance. It has a great training track. It is in a great position. It is well organised and I think it is a credit to the racing industry.

I would like to congratulate Les Geeves, his committee and the relatively new CEO, Mr Mick Sullivan. The committee is extremely comprehensive. It has people on it who have been involved in the racing industry for a long time. All members are involved with substantial businesses on the Sunshine Coast. Through their businesses and their contacts they contribute in a private way to the club; they do not charge for their services and they offer their equipment. This helps the club financially. If they did not do this an extra financial burden would be placed on it. They are members who have an interest in racing but they are also members who have an interest in the community and helping what is a vital industry for the Sunshine Coast.

I would like to say a few words about racing as an industry. Indeed, it is a very viable industry. It contributes a significant amount of money to the state economy. It is a wide ranging industry from the horse owners at the top down to the people who rake and water the tracks, the trainers, the strappers and the jockeys—and we have now seen quite a number of very able female jockeys as well—and all the other staff who are involved in getting a horse ready from the date of purchase as a racehorse right through its racing career.

There is also a considerable spin-off from the racing industry to the Sunshine Coast with regards to tourism. A number of people come to the races at Corbould Park because of the quality of the racing, the quality of the track and the quality of the facilities there. In this time when the tourist dollar is so vitally important to our areas and to the Sunshine Coast in particular, I think that we need to really emphasise racing as an industry and the importance of that industry to our area.

I would like to also say a word of thanks to a former president of the club, Des Scanlan. Des was an extraordinarily active and enthusiastic president of the club. Through his innovation we saw Sunday race meetings and betting days when actual races are not held but people can still attend to bet at the TAB on races run at other places. That brings people to the course and promotes an interest in racing. A lot of people say that racing is gambling. Yes, it is a form of gambling. There is no doubt about that, but it is more of an industry. It is not just standing in front of a poker machine, pushing in coins and pulling an arm; it is actually a full-blown, substantial industry that has many spin-offs and positive benefits. Des and his committee really helped put Corbould Park on the map. Unfortunately, he is no longer with us, but his memory certainly lives well on the Sunshine Coast and with me in particular.

I do have a point of contention, and that is about the ownership of the land at Corbould Park. I ask the minister to intervene, if she possibly can, on the race club's behalf on this. The race club is in a unique position on the Sunshine Coast in that it does not own its own land. The land was given by Corbould but is held in trust for the race club by the Caloundra City Council. While people may think that the race club owns the land, it does not. In actual fact, it would appear that the Caloundra City Council owns the land. When I was in government I organised for certain moneys that were left over in the TAB fund to be spent on two main things. One was the acquisition of land that was really required for Doomben—and these were put up to me by the racing industry, not by me—and the other was the

acquisition of the land for the Corbould Park club itself. They made representations over a number of years to be able to acquire the land. Under the terms of the deed of the trusteeship the land can only ever be used for racing purposes. So it all fitted in. What is the point of having land that can only be used as a race club if the race club does not own the land? I put money aside with the full agreement of the racing industry for that land to be bought from the Caloundra City Council. We had agreed on a price and that was going ahead.

Then there was a change of government and I could never understand why Bob Gibbs took the action he did. Actually, I do understand. He said publicly in the media that I 'had got enough for Caloundra'. He decided that he would not go ahead with the purchase of that land. It was complete and utter spite against that club. So the sale never went ahead. He did other things with the money that were not really required, although it may have been okay to be used in the manner that it was. The club itself is the poorer for it and it still does not own its land. Of course, during that period, the value of that land on the Sunshine Coast has risen considerably, as has land in general. It puts the ownership of the land further and further out of the grasp of the members of the club and the industry on the Sunshine Coast as a whole. They did not want the land to just stick their moniker on it and say, 'We own it.' If they bought the land they as owners could then do things to that whole complex and raise the funds to do it against the asset of the land. They wanted to put up more stables, better training facilities, a longer straight coming in and lighting. They wanted to really upgrade all the training facilities. It would have really given a great boost to that industry. Instead, they are still hampered by the deeds of this trust and the issue of ownership.

I do not know whether there is anything the minister can do about that, but I sincerely ask her to look at it. It is a major issue. The longer it goes on, the more valuable the land becomes. I would like to think that some arrangement could be made with the council. The council says that it is the legal owner, and so the round robin continues. I think that what the club is asking for is of interest to the racing industry as a whole, not just to Corbould Park.

A lot of these reforms are very important to racing as a whole. I have gone through the general reasons why the minister is doing this. One of the reasons she gave is that such a controlling body that has been put in place must be able to ensure that the probity, integrity and public confidence in the industry is maintained and that the interests of regional and country racing are protected to acceptable community and public interest standards. I think that is very important. It is an industry that over a period has had a lot of things said about it and against it. Certainly some of the actors in the whole show have deserved that censure. However, in general it is not an industry that has deserved that. I think that the public need to know that it is well run, that there is probity there and that the interests are taken into consideration.

The minister also mentioned in her second reading speech the privatised wager environment and that it is because of that that the act requires amendment. I would like to put on record the work that the previous coalition government did with regard to the privatisation of the TAB. In fact, it was all ready to go when we left government. I do not know why it took so long when there was a change of government and why there was the considerable conflict that subsequently occurred. I know that the current minister was not in office at the time.

I would like to put on record my thanks to Russell Cooper for the work he did in relation to the privatisation. We had a joint working group from Treasury and from his racing department who hammered out with the racing industry—and there was considerable input from the racing industry—the terms and conditions which finally were acceptable to everyone. We then had a state election and the whole thing got thrown out the window. What we see now by and large in relation to the problems the industry is in result from the then minister, Bob Gibbs, refusing to go ahead with the agreements as reached.

Racing is a competitive industry; it has to compete with a lot of other forms of sport and entertainment on which people can now place bets. Yet, as I have said, it is a substantial industry in itself in terms of the spin-offs and the benefits to the community. I am pleased to see that privatisation finally go ahead. I think the days of government involvement in that industry have passed. That is a very positive step, as are a lot of the provisions in this bill.

Some concerns have been raised, but a lot of issues needed to be resolved. The minister stated that under a privatised wagering environment amendments were required because of what was in the act, that some of the provisions were outdated, that they had the potential to further undermine the ability of control bodies of all codes to effectively manage and act in the wider interests of the industry, and that they should not be hampered in actually doing this.

It is very important—and I am sure the minister has taken this into consideration, but I would ask her to consider it again—that there is regional representation on this new board, commission or whatever it is to be called, and that we do not have as great a focus on the central racing issues in Brisbane as has been the case in the past. Country and regional racing right across the state is vital. We have a big decentralised state. Although it places a strain on the racing industry to provide racing in

a lot of these places, it is often the lifeblood of country towns and regional areas and so it is not something that can be lightly gotten rid of.

It is also important that prize money be looked at. Prize money needs to be increased. When we see what is offered in a lot of the other states, we see that Queensland falls short in comparison. Prize money is vital. If we are to get people to buy racehorses and spend all of the money involved in racing a racehorse—and, believe me, that is a lot—there has to be incentive. Prize money is one of the big incentives to get the good horses, owners and trainers here. There is also a lot of competition from overseas.

Mention is made of having financial reports of clubs meeting the same standards as those for incorporated bodies. That is important. Clubs are now big organisations with high turnovers. We need to know that these audited financial reports are at an acceptable standard such as that for incorporated bodies.

I support the bill. I would like the minister to take on board the issues I raised, in particular those in relation to Corbould Park. I put on record my thanks to the people involved in Corbould Park over time and acknowledge the contribution that industry makes to the Sunshine Coast.
