



Speech by

Hon. K. LINGARD

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

Hansard 27 November 2001

MAJOR SPORTS FACILITIES BILL

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (11.42 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Major Sports Facilities Bill. The opposition has some reservations about this bill which hopefully the Treasurer will be able to answer.

I would like to start by putting on record the strong support of the opposition for sport in this state. Our 2001 policy stated—

The National Party believes that every Queenslanders regardless of geographical location, age, sex or prowess, should have reasonable access to appropriate sport and recreation opportunities and facilities. Every individual and every community should be able to contribute to, and gain from, the benefits that flow from a progressive, healthy, and innovative sport and recreation regime.

We particularly support the attraction of major sporting events to Queensland, for they bring many benefits. We also agree with the modern approach for events such as the Bledisloe Cup to be run by private organisations, and for these private organisations to tender out functions such as the Bledisloe Cup. We are aware that it may be that a private concern which is running the Bledisloe Cup would approach all cities in Australia and ask for a tender price, and that all of these cities need very large venues if they are to compete against each other.

Brisbane is clearly at a disadvantage when it comes to venues such as the Melbourne Cricket Ground if we cannot put 80,000, 90,000 or 100,000 people into a particular venue. Our people have no chance of participating in or experiencing events such as the Bledisloe Cup unless we have such venues. These events encourage Queenslanders to greater participation in sport. They provide great entertainment, they show Queensland and Australia's world class talent and they bring great economic benefits to the state.

As we saw in the 1982 Commonwealth Games and the 2001 Goodwill Games, in order to attract top-notch sporting events we must have first-rate facilities. The National Party has a proud history of developing venues of the highest standard and maintaining them. The maintenance and management side of the equation is just as important as the building side. It is important that no one facility gains benefits at the expense of another.

One of the major intentions of this bill is to create a major sports facility authority to manage Queensland's major sporting and entertainment venues. The opposition asks the minister how he is going to ensure that no one facility gains benefit at the expense of another. If it is the situation that one particular venue is running at a loss, what will the minister do? Will he make sure that that particular venue maintains that loss? Similarly, if it is maintaining a profit, how will the minister ensure that there is no transfer of these profits or losses? We have concerns about this proposal. However, there is no doubt that the opposition has always believed that there is a need for a more central authority and we were certainly moving towards that position.

We are concerned that funds collected by a venue stay with that venue. I have spoken to people in Brisbane and that is their concern. There is no doubt that the minister will have a problem in trying to control that. I ask the minister what his policy is going to be for a venue such as the Gabba which runs at an extreme profit because of the facilities that are there—

Mr Mackenroth: A what?

Mr LINGARD: If it does run at a profit because of the extra facilities provided at that particular centre, how is he going to equate that with another venue that does not have such facilities?

Mr Mackenroth: An extreme profit!

Mr LINGARD: When did the minister have a great command of the English language? Likewise, if a facility has racked up debt, that liability must remain with that venue and not be assumed by the group. A current example of this is that Lang Park at present has recurrent debt of \$16 million. \$45 million for the present development needs to be repaid out of the operational budget. Another \$235 million is to be repaid by the pub tax. This debt must not be shouldered by profitable enterprises.

We are seeking a guarantee that each facility will be separate in administration, will be separate in revenue and will be separate in liabilities and that this will be clearly identified in the annual report. If we do not receive this undertaking, how can we be certain that this authority will not simply be used as the milch cow to prop up a loss-making enterprise whilst running down the thriving enterprises?

We are concerned that if venues are in competition for a major event—for example, the Bledisloe Cup or an international pop concert—having all these amenities under the one authority may compromise true competition. I would be interested to learn how a central authority, having a responsibility to the government, can work out how, say, the Gabba, Lang Park or the rugby union grounds are suitable for a particular activity. How is the Treasurer going to ensure that there is an impartial decision and not a favourable decision? Even though the board will consist of a group of seven people, there are human elements involved and there is very strong competition from sporting groups. We need an assurance that no interference by the Major Sports Facilities Authority will be allowed at all in the bidding for such events. If the authority does meddle in this process, we may find that games do not go to the venue that is most suited and most efficient but, rather, may go to the venue which needs the income the most. The National Party believes that this is not good business practice. We would strongly oppose such an action.

Thirdly, listed before us are the Brisbane Cricket Ground and the Suncorp Metway Stadium as facilities to be incorporated under this authority. Can the Treasurer confirm or deny whether the Sleeman Centre at Chandler, Boondall and ANZ Stadium are to be transferred from the Brisbane City Council? I remember seeing a release which said that negotiations were ongoing with these groups. Will these be transferred to the state government? If so, will they be incorporated under this authority? If this acquisition is to occur, will the Treasurer also state on what grounds these venues would be acquired? Will it be the case that local governments can turn to the state government and say that a particular entertainment venue is not a viable proposition? If so, what will be the responsibility of the government for picking up this sort of venue? Who will control the board as it makes a decision as to whether or not it picks up a non-viable concern from a local council? Can a local council allow a venue to be run down and then just dump it on this authority?

Fourthly, we are concerned by the trend of this government to concentrate its attention and funding on sporting venues in Brisbane to the detriment of regional sporting facilities. We all have our own personal thoughts on what we are doing in regional areas. We all react to criticism that we work in metropolitan areas, but there is no doubt when it comes to decisions on these particular venues. I use an equestrian centre as a typical example. If a magnificent equestrian centre is to be built, there is no doubt that an authority which has to ensure it is viable will move it towards a highly populated area, because it simply needs that kind of support to make it a viable entity. The people of Warwick would not be concerned if the city council decided to build an equestrian centre. It would be more determined to build an equestrian centre at Warwick than the government would because the government knows full well that the population base is not there but that it is in places like Toowoomba or the Gold Coast.

The National Party's 2001 sport policy states that investigations will be undertaken into the feasibility of further developing viable stadium projects in major regional areas of Queensland. I challenge this government to provide regional areas with comparable opportunities as those provided to Brisbane. I am concerned that under this sort of administration sporting facilities will be even more concentrated. The equestrian centre is a good example. I am also apprehensive that state-wide revenues such as the pub tax will be allocated to metropolitan facilities to the detriment of regional facilities. How will the Treasurer ensure that this will not occur?

The second major aspect of this bill concerns the setting up of a Stadium Redevelopment Authority to oversee the development of Lang Park. As members opposite are aware, we on this side of the House have been consistently concerned about the use of public money in the redevelopment as advocated by the government. I continue to challenge the Treasurer to refer Lang Park to either the Public Accounts Committee or the Public Works Committee. We continually find that the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Works Committee have not—and I use these words—made a decision to look at the development of Lang Park. Quite obviously, this is a political decision. If he wishes, the Treasurer has the ability to refer this to the Public Works Committee.

There is no way in the wide world that this government is being honest in its public scrutiny of either Lang Park or other such projects. There is no doubt the committees are dominated by the government and no doubt that this government will not allow the Public Works Committee or the Public Accounts Committee to investigate this development. In other states spending \$280 million or \$45 million would demonstrate that there is a definite commitment by the government to this sort of facility, yet this issue will not be investigated by the Public Works Committee or the Public Accounts Committee.

We have been particularly opposed to the application of the pub tax. We feel that this fee is unfair and unjustified. We also believe the actions of this government during the process have been deplorable. It has not allowed due process, has ignored community groups and has misled the public repeatedly. I have always referred to performance auditing. The Treasurer criticised me and said how dare we even indicate that the Auditor-General can tell the government what to do. That is the basis of a performance based audit; it is where an Auditor-General can look at the accounts and say, 'Yes, all the invoices and statements match the payments.' However, he will also say, 'I believe that the Minister for Families has not spent enough money on disabilities.' He has that ability in performance based auditing. We do not do it in this state.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr LINGARD: I have heard the Deputy Premier mention that. At least I have never used two cars to go to Sydney to take a netball team. At least I have never hidden my accounts and not allowed them to go out under FOI. He knows as well as I do what he hid, so he should not start that. At least Charlie Doyle carried the flag.

We believe that the actions of this government during the process have been deplorable. We are worried that this authority will continue this sham and be just another tool that this government will use to hide the full cost and realities of this development. I ask the Treasurer to reassure this side of the House very strongly that this will not occur. I did not think he would start that again.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr LINGARD: The member opposite can say whatever he likes, and so can I. But it is quite amazing to hear the reaction of the backbench after I said something compared with the reaction to something the Treasurer said.

I also note that the term of the chief executive officer of the Stadium Redevelopment Authority is not to exceed 30 September 2003. Will the Treasurer guarantee that the Lang Park redevelopment will not exceed this date and that all loose ends will be finalised? I also ask the Treasurer: what is to happen under this authority to all those people who hold cricket club memberships? What happens to life members of Lang Park under this authority? What happens to the trustees? What will be the agreements between ANZ, the Brisbane City Council and groups like the Broncos? Who controls that concern?

Who determines structures of a complex in the future, especially the structure of a complex such as for soccer and tennis? If the government decides to build a combined venue for soccer and tennis, especially with the way turf can be laid these days, who makes that decision? Who is going to say, 'We will have a combined venue,' especially if the soccer association says that it does not want to combine with tennis and tennis says a similar thing? Who will make decisions on super stadiums? Who determines the standard of a hockey venue? As we all know, super-duper hockey venues are needed if we are to have a top-class hockey team. If a particular sport wants a particular standard but the government says, 'No, we will not spend that amount of money,' who will make those decisions?

Mr Mackenroth: There is only one association left in Queensland now that hasn't got a really good hockey centre.

Mr LINGARD: The equestrian centre would be another typical example.

Mr Mackenroth: No, hockey. We fund all but one of the five top international hockey centres.

Mr LINGARD: I do not think that one hockey centre in Queensland is going to be enough. I certainly think that the equestrian centre would be another typical example. At this stage, there is not a top-class equestrian centre. Who is going to make a decision on a top-class equestrian centre? Who is going to make the decision as to where it is to be built and what sort of equestrian centre is to be built? Who is going to determine the extent of the debt? Surely a sporting group would say that they want to go into debt to build a super-duper equestrian centre, especially if this authority is going to take responsibility. There is reason for great concern when it comes to this.

Mr Mackenroth: Who said that the authority has responsibility for this?

Mr LINGARD: Who is going to take responsibility for the development?

Mr Mackenroth: If a sporting organisation wants to build an equestrian centre, they can go and build one.

Mr LINGARD: Of course they can go and build one. I am asking how much they are allowed to spend or how much they are allowed to put into that sort of complex. I also ask the minister: what opportunity will private groups have to develop a complex, especially when the government sees that it could be a viable proposition? If a private group wants to move into Queensland and build a massive complex, who will make a decision on whether this private group can develop such a complex, especially if it will be in competition with some of the top venues? There are many questions I would like the Treasurer to answer. While we will support the bill, we need some sort of answer to some of those questions.
