



Speech by

STEVEN RODGERS

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Hansard 4 December 2001

RACING AND BETTING AMENDMENT BILL [No. 2]

Mr RODGERS (Burdekin—ALP) (3.31 p.m.): I rise in support of the Racing and Betting Amendment Bill. Firstly, I would like to remind the opposition that they do not have a monopoly on a love of or commitment to regional racing in Queensland. Throughout my life, I have been to numerous race meetings everywhere. I have found the ones in north Queensland to be some of the best race meetings that I have attended.

I would like to mention one race meeting in particular in the Burdekin region. Over the past few years, the Burdekin Grower Race Day has been promoted very strongly by the Burdekin region and also by Henry Petersen, who is the area's shire councillor. The Burdekin Grower Race Day has proved to be one of the most viable and energetic race meetings in north Queensland, and it all came about in two years. While I am on this issue, Henry Petersen is also promoting another race day, and that is the Mango Madness Race Day at the Ipswich Turf Club on 7 December.

Mr Cummins: They should pop into the Racehorse Hotel next door.

Mr RODGERS: They should do, too. It is a good hotel. Queensland Country Racing marketing manager, Kerri-Anne Bridge, has stated that the QCR had become interested in the idea of inviting Mr Petersen's ideas after seeing the success of the Burdekin Grower Race Day. That proves that promotional race days attract people to the races. Such race days have proved very successful in the Burdekin and I am sure that the Mango Madness Race Day at Ipswich on Friday will be well promoted. I encourage members of this House to attend that meeting. It will be well worth while. About 1,000 free gift packs of mangoes, provided by Henry Petersen, will be given away at the race day. I have also been informed that people attending that race meeting will be given champagne.

Mr Reynolds: Do you have any tips?

Mr RODGERS: No, I do not have any tips.

This bill will protect the interests of country racing through the formation of the Queensland Regional Racing Council and its statutory powers. The introduction of an independent board will also assist the country and regional sector as members of the board will not be beholden to their alliance to major clubs. An independent board will be able to look objectively at the contribution of all sectors of the Queensland racing industry when assessing issues such as funding, race dates and the performance of individual clubs.

There should be no doubt about the contribution of country regional racing in the overall make-up of the Queensland racing industry. It provides a racing presence for the industry throughout the state, which is an underrated marketing tool. It provides an entry point for many of the participants as well as the recognised social benefits.

While the Queensland opposition raised the issue of benchmarking Queensland against Victoria, I would like to raise the foolhardiness of this approach. The Victorian racing industry supports almost no non-TAB racing and the entire state of Victoria is approximately the size of south-east Queensland. The Victorian industry has gone through a massive program of rationalisation and has continued to run the ruler over regional clubs. Despite the economic rationalist approach advocated by Victoria, that state has also lost trainers, jockeys and horses to either interstate or overseas destinations. Some good examples of that in thoroughbred racing are premierships-winning trainer David

Hayes shifting to Hong Kong, Melbourne Cup-winning training John Meagher moving to Singapore, and cup-winning jockey Steven King moving to Hong Kong.

It has been pointed out that there has been a reduction in the number of race meetings in Queensland. That should be balanced by the fact that Queensland still runs approximately twice as many meetings as in Victoria. Although nobody welcomes the loss of meetings, it is important to have benchmarks to ensure the quality of the product being offered to the public. Programs filled with two or three horse races do nothing to promote the industry as a spectator sport or a gambling opportunity.

On that note, I would like to mention the Lower Burdekin Greyhound Club, which has been running for about 15 years. Recently, owing to cuts to funding and race dates by the Greyhound Racing Authority, the club itself has decided that over the next few years they would not be able to continue their level of performance and, therefore, operate in the black. Over the years, the Lower Burdekin Greyhound Racing Club has been one of the most successful greyhound clubs in north Queensland. It has always had full meetings. There are always a number of dogs plus reserves in the meetings. Sometimes the club could have run 14 races with full fields. That club has decided to close voluntarily as at the end of June next year—something that I have written to the Greyhound Racing Authority about, and I hope to have more talks with them about that in the future.

I believe that issue is important to north Queensland, because greyhound racing owners and greyhound trainers throughout the north come to the Burdekin region to race their dogs—from Mackay, Cairns, Mount Isa; anywhere in north Queensland. That club is centrally located and it has a reputation for being one of the most hospitable greyhound racing tracks in the north.

I would like to conclude by saying that thoroughbred racing, harness racing and greyhound racing is entertainment. It is very important that the racing industry continues to provide high-quality entertainment in order to meet its challenges and remain relevant in the future. I encourage people to support the greyhound racing industry, the harness racing industry, and the thoroughbred industry by going to the races. Most country and city racetracks hold promotional days throughout the year. I encourage those people who do not usually go to the races to attend them on those promotional days. They can usually take their children, who can amuse themselves with side events. The parents can also have a bet and watch the horses, the dogs or the trotters go around. I commend the bill to the House.
