



Speech by

STUART COPELAND

MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

Hansard 4 December 2001

RACING AND BETTING AMENDMENT BILL [No. 2]

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (12.37 p.m.): Unlike the member for Albert, I have to say that I have been on race tracks from time to time. That is not why I rise to speak on the Racing and Betting Amendment Bill (No. 2). One could say that the electorate of Cunningham is the absolute heart of Queensland's breeding industry. I am surrounded by some of the best known thoroughbred studs in existence, not only in Queensland but also in Australia.

I am very well aware of the importance of the racing industry to the local economy, not only in terms of the breeders, the trainers and the jockeys but also in terms of the support industries, such as veterinary surgeons, farriers, and feed and produce merchants that are sustained by the level of activity within the racing industry. The Oakey Vet Hospital is one of the world renowned equine specialists. A lot of its work has developed and specialised in the thoroughbred industry. One stud in my electorate says that it has storage for 10,000 bales of hay for feed. That is a huge amount of feed. It means a huge number of suppliers who also earn their living. We must always keep in mind that the racing industry is important not only to those people directly involved but also to the wider community, with the indirect employment and services that are supplied to it.

It is fair to say that this bill has been greeted with mixed reactions from the industry. There is a general acceptance out there that something needs to be done and that perhaps removing the QPC and replacing it with an independent board is the way to go. There is not wholehearted support of that concept, but there is acknowledgment that there are certainly problems within the industry and that this is the first step along the line to addressing some of those problems. It is certainly not the be-all and end-all.

As the member for Clayfield highlighted, the issues of prize money and race dates are very real ones. This bill will not address those problems. Without increased prize money, the trend of horses and support for racing moving to Sydney and Melbourne will simply continue, and the racing industry in Queensland will continue to decline. That will have to be addressed not only by the new board once it is in place but also by the minister and the government to ensure that the prize money issue is addressed and to bring back some vitality into the Queensland industry.

Before dealing with the thoroughbred industry, I will touch on harness racing and greyhound racing, which have not been mentioned in any great detail in the debate so far. Both of those industries have been through some fairly difficult times. By examining what has happened in the Toowoomba industries, we see some of the lessons which may be learned before we go too far down the path of changing the thoroughbred industry. The Darling Downs Harness Racing Club, which is based at Clifford Park, is currently racing fortnightly on average. It does not hold races every fortnight; it organises the dates so as not to clash with race days at Gatton and Dalby. The three clubs are then racing on complementary dates to ensure the best result for each club.

Darling Downs Harness Racing Club was closed down for approximately 12 months. That did enormous damage to those people involved in the industry on the Darling Downs. People involved in training got rid of their horses because it was too difficult to come to Brisbane to race. There are some very big studs based on the Darling Downs and those breeders got rid of a lot of their brood mares—their breeding stock. Even though the Darling Downs Harness Racing Club has started racing again, it certainly has not recovered from the position which developed while it was closed down for 12 months. Prior to being closed down, it had a very successful Thursday night meeting. However, when it was closed Thursday was given to the Gold Coast and the prize money was transferred to Redcliffe. That really hurt the industry on the downs. We should look at the consequences of those sorts of actions to the harness racing industry to ensure we learn those lessons and do not repeat the same mistakes with the thoroughbred racing industry. The Darling Downs Harness Racing Club was closed

down effectively to keep the Gold Coast and Redcliffe operational. Rumours are now circulating that Toowoomba, Rocklea or Townsville will soon be closed down. I ask the minister to clarify that in her reply.

The University of Southern Queensland undertook a study into the effect of the harness racing industry on the downs. The results indicated that the closing down of Toowoomba operations cost the local economy millions in terms of the associated service industries rather than employment directly within the harness racing industry. There are people within the harness racing industry who believe that many of the troubles in the industry stem from the days when Bob Gibbs was the Minister for Racing. He replaced a board which was made up of industry people with businesspeople not directly involved in the industry. In terms of the conflict of interest requirements in the bill before the House, the government should be mindful of ensuring that board members not only have some knowledge of the industry but also have the requisite and desirable skills to make the board work. When the debate began last Thursday, the minister said that there are people within the industry who do have the skills which are required, who do have the knowledge of the industry and who will not be affected by a conflict of interest. We must be careful to ensure that the board members possess the necessary skills to secure the future of the industry.

Similar problems have been experienced in greyhound racing. In my previous capacity as CEO of the Royal Agricultural Society of Queensland, I had close dealings with the Toowoomba Greyhound Racing Club, which was based at the Toowoomba Showgrounds. It was perhaps the most impressive and best greyhound racing facility anywhere in the country. It was closed down 18 months to two years ago. That is an absolute tragedy for greyhound racing because no greyhound track exists in Australia that has those facilities, both in terms of the public who wish to attend and watch the races and in terms of the racing track itself. It looked terrific on TV. It had everything going for it in terms of promotion through Sky Channel and other television coverage, which is so important to the future of the racing industry in Australia. However, it was closed down. It was under administration by the Greyhound Racing Authority for a long time. The local club had its hands tied in attempting to address the problems it had faced and was not given much of a chance to secure its own future. The Friday night timeslot was a very successful meeting time for the club, but it was taken away and given to Ipswich. Toowoomba's date was changed to Wednesday, which was a totally unsustainable day for it to pursue and the club went into decline.

Now that Toowoomba greyhound racing has been closed down, the track has been closed and many of the facilities have been taken away and it simply will not open again. That is an absolute tragedy for greyhound racing. We need to be mindful that any move to centralise racing in the south-east corner must be cautiously approached and make sure that we take notice of the ramifications for the industry in other parts of the state.

We need to make sure, for example, that in thoroughbred racing we do not develop a two-tier system in which we have a professional racing circuit based around Brisbane, Gold Coast, Caloundra and perhaps Toowoomba and a second tier comprising some of the smaller regional areas which are not given the focus and assistance that they also need. In the electorate of Cunningham, the Clifton Racing Club is probably the only one that is continuously operating, but it operates very successfully. It has had no requirement from the government to step in and give money. All work is voluntary and the club runs a number of very successful meetings throughout the year. Those sorts of clubs should also be supported. We should not return to a situation where we have a professional league in the major centres and picnic races in smaller centres.

Again, I would like to confirm that one of the biggest problems facing the industry is prize money. There is no doubt that without increased prize money, we will continue to go down the line of horses leaving Queensland. It is not only where the horses are based; it has a huge effect on the breeders because, if there is no great interest in racing locally, the market for those horses—for example, at Magic Millions or QBBS sales or any of those—those breeders also have to look at taking their horses elsewhere for sale, whether it is within Australia or internationally. With the growing Asian market, for example, a number of breeders are specifically targeting Asia—which is a great thing; that should happen, but it should not be because there is simply no market in Queensland.

I would like to go through some of the studs and some of the things that are happening within the Cunningham electorate because it really is an impressive list of studs and people involved. My neighbours south of Cambooya are the Eureka stud. Colin McAlpine, who is an absolute legend within the Queensland breeding industry, and his son Scott and his wife Grania operate Eureka. They have probably one of the most legendary sires around, who has been around for years. I do not know how old exactly he is. Semipalatinsk has been a really successful sire over a huge number of years. The McAlpines have a really good set-up at Eureka. It is a very old stud, of course. We can actually do our gardening by their foaling lights at night when they turn them on. They have put in a huge investment and really have done some cutting-edge and innovative things when it comes to thoroughbred breeding.

Ron Gilbert, who is relatively new to the breeding industry but has established the Highgrove Stud, probably has some of the most impressive brood mares and breeding stock anywhere in Queensland and Australia. The quality that he has managed to establish in a very short period of time has been unbelievably impressive. I can guarantee that anyone in the House would be quite happy to

live in the yearling barn he has built. It is a beautiful building. The thoroughbreds that he breeds there, of course, are worth a bit more than most of us, so that is probably why he looks after them so well.

Mr Robertson: Speak for yourself.

Mr COPELAND: No, I was speaking for the benefit of the Minister for Natural Resources specifically.

Vatana Farm, which is a very well-known name, has established a stud at Wyreema. Hazelwood Stud, which is also a well-known stud, has done some good stuff.

Wattle Brae Stud is run by Gary and Phoebe Turkington. Gary is the third generation of Turkingtons to operate Wattle Brae at Pilton. They have also done a lot over the years for the industry, especially locally. Seven people have been employed directly at that stud. So members can see the sort of impact that the industry has, without taking into consideration the veterinary and other associated industries. Those people are directly employed at Wattle Brae.

The Wattle Brae Stud was founded three generations ago and it has been continuously operational for over 70 years. It is one of the oldest continuously running studs in Queensland, if not the oldest. They now have the fourth generation on the ground. I am sure that the girls will be interested in continuing the operations of Wattle Brae well into the future. Since the T lazy T brand was registered, Wattle Brae has boasted a record of producing over 240 stakes horses and thousands of winners in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. It is one of the studs that are exploring avenues into Asia.

The Furlong Stud, which is also located just down the road at Greenmount, is run by Rob, Alan and Jim Atkinson. They are a working family partnership. They have spent a lifetime involved in the thoroughbred industry in Queensland and have successfully stood at stud the former Australian Cup winner Crewman. They are another family that has been very intimately involved in the thoroughbred industry. Fred Brown is the stud master at Glen Avon Lodge at Southbrook. He has leased extra land to make sure that he has enough country to look after all of the horses that come to him for joining. Although the Lyndhurst Stud at Warwick is not located in my electorate, I know that it is a very old name in the thoroughbred industry. It has been around for over 100 years. I think that back in 1886, Mr McDougall commenced thoroughbred breeding with the sire Archer. His contribution to the Queensland breeding industry is still acknowledged with the McDougall Stakes, which is run as the first metropolitan two-year-old fillies race in Queensland.

So although the thoroughbred stud industry is very old, it is experiencing some real problems at the moment. The Raheen Stud at Warwick is another one. We also have harness racing studs such as Burwood Stud and Egmont Park. Egmont Park is probably the best known of the harness racing studs around. As I said, some of those harness racing studs have really downgraded the amount of their breeding stock as a result of the forced closure of harness racing in Toowoomba.

The thoroughbred industry is a really important industry to Queensland. It is cited as being something like Queensland's fourth largest industry. It is also one that has had more than its fair share of troubles. Some of those have been created by the industry and some have been created for it. The important thing is that we come up with solutions that assist the entire industry to function successfully and with vitality. Although the government wants to give the industry some independence to determine its own future, it cannot walk away from the industry and must continue to provide some certainty and assistance to ensure that it has a future. As I said earlier, this legislation does not address some of the industry's fundamental problems. It moves a little way down the track in replacing the QPC with the independent board. But that is only one step along the journey. It is not going to be the ultimate conclusion. It is going to take a lot of work from a lot of people to ensure that the thoroughbred industry has a good future.

A lot of really successful horses have come out of Queensland. Racing is one thing that can really unite people. It is fun to go to the races and enjoy yourself for a day. Whether you win or lose is not the point; it is a social activity as much as anything. I ask members to cast their minds back to a couple of the horses that have come out of Queensland such as Gunsynd, the Goondiwindi grey. However, the most famous horse to come from the Darling Downs is Bernborough. He did his early racing at Toowoomba and was to emerge from those humble beginnings to become one of Australia's greatest ever racehorses, winning many of his races with a brilliant sprint from well back in the field. He had 15 straight wins—which included victory in the 1946 Newmarket Handicap—carrying 63 kilos and he won the 1946 Doomben Cup carrying 68 and a half kilos.

Bernborough's unbeaten run came to a controversial end when he ran a luckless fifth carrying 68 kilos in the Caulfield Cup. His racing career came to an end when he broke down. But he then went to stud at Kentucky in the USA. He finished with a career race record of 37 starts, 26 wins, two seconds, one third and eight unplaced. We would all love to own a horse like that. It is incumbent on those of us who have any influence at all over the racing industry to secure its future so that people can continue to enjoy taking part in racing and perhaps one day own a horse like Bernborough.
