



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

---

Hansard 10 May 2002

**Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board**

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (4.41 p.m.): I have advised the Queensland parliament that the selection process for the Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board and other matters have been subject to political interference by the Queensland Minister for Racing. An independent three-person panel was set up to appoint the new QTRB—one ministerial appointee and two industry appointees, one to represent TAB clubs and the other non-TAB clubs. Those representatives were approved by the full board of the then control body, the Queensland Principal Club.

The selection panel was given 15 names from an original application pool of 200 by recruiting company TMP Worldwide. Prior to interviewing the applicants the panel proposed to request all applicants to complete personal probity forms. However, due to time constraints in relation to the selection and appointment it requested only eight applicants to provide personal probity forms. Therefore, those who were interviewed first were generally asked to provide probity forms. These probity checks were carried out by the Queensland Police Service, returned and scrutinised by the panel, who found no impropriety. The final list of five names was selected and the minister was advised. They were Chairman Mrs Nerolie Withnall, Deputy Chairman Mr Stephen Lonie, Mr Tony Hanmer, Mr Michael Lambert and Mr George Pippas.

For reasons not entirely clear, the appointed chairman, Mrs Withnall, stood down from her appointment. The minister, through her director-general, then appointed a second selection panel through her nominee on the Interim Thoroughbred Racing Board, Mr Longman. That selection panel was not endorsed by the then control body, the ITRB. Some members of the ITRB only heard of the secret selection panel after newspaper reports named the new chairman. Those members of the ITRB had also applied to be on the QTRB; however, they were not successful and I believe were advised accordingly.

Under the Queensland Racing Regulation 2000 2A(4), the Minister for Racing must consult with the industry on the formation of a selection panel. It is my strong view that this was not carried out and, in an answer to my question on notice on this matter, the minister advised that her director-general contacted her nominee on the ITRB. This is clearly not consultation with the racing industry.

It has since become known that a file from the Attorney-General's office, prepared for the Department of Tourism and Racing, may have found its way into the public arena. It is believed to be the file related to the nominated chairman, Mrs Withnall. The Minister for Racing was asked on 18 and 19 April if she was aware that files relating to nominees and candidates of the QTRB were interfered with or stolen. The minister responded—

I suggest that if ... the opposition has any evidence or information to back that up he make it available to me.

She stated in answer to a further question—

There has not ... been any suggestion about any files or documents ... disappearing or whatever.

The Attorney-General later confirmed to the parliament on 18 April that an internal inquiry had been initiated on 28 March, three weeks prior, to determine how legal advice provided by Crown Law to the Department of Tourism and Racing may have found its way into the public arena. It has since advised that the matter was referred to the Crime and Misconduct Commission on 17 April 2002. Others matters relating to the ministerial interference in an official inquiry and direction by the minister to the control body to sack the CEO, Kevin Hasemann, have been raised in the parliament and referred to the CMC.

On 24 April 2002 the CMC advised that information in respect to Crown Law advice unlawfully disseminated and used to influence the process by which a member of the QTRB was selected raised a reasonable suspicion of official misconduct, and an investigation has commenced. Further matters relating to the improper interference with the selection process and interfering in the administration of the QPC and the QTRB are being sought—

Time expired.

---