



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Hansard 14 May 2003

RACING INDUSTRY

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (6.00 p.m.): I move—

That this parliament notes the destruction of the Queensland racing industry, particularly country racing, by the Beattie government, and calls on the Beattie government to ensure that racing in Queensland be given sufficient funds to ensure a viable future.

There would not be a member in this parliament who has not been touched by or who is not aware of the enormous concern permeating the racing industry in Queensland as a consequence of the administration of the industry and decisions made by Queensland Racing that have reduced significantly the number of races held throughout the state. Of particular concern is the proposition that people are putting forward that the government seems to be unwilling or unable to do anything proactive or constructive to address this problem.

We are seeing a growing trend in this state whereby the government just says that it cannot do anything about something because it no longer has any effective control or say. That is not good enough. Many people in the community rightfully believe that it is the government that has primarily been in control of the racing industry in Queensland over a long period. The Queensland government, by design, was the government that put in place the process and the structure that currently governs Queensland racing, and therefore it has a responsibility to ensure that the racing industry in this state survives. As I said, this is an alarming trend. It is a trend that we have seen displayed in the parliament over the past week not only by this minister but also by the minister responsible for electricity, who has raised similar points when asked questions about ticklish issues.

Today I told the Minister for Transport that with respect to matters under his portfolio this government does not want to be seen to be responsible for any bad news in this state. This is bad news, because we know that the decisions of Queensland Racing, a creature of the government of the day following the policies of the government of the day, have brought about the virtual destruction of the Queensland racing industry. Honourable members should have looked at last night's television news. People were raising concerns not only about country racing but also about metropolitan racing in Queensland. We saw the sacking of Steve Railton and 10 others. Members should listen to what the likes of Bill Carter and other luminaries not just from the racing industry in Queensland have been saying about our racing industry and the government's handling of it.

Mr McNamara interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: The honourable member for Hervey Bay is bleating about this being a Tory view. I can tell him that I am encountering a lot of people with staunch Labor Party pedigrees who are concerned about this government's administration of and lack of interest in the racing industry in Queensland. As a backbench member of the government I would have thought the member should be concerned. I know that a lot of government members are concerned about this. The important thing to remember is that problems have emerged and we as a parliament need to do something about fixing them. It is no longer good enough to wash our hands of this. Let us become proactive and amend the system to secure the future of the racing industry in Queensland.

Queensland racing is the third largest employer of people in Queensland, according to the Australian Racing Board. I had thought the number employed was closer to 25,000. However, I understand from statistics I saw today that about 55,000 people are employed as either part-time

casual or full-time equivalents in the racing industry in Queensland. A lot of people are involved directly and indirectly in the industry and derive their livelihood from it.

In my area there are a number of race clubs that run very successful race events. The Warwick club used to run a large number of events—about 13 a year. That number has been cut back significantly. Stanthorpe used to run two, but it now runs one. Texas still runs one. The number at Goondiwindi has been reduced. Tallwood used to hold an annual event, which it has now lost. The people there are most concerned about that.

The impact of this spreads further than just to the owners, trainers and jockeys. Representatives of a P&C came to see me the other day to tell me that the Tallwood race meeting was its sole fundraising event. It has lost its funding source because of this decision by Queensland Racing. It is aware that it might be eligible to apply for what is now being made available through the Queensland Events Corporation, but that is a maximum of \$5,000. I think it is losing around \$15,000, which impacts on the viability of the meeting. \$5,000 will not be enough to ensure that they will be able to run their races.

Mr Horan: For six races they lose \$24,000; for five they will lose \$20,000.

Mr SPRINGBORG: As the member for Toowoomba South said, for six races they will lose \$24,000; for five races they will lose \$20,000. What is evident in my electorate is also evident throughout the rest of Queensland. I understand that this decision by Queensland Racing has cut 200 race events across Queensland and about 12 TAB events. We all know that country racing in particular has been a sound training ground for many of the famous stayers. Honourable members should look at my area.

Mr Horan: Gunsynd.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I cite Gunsynd, Murphy's Blue Boy and Bernborough, which was from the Darling Downs. Where do the interests come from? The owners and interests are spread right across Queensland. A lot of these horses come from the smaller centres.

What can the government do? The government can do something. It does not just have to sit back and say, 'We can't do anything.' This government privatised the TAB and put in place the process and structure. It put in place a funding stream which has been inadequate to ensure the continued viability of Queensland racing.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: At least we have a plan, which is far better than the plan of the honourable member for Southport of raiding Queensland Tourism to the tune of \$200,000 a year. Our plan involves the direct injection into the Queensland racing industry of \$10 million per annum. That is not in any way contradictory to the way in which Queensland racing should operate.

The government must at least have its hands on the levers in some way. What can it do for Queensland country racing to ensure that it is looked after and can continue to flourish and be viable across Queensland? It can establish through a Queensland country racing council an authority to spend \$4 million a year under the auspices of Queensland Racing to promote, administer and build country racing throughout Queensland. The government is not even thinking about such ideas. All it is doing is making excuses and saying, for example, that because of the Sky Channel deal this or that has happened.

The government has a disaster on its hands in the community. We have only to speak to the many people in the racing industry in Queensland and also to those who enjoy going to the races, be it on a fortnightly, monthly or once-yearly basis, to find out how they feel about the management of racing in Queensland by this government. It is just not good enough for this government to say that it cannot do anything to secure the future of racing in this state and particularly country racing. We are already under siege from the southern states. The bad publicity, bad decisions and lack of proactive, positive contributions and support from this government are further weakening the position of Queensland racing and in particular country racing. It is about time this government faced up to its responsibility.

Time expired.