



Speech by

**Pat Purcell**

**MEMBER FOR BULIMBA**

Hansard Wednesday, 19 May 2004

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### **ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

**Mr PURCELL** (Bulimba—ALP) (4.27 p.m.): It gives me pleasure to rise today to speak in this address-in-reply debate. On Saturday, 7 February 2004 the electors of Bulimba re-elected me for another term. I would like to sincerely thank those people for trusting me to represent their interests for another three years. I will work for every constituent in my electorate, as I always have. I enjoy my job and trust that my constituents will continue to come to me with their issues.

Being a member of parliament means being away from family sometimes for many days—sometimes weeks. I would like to thank my family for their patience, understanding and continued support. I would also like to thank the many hundreds of people who assisted with my election campaign, working tirelessly in the lead-up to and during the election. I realise members of parliament do not get to be where they are without the support of branch members, friends and relatives. They all hold a special place for me and always will. I would especially like to thank my campaign director, John Shepley, and the SEC committee which has met on a regular basis throughout the campaign.

Bulimba is a rapidly changing electorate with real estate values increasing every day and redevelopment occurring on a large scale. The cohorts of electors have changed greatly since 1992 when I was first elected. It is a real challenge to keep pace with that change—a challenge I am more willing to take on and enjoy.

I would like to thank the Premier for the confidence he has in me by appointing me as a parliamentary secretary. When he advised me of this, he asked me which minister I would like to work for. Without hesitation I said Robert Schwarten, given my background in the building industry and my interest in public housing. It was two days later that the portfolio was broadened to include racing. Although my brothers still have and my father had a deep interest in the racing industry, that gene up until now had passed me by. While I used to read the front pages of the newspaper, my brothers always turned straight to the racing guide. Now I find myself heading directly to the back of the paper to see what has happened in the industry overnight, although I must say that recently racing, and especially UNiTAB, has progressed more to the front pages or at least the business section. You are more likely to read about racing in the *Financial Review* than the *Courier-Mail* as the machinations of the TABCorp, UNiTAB and TAB drama have been played out.

So it has happened that I have spent a lot of time travelling the gravelly roads of outback Queensland to talk to country race clubs about rationalisation of the industry by Queensland Racing. The rationalisation has caused disquiet among 147 race clubs in Queensland. Some have benefited in terms of increased prize money, but many have lost out because of not being given race dates. Some 30 clubs have found themselves with a track, a committee, infrastructure, but no meeting. Some of these have applied for and been granted a date for self-funded meetings or community race scheme meetings, but some have no meetings at all. If racing is the sport of kings, country racing is the sport of the common people.

People are not only passionate about horses and seeing them race; they are also passionate about their towns and communities—towns where the only entertainment may be the once-a-year race meeting,

a meeting that brings the town and outlying district together for the one day of the year. It is a day when friends meet, people dress up, have a few drinks, catch up on the local news and maybe even watch a horse go round a track, maybe even wager on a good thing. Racing is not just about horses, jockeys, trainers and owners. Of course, that is the core of it, but it is also about a group of people in town coming together to celebrate, often in hard times, and the only celebration on the horizon is the upcoming race day. For weeks before the big event teams of volunteer workers take time off from their real jobs and put all their efforts into getting the track ready for the meeting. Grass is slashed, sometimes by the bloke who works for the shire, paint is splashed about to brighten up the bar of the canteen, the rails are checked for safety, repairs are carried out, barriers are dusted off and stalls cleaned out ready for champions to arrive.

These volunteers do it for the love of the event. Towns like Noccundra, which is 1,100 kilometres from Brisbane in south-west Queensland with a population of five, swell to a magnificent 400 on race day. Jill McNamara at the Noccundra Hotel proudly showed me the new amenities at the track, a playground for the children funded by Sport and Recreation Queensland, a huge shed providing shade from the hot western sun, toilet blocks, canteen and the new rodeo complex beside the track. They do not have much else out there at Noccundra, but they have this complex and that was the centre of their events for the year, the one and only event that that town had. The race committee for that track travelled 600 kilometres to sit down and have a chat about their race meeting and their facilities. Texas, Isisford, Muttaborra, Ilfracombe, Aramac, Wyandra, Eromanga, Flinton, Morven and Tallwood are all small towns but with big hearts and lots of willing helpers eager to contribute to the one day a year of racing.

To date I have visited 71 clubs and consulted with over 350 people, mainly in the southern and central parts of the state. It has been during these visits to country race tracks, sometimes sitting under the shade of trees, that another picture has emerged—a picture not just about horses and racing but a picture of passionate people involved, in a voluntary capacity, in staging the one day of the year race meeting; the day when the town comes alive, when locals and visitors come together to enjoy dressing up, a drink and a good yarn; when the town prospers, the pub sells more than it does on any other day, the clothing shops do a roaring trade, the local car dealer entices in a few buyers, the bakery and butcher supply the refreshment canteen at the track and the hotels and motels are full.

While this one day is vital to small towns, there is a bigger picture of racing in Queensland. It was on this bigger picture that Queensland Racing based its rationalisation of the industry prior to the 2003-04 racing season. The rationalisation of the racing industry in Queensland is proving to be a success. Prize money has increased and TAB clubs have received a significant increase in distribution. But at what cost? Thirty race clubs did not receive a race date from Queensland Racing in 2003-04 and may never race again with funding for prize money from Queensland Racing. In the 2003-04 racing year there were 47 clubs with one non-TAB meeting. There were six clubs with Queensland community racing schemes, four clubs with self-funded meetings, one club with only a betting meeting, and a total of 58 clubs with one meeting. In the 2003-04 race year total, clubs that did not race numbered 18. If we put all these clubs together with one race meeting or nil, we have 76 clubs, or a total of 147 clubs in Queensland—that is, 54 per cent of clubs had one meeting or none in 2003-04.

It is not argued that Queensland Racing's role is a commercial one. What is important to Queensland Racing is the bottom line. It is obvious that the wellbeing of communities has been ignored in the rationalisation process. What also has been totally ignored is the human factor. Thousands of people have for many years voluntarily organised race meetings, maintained racecourses, provided information to whatever body governed racing at the time, filled in forms, raised funds, convinced sponsors to contribute to prize money and done the myriad jobs, such as cleaning toilets and making sandwiches, that go to conducting a race meeting and keeping a club viable.

Also forgotten by Queensland Racing in the rationalisation process are those people without whom there would not be a race meeting: the trainers, owners, jockeys, stable hands and everyone else involved in providing the horses in order to put on a race meeting. Why do they do it? They do it for the love of racing and their community. The bottom line is not what country racing is about. It is about a racing event, a social event and a community event. It is about a community working together to provide what may be the only event for that community in a year.

Following the rationalisation 30 communities may no longer be able to do this. At this time I have only visited half the country race clubs, but it is clear there are many issues common to them all that have an impact on country racing. These issues include the lack of consultation in the rationalisation process with clubs generally, the formation of racing circuits, occupational workplace health and safety issues, maintenance of infrastructure, club representation on regional associations, the shortage of jockeys and horses, the allocation of race dates, the allocation of TAB meetings, improving the quality of horses, marketing, integrity services and mobile TAB vans. These are issues Queensland Racing and UniTAB will have to address.

In closing, I would like to thank the many clubs that have willingly met with me, sometimes early in the morning, late into the evening and on the many weekends. They have travelled long distances and

often brought smoko with them. I thank them for their openness, honesty and willingness to share their knowledge of country racing. I table a list of clubs that I visited over that period of time.