



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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RACING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (7.41 pm): I hope the Racing Amendment Bill addresses some of the issues of funding to non-TAB race clubs—that is, basically country clubs—by requiring that seven per cent of Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board shares of the net UNiTAB product fee are allocated as prize money for non-TAB racing. I hope this bill addresses the effects of racing cutbacks in my electorate, because 16 clubs in my electorate have been affected. Charters Towers, Moranbah, Clermont and Georgetown have lost three meetings. Hughenden, Aramac and Richmond have lost one while Capella, Alpha, Jericho and Mingela have had their only meetings taken away from them. Other clubs such as Einasleigh, Twin Hills, Oak Park, Kooroorinya and Towers Hill have lost significant funding.

I want to bring to the attention of the House the fate of the community of Georgetown following the cutbacks made in the regional racing program. Georgetown is at the southern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria and the closest town to the north of Georgetown is Kowanyama. Many of the communities in this area are isolated and people have few opportunities for social interaction outside their families. There are at least four racehorse trainers in this area alone. Prior to the cutbacks there were three annual race days at the Georgetown racetrack. The community was led to believe that it would lose one of these race days. However, it has lost all three. This has caused great headache amongst the entire community and surrounding districts.

The minister must take into consideration that race days in rural communities are eagerly anticipated as a major social, sporting and community event. They are historically well attended, with people travelling hundreds of kilometres. These gatherings encourage and develop a great community sense of spirit. Removing these race meetings is akin to removing the Birdsville race meeting. These meetings are the lifeblood of these small communities. If we take them away, there is nothing much left. I have been asked to bring this issue to parliament, as the people of Georgetown and surrounding districts are very passionate about their racing and about the traditions that have been lost.

One of the biggest events was held on New Year's Day. Generations of people have attended it and it had become a basis for traditional family get-togethers. I request the minister to intervene and return this race day to the Georgetown community. Outside of Georgetown are river systems, crocodiles, roos and pigs. There are no race meetings. They have been taken from the community—three of them. There are no race meetings. The area has four trainers, and they want those race meetings back. Any amendments to this bill that strengthen and support the effort of the many country race clubs in Queensland are a step in the right direction.

I now want to speak about the Moranbah Race Club and the struggles it faced against Queensland Racing last year alone. In August last year the highly successful BMA Cup was run, but not without drama. The Moranbah committee was advised by Queensland Racing to seek sponsorship, which the committee had done with great success. However, Queensland Racing decided that it would not permit Moranbah to offer the agreed amount of sponsorship on this particular race day. It made this decision without any consultation with the Moranbah committee. In fact, Queensland Racing actually confirmed the initial prize money. It later changed its mind but never contacted Moranbah to let it know of the change. Rather, it contacted the Barcaldine district—completely out of the district—and gave it the responsibility of advising

Moranbah of the decision after the close of the calendar. This ensured that Moranbah had no chance of appeal. Consequently, the Moranbah Race Club had to run this race day on reduced prize money and struggled to get the horses to race on that day. I hope that this never occurs again as it caused a great deal of stress to organisers and the community of Moranbah. The tactics employed by Queensland Racing for this particular event were heavy-handed and unethical.

With regard to the Moranbah Race Club, Moranbah is a town of approximately 10,000 people. Within the next two years, the town will increase to 12,000 or even 14,000 people. The town has two race meetings. It had five race meetings; it has been reduced to two. The race meetings are held in August and November. At its last race meeting it was given the opportunity to fund that particular race date. It was granted that funding. It increased the prize money and drew a crowd of 1,600 people. However, the town has to wait 10 months before the next race meeting. It is, as I said before, a wonderful social event. It is one of the biggest events and an opportunity for the miners to kick their heels up and have a bet and a beer. As I was saying, the town's race dates have been cut from five to two. It is one of the biggest events in the town. It has to wait 10 months for the next race meeting. With a crowd of 1,600 people in an area that produces over \$6 billion in gross revenue, one would be led to believe that they would be given a fair share of race meetings. It is asking for a race date in April so that the town does not have to wait 10 months. If that were the case, it would be about halfway, so it would be five months between almost every race meeting.