



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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RACING (RACE FIELDS) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (7.55 pm): This is an important private member's bill that we are discussing tonight. I join with my colleagues in congratulating the member for Surfers Paradise for pulling the whip on old 'Radish' and trying to get him to go up the straight a bit—the honourable member for Rockhampton, I mean. He is dragging the chain. They cannot get him out of the barriers and it is time to do something.

When we look at the size of the racing industry and how important it is to the capital city, regional and country areas of Queensland, we realise that something has to be done before it is too late. Betfair, which commenced betting around 2003-04 and currently has about 2,500 Australian customers, matched bets of about \$400 million giving commission of approximately \$6 million. Betting exchanges are like SP. We have never, ever legalised SP betting in the entire time there has been racing in Australia. Plenty of people have tried it. Those who have read or watched *Power Without Glory* will realise some of the foundations of SP betting in Australia and the ingenious way in which they used racing pigeons to bring back the results while people were still betting. That is the sort of thing that could happen with SP, and it has never been allowed in Australia because of what it can do to integrity.

Integrity is the absolute essence of the racing game regardless of the code. That is the real issue with Betfair, internet betting and betting exchanges. There are two issues: the integrity but, most importantly, what it will drain out of the industry. The core funding of our racing industry in Queensland comes from UNITAB, from the people being able to bet knowing they have a legitimate bet, knowing that what they are betting on is conducted with integrity under the eyes of the stewards and that they can be confident of their bet—not confident they are going to win, but confident that, to the best of their knowledge, the dog or the horse will be trying. Here we are introducing a different sort of betting altogether which is, first of all, going to drain the key core source of income to racing in Queensland. Then there is the aspect of integrity. Allowing a system where people can bet to lose has us all wondering. It is hard to win, but it is easy to lose. That is where they will be betting.

It has been legalised overseas. In the British market the betting is worth some £2.7 billion. It is eight per cent of the British market. The Commonwealth government has been approached and it believes that it is state legislation that needs to be resolved. Victoria has gone out and done it. Victoria has been prepared to have a go, but not our racing minister. This government's members sit on their hands and do nothing. It is up to the opposition to bring in a private member's bill to try to jig this mob into a bit of action to do something to protect this very important industry.

The Victorian legislation comes under the Gaming Regulation Act of Victoria. As I said, at least they had a go and made a move. Now it is up to Queensland to move. Here is the chance for this parliament to enact legislation that is based on Victorian legislation which was no doubt very carefully scrutinised and analysed. The minister states that he has concerns there will be some legal action. Victoria has gone through that process and checked out how sound the legislation is and what effect it can have.

The Victorian legislation is based on Article 28 of the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities which restricts, for example, cross-border wagering without approval. Victoria and Japan have brought in legislation that somewhat goes along with that policy. There have been other similar efforts

made in places like the USA, Holland, Hong Kong, South Africa, Canada, United Arab Emirates and other countries throughout Asia.

The stewards in our racing industry have some degree of control and regulation over the bookies, those people who are wagering with the bookies and all the licensees involved in the racing game. Internet betting exchanges are anonymous: you do not know who the account holders are. They could be criminals. They could allow people to back horses to lose. They do not have the standards or the regulation. With internet betting there is no way of having that oversight and control by the stewards that gives people the confidence to bet knowing that the industry is genuine, that it has integrity—that they can have a decent bet and an enjoyable bet and know that they are not going to be done over.

The government has made the statement tonight, in a fit of pique I think, that it is not going to accept this very good legislation based on the Victorian legislation. It does not want to do it simply because we have brought it in. I bet those opposite bring in legislation that is almost a mirror image of this and say that they did it. At least we have put the jigger on them to get them into a bit of action.

When you look at this industry throughout the state and look at the racing industry particularly in Toowoomba in my electorate, you see that it is a massive industry. It is probably about the third biggest industry in our town. When you think of the huge industry we have in agriculture and education in particular, you realise the size of this industry. But it is an industry that caters for all people—from princes to paupers, from track work riders and apprentices to owners, to trainers, to catering staff, to those involved in advertising and communication, to car park attendants, to all the people involved in produce agencies, horse floats, breeding, training, breaking in and selling and all the rest of it. It is an absolutely massive industry.

I would like to take the opportunity tonight to congratulate the Toowoomba Turf Club for the outstanding results it has been showing in the last couple of years. About two years ago the club's profit was around \$200,000. Last year it was around \$400,000. The club is on track for another sound profit again this year. It is an innovative club: it is the club in Queensland that brought in night racing. I remember going with the then president and secretary of the TAB in Brisbane, trying to get TAB coverage of the club. We had to move the racing timetable to the afternoon to run parallel with Perth in order to get that TAB coverage. That led to evening racing and twilight racing in Toowoomba which has been successful in getting funds from the TAB coverage.

I want to congratulate the club for its innovative thinking at the moment in trying to drought-proof the track. With the issues we have with the lack of rainfall, the club is looking at a No. 2 track. I am talking about the importance of this industry. If Betfair starts to leach money out of the industry, the club will not be able to do this. It is looking at an artificial No. 2 track based on what is in Kentucky in America to drought-proof the track. How will the club do that if the money is not coming through? All the money from stable fees, gate fees and everything else has to go into prize money instead of running the club and looking after the facilities for the racing venue and the racing product.

If the TAB money is totally drained by these virtually anonymous booking agencies, these anonymous account holders—this anonymous betting that no-one has any control over—that is the biggest threat to racing we have ever seen in the history of racing in Australia, whether it is thoroughbreds or the trots or the dogs. Something has to be done about it before it goes too far. It is like a cancer. If you do not cut that cancer out early it will get away from you and you will never have control over it. That is why we in the coalition opposition have had the foresight and vision, through our member for Surfers Paradise, to bring this legislation into the parliament to try to put a bit of pressure on the government. Here is your chance. Here is some good legislation.

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr HORAN: What's up with you, old bottlebrush?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order!

Mr HORAN: Here is a chance for the government to vote for this bill which will give the Queensland racing industry a chance to stay strong and to maintain the integrity of the racing industry. I implore the racing minister to reconsider the decision that he has made. Here is his chance to do something. Here is his chance to show that he has the courage to accept what has been put forward—well-thought-out legislation from the opposition. This is a chance to provide the very protection of our racing industry that we need.