



Speech by

Rosa Lee Long

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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RACING (RACE FIELDS) AMENDMENT BILL

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (9.15 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Racing (Race Fields) Amendment Bill 2006. This bill is aimed at protecting the integrity of the racing industry. It also seeks to protect the racing industry from unauthorised betting exchanges which make no financial contribution to the racing industry or to the state. Into the bargain, some unauthorised betting exchanges could also allow people to back horses or other animals such as dogs to actually lose a race, and that could mean that punters might have to wait until the cows come home for the last horse to cross the line. There is great concern that this type of activity could attract undesirable activities of many kinds.

There is already a lot of pressure on country racing. The amendments which were brought in just last year were introduced because the old system was not working. So the new system was introduced, which is local clubs feeding information to an overarching committee and a separate delegate representing them at quarterly meetings in Brisbane. I have it on good authority that the new system is not working as well as expected and that some delegates are toying with the idea of resigning. They would very much like to meet with the minister to discuss their concerns but do not know if that is possible. So it is not just unauthorised betting and betting on the last horse that is threatening racing, and country racing in particular. There are other matters which need to be cleared up. I believe some delegates feel that their input in Brisbane is not valued and that their time in attending these meetings is largely wasted.

This bill raises serious questions about the possibility of organisations such as the unauthorised betting exchanges, which have their bases interstate or overseas, conducting businesses that have the potential to raise significant revenue which is lost to this state's racing industry. This has the potential to cripple the industry, particularly in country areas. The turnover of the TAB directly affects the amount of money that is passed on to country racing as country racing is now allocated seven per cent of TAB's turnover. If the turnover goes up, we get more. If the turnover goes down, we get less. It is as simple as that. So if unauthorised betting is permitted, taking revenue away from the TAB, then it could seriously impact on an industry which is so popular in this state.

My electorate of Tablelands has race clubs at Atherton, Mareeba and Mount Garnet—all of which have good tracks and have raced successfully for years. Atherton in particular has the highest number of horses being trained in the far north. We are part of the far northern region which covers basically from Cardwell to the tip. A number of clubs in this region closed in recent years when the huge culling of race dates took place. Most people and clubs still involved in the industry are very precious about keeping their current race dates. They are acutely aware that there are barely enough dates to keep their horses race fit and the trips to Townsville are too expensive for the battlers and too physically draining for themselves and their horses.

Another concern of clubs in my electorate is that they cannot obtain a list of the coming year's race dates from Townsville prior to having to put in their own dates at the end of each year. It would be helpful to know Townsville's dates as they race some 45 to 47 times a year and, as they run TAB meetings, Townsville gets preference. Because their prize money is always better, the jockeys tend to gravitate there as well, leaving potential shortages at other venues.

This is an industry vital to many country Queenslanders, and loved by many more. It should be and must be protected from the threats of unauthorised betting exchanges who will take away vital resources which could bring one of this nation's most popular sports and industries into disrepute and bring about its destruction. I support the bill.