



Speech by

Rosa Lee Long

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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RACING AMENDMENT BILL

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (4.20 pm): I rise to speak to the Racing Amendment Bill 2006, which aims to facilitate the transfer of employees, assets and liabilities and the responsibilities of the present Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board to a new corporate control body called Queensland Racing Ltd. This transfer will take effect from 1 July, just six weeks or so from now, even though Queensland Racing Ltd has been registered with the Australian Securities and Investment Commission since 2005. As the minister has said, this is the final phase of reform of the thoroughbred code in Queensland.

Also contained in this bill are amendments allowing for the continued operation of the Queensland Harness Racing Board and Greyhound Racing Authority through to 30 June 2008. These provisions recognise the fact, as indicated in the explanatory notes, that these two bodies are much smaller, with much less in the way of resources and assets, compared with thoroughbred racing and therefore more time is needed to figure out how their operations can best be moved on to a corporate footing. For thoroughbreds, however, corporatisation is less than two months away.

It is important to keep in mind the industry which is at the heart of this bill today, the racing industry. It is a major employer. It generates significant revenue. It fills very important social and sporting roles across Queensland, especially so in regional and rural areas such as my electorate. The Tablelands electorate is serviced by tracks at Atherton, Mareeba and Mount Garnet and they also race on tracks at Innisfail, Gordonvale and Cairns.

The recent passage of Cyclone Larry wreaked havoc on two of our northern tracks—the one at Innisfail and the one at Mount Garnet. The weeks of rain which have followed have resulted in the cancellation of meetings at Cairns and Innisfail. Thankfully, Atherton and Mareeba have not yet had to cancel as, luckily, they enjoy far better weather and have good tracks.

The Mount Garnet facility was badly struck by Cyclone Larry with day stalls, stables, the running rail and buildings all damaged. But thanks to the dedication of supporters and the valued help of volunteers all is on track for another fantastic event over the May Day weekend. We thank Minister Barton for his offer of assistance yesterday in restoring these facilities.

This event always draws thousands of supporters and visitors alike from all parts of the state who enjoy the racing, camping and social events. I can highly recommend the Mount Garnet race meeting to members who want to enjoy the very best of country racing and country hospitality.

Mr O'Brien: It's a great day.

Ms LEE LONG: Fantastic. I hope the member for Cook is coming. We cannot lose sight of events like this and of the regular meetings at Atherton and Mareeba and other places around Queensland for a very important reason. While horse racing is sometimes called the king of sports, it is, in reality, a sport of the people. Corporatising its control body is a very significant step. Under corporate control what certainty is there that the voices of the people, the ordinary Queenslanders, the mums and dads, the trainers, the jockeys, the bookies, the club stalwarts and everyone else who give this sport its heart will continue to be heard.

The minister worked hard to bring the new system, with new areas and direct representation for regions, into meetings of the Queensland Country Racing Committee. There have been some teething problems, but with determination and goodwill on all sides we hope it will bring a sense of ownership back to country racing. How far that will fit with corporate management and with corporate attitudes towards accountability remains to be seen.

We have not long come out of a period when country racing felt, very keenly, that it was considered the poor cousin of the industry. The minister's restructuring was aimed at overcoming that, among other things. I think corporatising the control body threatens to take us right back to that sorry situation.

This bill is almost entirely of a technical nature, ensuring various powers, employee status, entitlements and so on transition smoothly between the old control body and the new. It is important that all levels of this industry feel involved and play a constructive part in taking it into the future. The concern is that corporatising the control body will prove to be a hurdle in achieving that goal.