



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Friday, 21 April 2006

RACING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (4.25 pm): The objectives of the Racing Amendment Bill are to facilitate the transfer of employees, assets and liabilities and the ongoing responsibilities of the Queensland Thoroughbred Racing Board to the new control body for thoroughbred racing from 1 July 2006.

I would like to inform the House of the clubs in my electorate that have been affected. Charters Towers, Moranbah, Clermont and Georgetown have lost three meetings. Hughenden, Aramac and Richmond have lost one meeting. Capella, Alpha, Jericho and Mingela have had their only meetings taken away from them. Other clubs such as Einasleigh, Ewan, Twin Hills, Oak Park, Kooroorinnya and Towers Hill have lost significant funding. This bill does not offer strong, stable representation for country race clubs. Much emphasis is placed on a strong commercial gain without taking into consideration the flow-on effects that country racing provides.

I wish to bring to the attention of the minister the fate of the community of Georgetown following the cutbacks made to regional racing programs. Under this new control body, will Georgetown Race Club have at least one race day returned? Georgetown is in 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 extremely isolated and have few opportunities for social interaction. There are at least four racehorse trainers in this area alone.

Prior to the cutbacks there were three annual race days at Georgetown racetrack. They have lost the whole lot. The community was led to believe that they would lose one of these race days. However, they lost all three. This has caused great heartache amongst the racing body, local business and the entire community and surrounding districts. The minister must take into consideration that these race days in the rural communities are eagerly anticipated as a major social, sporting and community event.

They are historically well attended with people travelling hundreds of kilometres to attend. 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. Take them away and there is not much left.

I have been asked to bring this issue to the parliament as the people of Georgetown and the surrounding districts are very passionate about their racing. One of the biggest events was held on New Year's Day. Generations of people have attended it and it has become the basis of traditional family get-togethers.

I would also like to raise the issue of Moranbah. This area produces billions of dollars for the economy. They have two race meetings per year—in February and November. They wait 10 months for their next race meeting. These race meetings are the social fabric of these towns. It is an area that produces much wealth and much revenue. They are well attended. As the shadow minister for racing was saying before, 1,400 people attended the last race meeting and the meeting before that, the November race meeting, was attended by 1,600 people.

It is ridiculous that there is a 10-month gap between race meetings. The Moranbah Race Club has done everything within its power to get more race days. They are told that there is a TAB meeting in Mackay or a TAB meeting in Rockhampton. At those TAB meetings in Mackay and Rockhampton they are lucky to get 45 or 50 people. That includes the horse trainers and the jockeys. At these country race meetings are some 1,400 to 1,600 people. It is ridiculous for Queensland Racing to suggest that it cannot give the Moranbah Race Club another date because it falls in the same time frame as the race meetings in Mackay and Rockhampton.

As I was saying, race days are part of a country town's social fabric. They provide fundraising for P&C groups, the local pony clubs and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. I call on the minister to consider this issue to see if that town can get another two race dates between November and February, or possibly between April and September.

Rural communities do not trust this government's ability to manage the racing industry successfully. It is understandable that people will continue to be suspicious of any changes, as this bill proposes.