




Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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RACING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (4.12 pm): I rise to speak in relation to the Racing and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. At the outset I wish to indicate the opposition's support for the bill. The opposition will be supporting the bill despite having a number of reservations in relation to it. We have always maintained the belief that the LNP's commitment to pulling apart Racing Queensland Ltd and reinstigating three control bodies would be a destabilising and very expensive demerger for the racing industry. The demerger of RQL into three separate control bodies will cost the LNP more than \$1.3 million in efficiency savings that existed with a single racing control body. With this bill the LNP government is implementing an additional layer of bureaucracy and red tape by demerging RQL into three separate control bodies and then establishing an overarching Queensland All Codes Racing Industry Board. For a government that was elected on a platform of reducing red tape, introducing another level of bureaucracy into the racing industry seems somewhat extraordinary. The \$1.3 million in efficiency savings which were realised through only having one control body could have been spent by the LNP government on conducting extra race meetings or allocating more prize money in the same way as the previous Labor government spent such savings, but instead the LNP will put the money towards additional red tape and bureaucracy.

I also note that with this bill the LNP government is transferring the integrity functions which are undertaken by the control body to the government, but this process will still be paid for by industry. I bet the proposal went down well with industry, making them pay for something that they no longer have any power over. In the political climate we have in Queensland at the moment, where every day we see new integrity and accountability questions raised about numerous members of the LNP government, the LNP government is transferring more integrity responsibility back to itself. The original reason racing integrity functions were removed from government and made the responsibility of the racing industry was a handover from the 'Minister for Everything', Russ Hinze, and his improper grip on the racing industry. We are seeing Queensland politics slide back into the murky pre Fitzgerald days. On the same day we see a poll indicating that more than half of Queenslanders do not trust this LNP government, it is convenient and coincidental that the LNP government is granting itself more integrity powers. The bill also proposes the minister has more involvement in and power over the operations of the control body. Again this echoes the ghost of Russ Hinze who, as racing minister, had absolute control over the industry. At a time like this it would be a disaster to take the racing industry back to the uncoordinated arrangements of the past.

I also note the bill ensures that the control bodies will be provided with the necessary powers to manage the industry, but it mentions nothing about the funding to establish and manage these processes. In fact, the department briefing identified no extra funding would be provided to the board structures even though the amount of board positions will go from seven to 11 members. The department briefing also identified that despite the LNP advocating this model for years, as recently as a couple of weeks ago, on 7 November, they had no idea how this was going to be funded. Many of the costs associated with the structure, including the remuneration details of appointments to the all-codes board and the control boards, as well as the costs associated with the Racing Integrity Commissioner, had not yet been decided and I accept the comments made by the minister earlier. Today we are debating a bill without the full details of how it will be funded and how the minister will pass the costs on to administer the integrity functions of the

industry. This also seems highly suspicious for a government whose integrity is questioned by the people of Queensland on a daily basis. The opposition will follow with interest how the minister approaches the integrity functions and how the changes in relation to legal representation and appeal rights will work practically.

Section 9CO of the bill also precludes the minister giving directions to the control board to request specific allocations of race days by the all-codes board. It appears the minister is also not lawfully allowed to allocate prize money for races. This is despite the minister speaking about the LNP election commitment to support country racing with \$1 million a year to fund an additional 20 race meetings over the next four years. I fail to see how the minister will deliver this election commitment and also ensure the boards comply without breaching section 9CO of the bill. The farce that this parliament has become is that we find ourselves in a situation where an LNP election commitment seems to breach a piece of the LNP legislation which, funnily enough, was also an LNP election commitment.

The consultation process for this bill also raises concerns about the future of racing in Queensland. The bill was introduced to the parliament on 1 November and submissions to the Health and Community Services Committee closed on 12 November. I am concerned about the lack of consultation which has been a hallmark of this government. But what is also concerning is that the period of consultation spanned the Melbourne Cup Carnival. Because the Melbourne Cup Carnival attracted such a great proportion of the Queensland racing industry, the period of consultation was held at the worst possible time for the industry. It raises the question of whether the LNP government selected these consultation dates specifically over the Melbourne Cup period to avoid scrutiny of the bill by the industry.

Another indication that the LNP government is attempting to avoid scrutiny of the bill is that they cancelled with no warning a public committee hearing at which members of the industry would have been able to ask questions about the legislation. Racing industry representatives arrived at Parliament House to attend the public hearing, ready to give evidence before the committee. However, they were soon to learn that the committee was cancelled with no warning. Sadly, that meant the industry was not able to give the evidence that it wished to communicate to the committee. It is rather disgraceful that members of the community and the racing industry have been silenced and not allowed the opportunity to raise any issues they have with this legislation and ask questions of the committee. This is yet another example of the LNP government stifling the democratic processes in Queensland. Under this government, no proper community consultation exists in Queensland. The industry's concerns deserve to be heard, instead of being brushed aside by the arrogant LNP government.

The opposition is also concerned about the perceived watering down of the Police Commissioner's ability to advise the minister on the intelligence the commissioner may have in relation to the appointment of a board member. The bill appears to remove section 23(3)(c), which allowed the Police Commissioner to write in a report 'other relevant information to which the commissioner has access'. This means that the commissioner was able to advise whether a person was in debt to organised crime figures or had overseas convictions in areas of fraud or race fixing, for example. During the departmental briefing, much was made by the LNP committee members of the potential for unsuitable people who had adverse histories overseas being able to obtain a board position and what impact this could have on the local industry. The change in the bill means that the commissioner may not be lawfully entitled to provide this other information, including overseas criminal histories. The commissioner may have access to information other than criminal histories in the form of verified intelligence reports. The bill introduced by the minister looks to keep the commissioner quiet on this information. Any infiltration of the boards by unsuitable members may test the integrity of the industry and I can only hope the lack of consultation will not let someone untoward slip through the cracks, which would cost the state millions of dollars.

Despite the line of questioning during the departmental hearing by LNP members, it seems they chose not to highlight this potential problem in the final report and bring it to the attention of the minister. This is another example of the LNP's tactics to silence some elements of the fragile backbench. We all know the way that members of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee who dared to highlight problems with the boot camp and body corporate bills have been treated recently. Again, bullyboy tactics are stifling democratic debate in Queensland.

Concerns were also raised in submissions about the regional representation of the board members. Despite the minister's commentary on that matter, regional Queenslanders have already been burnt by what they believe is a Brisbane-centric LNP government and they are questioning whether the city Liberals have any real regard for their concerns. Those involved in country racing may well like to write to the minister and see how he will deliver on his promise for regional board representation.

The opposition supports the changes to the Wagering Act 1998 and the Interactive Gambling (Player Protection) Act 1998, which brings the bookmaking activities of Queensland bookies into line with other states and other new competitors in the industry. We also support the bill permitting bookmakers to use the internet to conduct bookmaking. We respect that people in the community enjoy gambling and we wish the Queensland industry well as it begins to compete against its interstate and international rivals.

The key to a sustainable gambling industry is ensuring that all players in the industry act in a responsible way. We understand match and race fixers will test the integrity of the gambling industry and we have seen plenty of examples over the years, not just in racing but also in other sports. We will ensure the minister sets up proper systems and processes to detect those types of fraudulent activities. The racing industry and the sports betting industry rely on transparent and accountable industries. I wish the stakeholders in the racing industry all the best as they work through these changes. The opposition will be supporting this bill.