




Speech by

Jason Costigan

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

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RACING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr COSTIGAN** (Whitsunday—LNP) (5.30 pm): I am absolutely delighted to rise in the House this evening to support the Racing and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and place on the parliamentary record my enthusiastic support for racing, in particular country racing, together with various members who have participated in the debate so far. What is country racing? I will give members a hot tip: it is racing in the bush, it is racing in our country towns, it is racing in our provincial cities and it is part of the social fabric of these communities. Over the years I have had the pleasure of attending many country race meetings around Central and North Queensland.

Mr Symes: As seen on Facebook!

Mr COSTIGAN: I have been seen on Facebook at various racetracks as the member for Lytton points out. Those tracks include Ferguson Park in Gladstone, Pioneer Park in Emerald, Ooralea in Mackay of course, Keppel Park on the Capricorn Coast, Ben Bolt Park in Bowen and Cluden in Townsville. Ben Bolt Park in Bowen is celebrating its 150th anniversary next year.

Mr Walker: Not the Dapto dogs.

Mr COSTIGAN: Not the Dapto dogs, I might add. Over the past decade I have been to all of those tracks that I have mentioned. I should also place on record that I am a very proud member of the Mackay Turf Club and the Bowen Turf Club, with, as I said a moment ago, the latter celebrating its 150th anniversary—the oldest turf club in the oldest town in the north celebrating 150 years of racing next year at Ben Bolt Park in Bowen. It was again tremendous to be alongside so many fun-loving people from the Whitsundays at Ben Bolt Park and even further afield—places like Mackay, Townsville and the Burdekin—at this year's Bowen Cup. The member for Burdekin is a regular there and it was great to be alongside her on that memorable day. I personally had the good fortune of co-hosting Fashions in the Field—not the first time I have done that. Suffice to say that the ladies looked spectacular and the blokes not too shabby either, although it is fair to say that it seemed to be the case that the fillies caught the attention of most observers.

As the member for Townsville remarked in his contribution to this debate, country racing is an opportunity for people to dress up, to have a punt, to have some fun. What is wrong with that—having some good old-fashioned fun, reconnecting with people you have not seen perhaps for years, essentially meeting up with your mates and having a damned good time over a few beers? Let us contrast that with Labor, who were the joy killers when it came to bush racing. I am sure the member for Gregory and the member for Warrego will know what I am alluding to here when I start mentioning places like Jericho, Windorah, Stonehenge, Alpha and Mitchell. They were all killed off thanks to Labor and other places such as Aramac and Tambo took a hit when it came to losing race dates, as did other clubs right around Queensland. In the dark days under Labor officials of country race clubs had very little say. If they did not sign over the ownership of the club, they basically did not get a brass razoo for capital works. That is what it came to. Back in 1989 when I worked in Bowen, racing was a regular occurrence at Ben Bolt Park, but

nowadays guess what? They only race four times a year—pretty ordinary, as I said earlier, considering that this is the oldest turf club in North Queensland.

In the decades prior, the old bushies around the traps would remember how horses would be put on the train at places like Collinsville and railed down to Bowen because the road was not sealed in those days. The Peter Delamothe Road, as I still call it, was not sealed until 1969. Of course, that road remembers a great champion of the people of Bowen. Returning to Labor's approach to country racing over these past two decades, we have seen two decades of waste, golden handshakes and shonky deals. You do not have to go too far to see the carnage that it left behind. In the Mackay-Whitsunday hinterland at places like Bowen River and Collinsville it is sad—very sad. My uncle Brahma Costigan first went to Bowen River in the late 1950s. Like a lot of bushies—salt of the earth people—they lament the loss of racing at Bowen River. When I was there in June this year alongside the member for Burdekin, who of course has a great history of going to Bowen River with her family and camping under the stars, I could see the look in poor old Brahma's eyes wondering how such a good thing for the bush bit the dust. In many cases these bush clubs died because of that lack of government support and, more to the point, governments that had a mission of just shutting them down, demanding unrealistic standards at racetracks. To think that you can have an Eagle Farm or a Doomben type set up in the bush is of course pure folly. The bushies certainly know it, but Labor regrettably just did not get it.

One of the great components of the aforementioned bill is the new approach to ensuring representation for regional and rural areas—something that bush racing has been crying out for for some time. I congratulate the minister for making this possible. For country race lovers, it has been a long time coming. The other two codes of harness racing and greyhound racing have also suffered thanks to two decades of Labor in Queensland. In the early 1990s one of my old jobs was to report on the dogs at the Townsville showgrounds. At that time I was working for the *Townsville Bulletin* and I got one of the big jobs: no court reporting, no chasing ambos; I would be going out chasing the dishlickers on a Thursday night. They used to hold the newspaper for me. The printers would say, 'When are you going to be back, Costigan? We want to file that copy so we can print the damn thing!' They were great days. Sadly, there is no greyhound racing in many places in regional Queensland, including my home town of Mackay, where of course the dogs enjoyed strong support many years ago on a Thursday night—like elsewhere across the state.

It is the Queensland Harness Racing Board by name, but it may as well be the 'South-East Queensland Harness Racing Board' as far as I was concerned. You only have to look at those who used to be regulars at paceways in places like Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and Rockhampton at good old Callaghan Park. In fact, in Rockhampton people like Mel Slade, a great stalwart of the Rockhampton Harness Racing Club, still shake their head at what happened—as I do recalling years gone by when I would be only too pleased to host club functions at places like the Cambridge Hotel. Harness racing is in the blood of Mel Slade, like many others who love the trots, and I am delighted to see his granddaughter nowadays in the gig winning races and making her Poppy proud. I noted the contribution to this debate by the current member for Rockhampton, who indicated that the opposition would support the bill. How noble, because it was people like his predecessor who hurt the racing industry, causing irreparable damage in the eyes of so many observers! The member for Rockhampton even had the hide to rave on about the so-called lack of consultation on this bill. As I alluded to earlier in the debate, where was the consultation when it came to shutting down clubs like Bowen River and Collinsville?

Mr Symes: None!

Mr COSTIGAN: That is right; there was none. There is no doubt that under Labor, which prior to March this year occupied the treasury benches for 20 of the last 22 years, racing did suffer. In the case of regional communities, it was killed off in some places up and down the coast and of course areas west of the Great Divide. In this debate we have already heard about the much needed reforms to racing in Queensland and this new era being ushered in by our new Minister for Racing that will be delivered thanks to this bill. I certainly will not double up too much on that but simply sum up this debate from my point of view by quoting the words of the minister—

The 30,000 people who rely on the racing sector for their employment will once again have a voice.

I commend the bill to the House.