




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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RACING INTEGRITY BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10.30 pm), in reply: I start by thanking everyone for their contributions to this debate. In particular, I acknowledge the speech made by the former minister for racing, the current Minister for Police. I know that he spent a lot of time pulling all of this together. I thank him for his contribution this evening. I thank all of my colleagues on this side of the House, who understand what it is we are trying to achieve with this Racing Integrity Bill.

This bill really is about securing the stability and future of racing. One thing I want to make clear is that this government is not prepared to sit back and do nothing after we had a very comprehensive inquiry and accepted the recommendations of that inquiry. We are now enacting the recommendations that this government accepted.

I have heard a lot this evening about the lack of consultation. The amendments included in this bill followed the MacSporran inquiry. That was an inquiry held with extensive consultation. The government then took the inquiry's recommendations and decided to implement the first three of them.

The intention was to commence a review of all three racing codes. It was not limited to greyhound industry issues; it also focused on all three racing codes. Anyone suggesting that Alan MacSporran QC, a very learned man, would make recommendations without thoroughly looking into the issues he was tasked with addressing is mistaken about the calibre of the person who headed this inquiry. To suggest that he made these recommendations blindly, without fully considering all of the information, is completely wrong and misleading.

I met with Mr MacSporran. The previous minister met with Mr MacSporran. I can tell the House that he landed very firmly on his recommendations and considered them extremely thoroughly, in the honourable manner in which he operates. For those opposite to suggest that recommendations were made on a whim or that he did not consider them fully is completely wrong and misleading the House.

Mr MacSporran found that the model of self-regulation in the racing industry had contributed to the lack of action on greyhound live baiting and other greyhound racing issues. The report also found that the self-regulation model created risks for animal welfare in other codes of racing. He found that; he did not make it up. Those opposite should read the MacSporran report, as the Minister for Police said. Mr MacSporran found that a restructuring would reduce these risks across all codes—an all-codes board that currently exists and that also existed under the previous government. Those opposite did not have separate codes; they all existed in the all-codes industry board.

Recommendations 1 to 3 of the MacSporran report stated that a new statutory authority should be established, a new board structure put in place and enhanced powers provided to authorised officers to ensure greater integrity and animal welfare in the Queensland racing industry. He did not make those

recommendations lightly; he made them because that is what he found in his investigations. For those opposite to come in here and say that he stepped outside his terms of reference or that he did not consider the whole industry is to propose a fabrication and indicates that they have not read the report.

The recommendations made by Mr MacSporran were not limited to greyhound racing but applied to all sectors with a view to improving public confidence in the racing industry through improving integrity and animal welfare. If we do not increase the wagering in this industry there will be continuing problems. The way you increase the wagering is to get back public confidence so that we can grow and prosper this industry.

There was also a lot of comment about my releasing or not releasing the costs. I released the costs when I cemented the funds available for QRIC through our CBRC process. We are fully funding the additional costs of QRIC across the forward estimates. As I have been continually saying in this House and outside, the industry will not incur any additional costs. In fact, it will make savings on what it would have normally spent in the area of animal welfare and integrity. I have put figures before the House. They were read out by the member for Murrumba. They are on the transcript. They have been tabled in the response to the committee. All of the costings are completely consistent with previous statements that the establishment of the new QRIC will not cost the racing industry one extra cent. In order to maintain integrity and animal welfare in this industry, the government has provided the money up-front for that to occur.

We have an outstanding commissioner designate heading QRIC, a person of the calibre of Ross Barnett. I say to the industry: if you are doing nothing wrong, you have nothing to fear. However, if you persist in animal cruelty or in abusing the integrity of this industry, you will be caught and you will be dealt with. Public confidence in this industry needs to be maintained in order for it to grow.

In terms of the issue raised by the member for Currumbin relating to bookmakers, the changes actually bring about less red tape. They do not increase it. The changes mean that bookmakers will now need only one approval in one place instead of two approvals in two different places. They actually streamline the process. They make things a lot easier for them. In fact, everything else remains exactly the same. I thought that was a good thing for bookmakers. They are unfortunately reducing in numbers. Hopefully this will be an incentive for some to embark on that wonderful career.

In relation to search powers, the bill does provide to QRIC's authorised officers powers similar to those given to RSPCA inspectors. MacSporran found that Racing Queensland did not have the powers to properly investigate these animal cruelty and integrity issues. Also, there was confusion about who had responsibility to regulate this industry. We are putting all of that aside. They will have equal powers with set responsibilities in relation to ensuring the integrity of animals in this industry. It is simple and clear. It is not over the top. It is not overreach. It is just a parallel power that gives both the ability to look into the issue of animal cruelty and into integrity issues and to collect and share information where they suspect that an offence is being committed.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Order! Members, there is a lot of background noise. If you want to have a conversation please take it outside. I am trying to listen to the minister.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Obviously this will allow the taking of appropriate disciplinary action in relation to suspected offences with regard to animal cruelty. I listened to clubs and venues and I think it is appropriate that Racing Queensland maintains control of those clubs and venues, and this issue is the subject of amendments as mentioned by the member for Currumbin. We have moved those clubs back into the administration of Racing Queensland—I think that is the right thing to do—from QRIC and it is something that the industry has told me that it wanted and I am very happy to accommodate that. I apologise that there are a lot of amendments because of that, but I want to get it right. With regard to concerns about disciplinary actions taken, as I have said, they will be reverting back to Racing Queensland and there are a few amendments in that area. There are a lot of issues about the composition of the board. I want to say one thing about this: MacSporran landed very solidly on this. I questioned him extensively about it. I also say this: I do not know that I have met too many people in this industry who have been happy with previous boards. I honestly do not know too many that have not at some stage had complaints about every single previous racing board, whether they had experience, whether they had knowledge of the industry or whether they did not. Even the member for Dalrymple said that country racing people were concerned about all of the cuts that had happened previously. This is an issue that has been going on for a long time.

Mr Stevens: Your mob—Bentley.

Ms GRACE: I take the interjection from the member for Mermaid Beach. No-one has been happy with the previous board. I rest my case. What Mr MacSporran is saying is that you need to take away that direct interest and you need to bring about some skill sets of people who will be able to work

together to improve racing, and that is what we on this side of the House want to see. I am passionate about ensuring that that is what it delivers. There were issues in relation to a regional person, and they went through a comprehensive selection panel. The member for Buderim is incorrect: everybody who was recently appointed to the board went through a very intensive selection panel that was open and transparent.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms GRACE: Yes, that is right. He went through that process. Peter Arnison, the Director of Energex and the former governor, was on the panel. Kerryn Newton, the Managing Director of Directors Australia, was on the panel. Jim O'Sullivan—your part-time commissioner—was on the panel. They went through an extensive selection process in relation to who was to be put on the board and that person was recommended to be on the board to represent the regional thoroughbred area as well as the thoroughbred industry. It was very disappointing to me that certain facts came to light. I took swift action—and I make no apologies for it—and it was most unfortunate, but Mr Rundle did the right thing because he understood. I think that that is enough said about that issue. When it comes to implementing that recommendation, as I said, 'independent' means that they have not been directly involved in the industry for two years. Mr Steve Wilson has had a background in the thoroughbred industry at some point. It is not a huge background but he has an understanding of it, so suggesting that the independent members are going to have no idea of the racing industry is incorrect and I have already demonstrated that with the independent chair—a high-calibre Queenslander who has all of the skills necessary to bring the racing industry forward and who is enthusiastic, passionate and very much looking forward to taking on the role.

I agree that it is important that we look after country racing, and the government has put its hand in its pocket when it comes to country racing. All of—

Mrs Stuckey: Two years!

Ms GRACE: No, it is not just two years. It is \$21 million over the forward estimates and we are guaranteeing at least the funding of their prize money for two years, but we go beyond that as well. It is not just the two years. By that time we hope that when Eagle Farm comes online we build the wagering revenue and then hopefully we can get the racing industry back on its feet and that it not only increases the funds available for country racing, because I want the board to work very closely with it, but also prospers. I agree with the member for Mount Isa that there may not be an avenue for every single country race club to do something, but there are many that are looking forward to doing so and there have been many propositions put forward to me that they would like to advance in country racing and I look forward to the board working with them to advance those ideas.

I agree: it may not be the whole lot, but at least we can have a look. However, we are guaranteeing that section for four years with \$21 million. We are also underwriting the industry this year to the tune of \$32 million. The member for Nanango got up in this House and said that we hate country racing. Yes, we hate it so much we are funding it to the tune of \$32 million this year, there is \$21 million for country racing and now \$36 million to bring about proper integrity in this industry. It is ridiculous and does not make any sense and I totally refute anything in relation to that. Country racing will be protected, but once again let us not confuse tracking towards sustainability in terms of this \$32 million loss made by the racing industry. Under the previous minister they increased the prize money to levels that were unsustainable—

Mrs Stuckey: Not true!

Ms GRACE: Go and read the audit report; I take the interjection from the member for Currumbin. She obviously knows nothing about business and knows nothing about figures, because anyone who comes into this House—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Order, members! Order! There will be no interjections across the chamber.

Ms GRACE: Anyone who comes into this House and accuses someone who owns shares in a publicly listed company of holding a private direct personal financial relationship just shows that they know nothing about business, because that would be the same as saying that anyone who owns Woolworths shares has a direct personal financial relationship with the chair of Woolworths, and that is absolutely ridiculous. I want to put this on the record very clearly: there is no business relationship between myself and Steve Wilson. There never has been and there never will be in the future. I have no letter from the Integrity Commissioner to table because there is no conflict and there is no business relationship. It is a fabrication, it is completely misleading and it is a disgrace to suggest so. I do not even want to talk any further on that issue because I do not want to justify the indignity of what is being said by responding to it.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you can pause there for a second, Minister, there are too many interjections across the chamber. I would ask anybody who wants to have a conversation to go outside. There is too much noise.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I also want to address the issue in relation to the standards that will be set. Members opposite have raised concerns about the role of the standards under the proposed Racing Integrity Act and their potential effects on country racing clubs. These issues were raised. We have addressed them and there will be no requirement in this bill for standards made by QRIC to be a one-size-fits-all solution. QRIC will be working cooperatively with the industry to develop standards that are not only effective but also practical for clubs to implement with respect to a number of issues.

A number of allegations have also been raised in relation to one board being a bad idea. That is the structure that has been in place for many years now. It did not change under the previous government and MacSporran suggested that that is the way that it should work best. There were allegations made that the Labor government is destroying the racing industry. I heard some members opposite wax lyrical about the LNP being the friend of the racing industry. That is not what I have been told. With friends like the LNP, as has been often said, who needs enemies? The LNP courted the industry with false promises, knowing full well that those promises could not be fulfilled. The LNP hiked prize money to a level that could not be sustained. We have seen funds depleted—and these are not my figures but the figures of the Auditor-General—and black holes that have needed to be filled by a Labor government. This Labor government knows full well what it needs to do. The careless way in which the LNP does business—its play now, pay later attitude—was destroying the racing industry. This government will not stand by and let that happen. Once again, we will clean up their mess.

I think it is very important that we get the relationship between the industry and the board right. As I have said, we can throw mud in this place, but I believe that those who have been appointed to the board are of a fine calibre. I look forward to appointing the remaining four representatives to the racing board when this bill is passed. I look forward to them getting to work and consulting extensively, giving me a five-year forward plan and giving me a clear picture of how the budget will work for the next five years so that we can get this industry up and running and do the best that we can for racing in Queensland, because that is what we want.

The existing legislation has provided for the control bodies to govern and oversight all aspects of the industry—from commercial matters to integrity and animal welfare. However, as I have said, this has not worked. The bill will provide for a new governance structure for the racing industry that will provide for better integrity and animal welfare.

Let me put it as simply as I possibly can: country racing will be looked after. There is \$21 million for country racing. The board will work with country racing over the next four years to develop country racing so that it can grow and be prosperous. MacSporran landed fairly solidly on QRIC, which will have a separate integrity regime. That regime can concentrate on animal cruelty, animal welfare and integrity in the industry in a regulated environment, and that is where it should be. Racing Queensland, with an expanded board, will then have the ability to concentrate on the business of racing and concentrate on making Queensland the prime racing state in this nation. Racing Queensland will concentrate on helping country racing. It will concentrate on the wagering issues. It will concentrate on bringing Eagle Farm online and making sure that Queensland's love affair with that racecourse continues. I want Racing Queensland to concentrate on issues such as country racing tourism. I want Racing Queensland to concentrate on issues such as racing tourism in Queensland. I want Racing Queensland to look at ways in which it can make Queensland racing the best it possibly can. Racing Queensland cannot do that if its attention is diverted at the same time to integrity issues.

The members opposite have mentioned a lot of names in this place. I have met a lot of people. My last response is to the member for Warrego. My diaries are public. The member can see how many meetings I have had with the industry, how many meetings I have had with race clubs and how many meetings I have had with turf clubs—and there are quite a few. I suggest that the member have a look at them, because they are just too numerous to mention in this House. I have had extensive consultation. I think even the member for Currumbin would say that I have been meeting with as many people in the industry as I can.

Mrs Stuckey: And so have I and you could acknowledge that.

Ms GRACE: I acknowledge that the member for Currumbin has done so equally. However, her meetings have been about misinformation. My meetings have been about making sure that the industry prospers.

I look forward to the bill being passed. I plead with the Katter party to support this bill. If they want to advance country racing, we need Racing Queensland to concentrate on doing exactly that. Racing Queensland will not have its eye on integrity; its eye will be on advancing racing not only throughout the eastern side of Queensland but also in the country areas and QRIC can get on with the job of integrity in the industry.

Mrs Stuckey: There was no consultation.

Ms GRACE: I take the injection from the member for Currumbin, who keeps peddling false views about there being no consultation. There has been extensive consultation on this bill. The committee consulted with the department. We had an inquiry. Racing Queensland was consulted. I have consulted extensively. We continue to consult extensively. This bill is good for Racing Queensland and I commend the bill to the House.