




Speech By
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RACING INTEGRITY BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (10.13 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Racing Integrity Bill. The first point I would like to make—and I think the most significant—is the make-up of the board. The drive behind this is to have people outside of those fields to spread the fields of expertise. It makes me consider how other industries effect this in other ways. I recall a conversation I had with someone in the trucking industry. We were discussing the adverse decisions and conditions in the industry as they had grown or manifested over the years. I said, ‘How do you think this has come about?’ He said that he used to go to the trucking industry forums and they used to be full of blokes in Jackie Howe singlets; they were drivers. He said that 90 per cent were drivers and 10 per cent were white-collar executives. He said the problem now is that Toll IPEC white-collar executives make up 90 per cent and 10 per cent are drivers. I think that is what we are getting at here; there are too many people who are distanced from the industry and it is having an impact.

It has been said before that the genesis of all of this is the greyhound racing commission. Some of those earlier comments that tarred the entire industry were very unfair, because I personally know of some very responsible participants in that industry. Quite rightly, it is very important to crack down on those sorts of practices. Those responsible participants in that industry are very grateful for that clean-out. I still struggle to see why this is needed in the racing industry. I get that the government wants to alleviate any risks in the racing industry. However, if they are going to go to such an extent and undermine the structure of an industry and take such a huge punt on restructuring it, they would want to be sure that that is the right option. I am not convinced that those options were considered in formulating this bill. I am also not convinced that the people were pulled along the way with it.

I do not claim to know the industry inside out, but I certainly have a lot of friends in my electorate in the racing industry. The feedback I have received is that they are vehemently opposed to what is happening here. They very much want to be part of a change or an improvement in the industry, but they would like to start from scratch. Perhaps there are one or two operators out there who need to be jerked into gear every now and again. That is important. I am not trying to devalue that drive or that impetus to pick that up in the industry. We can overreach with these things and the inadvertent effects of that can be dire. Quite rightly—and I am going to pick on the country areas—usually when rules are made for the aggregate and for the populous areas, all too often we can lose the particular characteristics and idiosyncrasies of country races or western areas. They just get lost at a board level and we can lose that connection, particularly if there are not enough people with experience in that industry. I think that is the risk here. One of the pertinent points that was made in the hearings was likening the formulation of the board to cross codes in football, for example, putting together a Rugby League, Rugby Union and AFL board to run all those separate codes. Sure, there are some similarities, but it would not make sense if we herd them like that. I think that is akin to what is happening here.

In terms of the composition of the industry, we could say about 75 per cent of the industry, give or take, is thoroughbred and the balance comprises the others such as harness racing and greyhounds. There really should be stronger representation of the thoroughbreds on that board to reflect the fact that they are such a strong part of the entire industry—and that is if they are thrown together.

It also brought to light that there are opportunities for change and improvements here. The Victorian model was mentioned as one that could be looked at for Queensland to copy. I am told that we have gone closer to the Tasmanian model for whatever reason, but it is certainly not seen as the industry leader. I am told that Victoria is the industry leader, and that is the one we should be copying. A good thing about this is that QRUG has been formed, and it has brought some unity into the industry which has been a long time coming, and that has been really helpful. There is a good opportunity here to engage with the industry, and there is a strong call from them to take a different direction. Communication and having that endorsement on the ground is so vital to trust going forward from this point onwards. If you do not take people with you from the start, they are going to be fighting you all the rest of the way from now on.

I would like to make another point about the composition of the board and the types of people you can attract. The turn of phrase that you hear escapes me now, but I had a good chat with one of the new executives out in Mount Isa. It was a pleasant day at the races, but littered throughout the conversation was, 'These things need to fund themselves,' and 'There are opportunities for expansion, but they could be doing greater things.' That sounds great, but to be honest there are no great opportunities. The races are what they are in Mount Isa, and I am not sure there are many better opportunities. The truth is that Mount Isa was one of the wealthiest pound-for-pound per capita places because of the TAB funds that came through there. For a good 20 or 30 years they were ripping money out of there from the miners who supported the industry very well, and I do not think it is too much to ask for a little bit of support in those areas. I know that we are not talking about funding sustainability here, but it is related. People on the board keep talking about commerciality, but they are too commercially focused and they are going to miss the finer points.

If you look at the race takings and other income associated with the Birdsville races it may not look so great, but if you look at their business case I think it is worth \$5 million in economic activity to the town of Birdsville, and 50 or 100 people live there. That is an extreme example, but it is the same thing all through country racing. The economic activity surrounding this creates a great business case for the industry, so we need to ensure that it is supported. I am not sure that is always captured by people who do not have that strong background in the industry. If the board is not fully made up of industry participants, they have to be a strong contingent or otherwise it will miss the point. I cannot give you a plethora of examples of how that will play out, but in the fullness of time you will see that it lacks experience, credibility and good judgement, and things are going to slip through the cracks. I think that is why you are having problems with the industry right now, because they intuitively know that will happen with that type of structure.

Regarding integrity, I am happy to see that followed up. You hear the odd bad story, but by and large there are no big problems out there with the industry. It is a very rare event to hear of anything like that in the industry. I find it very difficult to comprehend that something which was confined to greyhounds was seen as a big threat to the horseracing industry. There could have been ways to look at strengthening the systems we already have. There are already tools and mechanisms there that we should have explored which may have been more cost effective. It is hard to say without seeing something in front of me, but I am sure that is a pathway I would have preferred.

This is really important to the future of racing, and I will go back to the example again. If you have too many people who are disconnected from the industry, they might have the best intentions and they might get to a few race meetings around the place, but if you do not have that background and that lifelong experience in the industry it is very, very hard to take these things in the right direction. I think there is a strong risk of that with this bill, and I think that is why you have seen such opposition from the industry and the people I mix with. I am very close to some of those people. The Ballard name is synonymous with racing in the Longreach area. The Huddy family in Mount Isa have had two Melbourne Cup starters in the last five years, and they are still racing horses in Mount Isa. We have some iconic people out there. They do not want to cause trouble and they do not want to be politically motivated, but these people are genuine industry participants. They care about the welfare of horses as much, if not more, than anyone in this room. They are the sort of people you really want to listen to and take direction from, and they are the sort of people who do not want this bill to go through the way it is.

Changes have to be made. We have to go back to the drawing board and talk to these people. That is how good sustainable development happens. If you bring this in now, they are going to be fighting for the next five or 10 years to turn it all around. I can assure you that when you have too many people who are opposed to this trying to sell it to them is not going to work because these people know. You have to listen to them and use them to help form the way forward. We have run a big risk by departing from that now, and I truly hope that tonight the House does not support this and that we go back to the drawing board.