




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR TOowoomba NORTH**

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### **RACING INTEGRITY BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (9.16 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Racing Integrity Bill. I will not be supporting this bill. The bill is another example of using the word integrity as a poor excuse for consultation leading to poor legislation. Before I move to what is contained in the bill I want to talk a little bit about what the racing industry means to the community in Toowoomba and the surrounding Darling Downs. Last week we had our biggest race day of the year, the Weetwood.

**Mr Costigan:** Always a big day!

**Mr WATTS:** It is a wonderful day for the community. Everybody comes out and catches up with their mates. The lead-up to it is really good for small business, whether you are a milliner, a fashion shop owner, a taxidriver, a restaurateur or a cafe owner. Even a politician can have a good time at the Weetwood. It is a great day out. As far as small business goes, it creates a lot of turnover. It is a big event. We should be encouraging events like this and making sure that they are efficiently run and that the industry is able to put them on with the help and assistance of Racing Queensland. The Toowoomba Turf Club gets help and assistance from Racing Queensland. It was a shame this year not to have Pat O'Shea around the track. He is someone who is a bit of a legend in Toowoomba and will be sadly missed in the racing industry.

I would like to quote a couple of people who gave evidence to the committee as it was considering this ill-thought-through and rushed bill. I would like to quote Mr Bob Frappell who is the chairman of the Toowoomba Turf Club. These are his words, not mine—

We are dumbfounded. Why is this government doing this to us? Is there anyone in elected government who knows anything about the thoroughbred industry?

He goes on to say, 'You want to destroy what we have worked so hard and passionately to achieve.' That is what he thinks. There is someone here who knows something about racing because his horse won the Weetwood. There is someone on the government side who knows something about it and I would like to congratulate him.

The reality is that a little bit of consultation would have been really helpful. The shadow minister, Jann Stuckey, came up and we held a roundtable meeting at which everybody had the chance to speak. The people in that room represented hundreds of years of experience in the racing industry. We talked about what Labor was proposing to do with the industry through this bill. Hardly anybody there thought it was a good idea; in fact, nobody thought it was a good idea.

**Mr Costigan:** Funny that.

**Mr WATTS:** I take the interjection, but it is not funny really. We are talking about people's livelihoods. When giving evidence, Bob Frappell also said—

So far, what has the government achieved? One, you have removed all the experienced administrators. Two, you have announced within eight hours that racing is broke. Three, you installed a liquidator with a massive conflict of interest who takes advice from an operations manager with no thoroughbred experience who came from the poker machine industry. Both are overseen by a Supreme Court judge who admits that he knows nothing about racing.

**Mr Byrne:** He knows about integrity, though.

**Mr WATTS:** Members opposite use the word 'integrity' a lot, but I do not see much of it. However, I thank the member for Rockhampton for his interjection. It is easy to say the word; how about we apply some?

Bob Frappell went on—

As people know, horses from the Darling Downs are being taken over the border to New South Wales, where the prize money is better. That takes money away from all the local small business owners. People are looking at putting their horses with New South Wales trainers, because they can get more money on the tracks over the border than they can get at a fantastic regional centre such as Toowoomba. Toowoomba is facing the biggest cuts of any track in the state, yet it has the biggest training facility. It makes no sense.

Before government members carry on interjecting, I will quote a few numbers. The Toowoomba Turf Club has 484 members, 24 full-time staff, over 150 race-day staff, with 94 registered thoroughbred trainers who directly employ another 20 people. The club has 125 years of history on the Darling Downs and boasts some of the most experienced racing industry people as its members. Despite that, before this bill was drawn up nobody came and talked to them.

Mr Basil Nolan, the President of the Thoroughbred Breeders Queensland Association, also gave evidence to the committee. To highlight the negative impact an ill-prepared bill that has been drafted without extensive consultation can have on the industry, I quote Mr Nolan, who stated—

A huge range of other industries rely on thoroughbred breeding as a main source of income: veterinarians, veterinary suppliers, farriers, feed merchants, farmers, machinery and equipment suppliers, transport, both stock and feed horses, stablehands, jockeys, race clubs, TABs—and they are just the main category. The racing industry also makes an enormous contribution to a diverse range of other employers through its social aspect: media and advertising, airlines, hotels, accommodation, taxis, caterers, restaurants and builders. It generates millions of dollars annually through tourism thanks to major events such as the Winter Racing Carnival, Magic Millions and numerous country cups held statewide.

Obviously, he is talking about what we do in Toowoomba. We are talking about hundreds of jobs in my area that potentially will be in jeopardy. For example, just around the corner from the racetrack, small businesses at the Whyalla Plaza will be affected. If no-one is going to the track to train their horses as they have all gone to New South Wales, bakers and newsagents and cafes in the shopping centre will be affected.

We all know that integrity is important in the racing industry, but it should not be done in the ham-fisted way that this bill proposes. Mr Robert McAuley OAM, the chairman of the Queensland Racing Unity Group, stated—

The bill is a confusing mix of integrity structure and its powers and racing operation structure and its powers. The integrity powers are wide and far-reaching. The commission is empowered to make its own laws, to police those laws, to determine guilt under those laws and to impose penalties under those laws. The pathway for review of adverse actions by the commission and upheld by QCAT to the court is unclear. It is confusing that special provisions have been made in the case of seize or forfeit an animal or other thing to go directly to the court. My members are confused about how this operates.

I hope that he can get some explanations. It is interesting that the government wishes to set up an integrity body that has all those powers while, at the same time, weakening the VLAD laws. In Queensland it will be easier to ride around on a Harley and cause problems as part of a criminal gang than it will be to train and race a horse. Under this bill, houses can be searched and cars can be stopped. Extraordinary powers are going to be given to people who are supposedly enforcing integrity, but those powers are not available for any other agency in the state. The government is looking to take those powers away from the police and the CCC, but will hand them to a horseracing integrity commission. It is unbelievable that the government would consider that to be fair and reasonable.

I am not saying that there is not a good place for integrity; there is. However, let us face it: Queensland racing is supposed to support clubs such as Toowoomba; not devastate them. We had to watch the Weetwood on a third-party big screen, because Racing Queensland could not work out how to unlock its own racing screens to hire them out to the clubs that they were bought for. There are tens of thousands of dollars worth of assets sitting in Brisbane somewhere, and in Toowoomba we had to hire equipment from a third party.

This bill has been rushed. What it proposes will be devastating for the industry, which will cost jobs and cause great discomfort to people in the industry. As we go through that disaster, members have to understand that there will be a couple of years feed-in with all of the mess. The effects will not be felt right now, but in three years time there will be no horses to run around the track, because nobody will have trained any as the prize money is so bad.