




Speech By
Hon. Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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RACING INTEGRITY BILL

 **Hon. WS BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services) (9.37 pm): I have managed to catch as much of this debate since it commenced with the speech from the member for Currumbin yesterday. I can honestly say that I have probably met single-cell organisms with higher IQs than some of those opposite. Their contributions are an attempt to rewrite history after 12 months of pretending that the Newman government never existed.

Let us go through a few facts. I was sworn in as the racing minister the very day that *Four Corners* aired its story. I went upstairs to my ministerial office and there was a DLO sitting there minding the fort with a pile of in briefs. The DLO said, 'Minister, we understand that there is going to be something on TV about greyhounds this evening. Perhaps you might like to watch it. It might be interesting.' I said, 'That will be great. I might learn something about the racing industry—or at least greyhounds.' Lo and behold, 20 or 30 minutes into that show and any person with any nous would have recognised that there was a substantial problem.

There has been the most limited recognition of any legacy of those opposite in the three years leading up to the point when this government was sworn into office. There was no recognition of the legacy that they left and the trail of destruction in the racing industry after three years. What happened? They came to power. We have heard members opposite talking about Bob Bentley. They came into government and brought in the chainsaw. They spent millions and millions of taxpayer dollars on an inquiry—an inquiry that was a witch-hunt to destroy the supposed legacy of previous Labor governments.

What did that mature? Millions and millions of dollars spent, not one prosecution. Despite their best efforts, despite the efforts to kick it upstairs and find this guilt that had supposedly infected Labor administrations, they found nothing—zero, millions wasted. While that was going on, in the background there were a number of reports done during their time, reports that indicated quite clearly the issues confronting the industry. What happened? Not a thing. They had inquiries and recommendations and here is one of them. The Newman government missed a real opportunity. There were certainly no smoking guns. There were 15 recommendations. Here is one of the recommendations—

Executive government review the suitability and efficacy of the present model of—
the racing board—

as a statutory authority assisted by the three codes boards, and the position of the Integrity Commissioner, to meet the needs and best interests of the three codes of racing and the stakeholders in the racing industry in Queensland but not before the second anniversary of commencement, that is, after 1 May 2015.

What they were saying even from their own inquiry was that you have a serious problem with your structure. You have a serious problem with the integrity commissioner, which is basically a ceremonial position. What happened? Not a thing. They sat back and let it roll along. They put their mates into running the board and they allowed the board to run rampant. Every piece that came out in

Four Corners sheets home to those opposite. It had nothing to do with the Labor Party. It had to do with the absolute turbulence and destruction brought on the racing industry and its integrity function by those opposite in their previous lives. There has been no recognition of that here this evening—none whatsoever. What happens? We come to power. We are sworn in and we have the greyhound inquiry.

There was commentary in the speech yesterday from the member for Currumbin about the process, about the things that were said. I doubt that she has read MacSporran's report. I doubt that she has read *Tracking towards sustainability*. I doubt that she has read the comments from the Queensland Audit Office about the veracity of the audit material provided by KPMG. It is impossible to have a sensible discussion with those opposite when you look at the speech given by the member for Currumbin earlier on in this debate. It was absolutely ridiculous. It was a personal attack and full of complaints—not a skerrick of substance or fact to support it.

There were two things that happened in this process: one was the integrity function. This government set up a systems audit. After about a month of that systems audit operating, it became clear—and representations were made to me by the commissioner, Mr MacSporran—that he was not receiving the level of cooperation necessary to complete his task within the time frame. What is a minister going to do when it is clear that there is a lack of cooperation coming from those who were positioned by the Liberal National Party, a failure to cooperate with the systems audit? Given the background that only a few weeks before we had had *Four Corners*—and the imperative associated with that should have been obvious to any fool—we had a lack of cooperation. It was quite clear to me that in order to send a very clear message to those involved we needed the powers of an inquiry. We needed inquiry powers to be able to access information, to demand information, to talk to people, to insist on evidence being given because that was what was necessary.

The member for Currumbin stands up and talks about the brilliance of the previous administration's construct in the three years they were in government. The *Four Corners* inquiry validated the success of that—a complete and utter failure. We had a commission of inquiry. We went through a process. There was an enormous amount of material investigated, put before the inquiry and Mr MacSporran made certain recommendations. The member for Currumbin has stood up and said that it was a very small part of the greyhound industry. These are direct quotes from the inquiry report—

... it would be naïve in the extreme, to conclude that the practice is not widespread.

...

The practice of live baiting could not be engaged in without the acquiescence of many, who although not directly involved, chose to ignore the cruelty and turned a blind eye.

...

... the system of self-regulation ... has failed ...

The system of self-regulation has failed. Have I heard anyone over there make any reference to that? That is what the inquiry said, and I have heard no criticism of Mr MacSporran or the thoroughness with which he undertook his task. The inquiry said that Racing Queensland was 'compromised' by a conflict of interest and that the 'current operational model is flawed'. That is the basic language in that report. There has been no acknowledgement over there: 'It was all fine when we left it—no problems.' It is hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.

We put in place administrators. Mr MacSporran's strong recommendation was the removal of the boards. The language used to suggest that there was no inference or reference of volume given to that is false, and he confirmed that to us privately once he had reported to us. His strong recommendation was the removal of the boards and to put in place his recommended model, which the Premier, to her great credit, acted on very decisively and very early. At that point we then put administrators in. That is when the second crisis, not related to in this bill, was revealed—the financials of Racing Queensland. Again, that is a legacy that sheets home to those opposite, that bunch of rocket scientists across the chamber who understand the industry.

The Queensland Audit Office was sitting inside that LNP board structure and raising red flags left, right and centre, 'This is not good. We are going in a bad direction.' But the board was sailing on, raising prize money, giving more incentives, doing everything they could without the slightest idea of what the financial implications would be. I challenge the opposition with this: go and read the commission of inquiry report, go and read *Tracking towards sustainability*, go and read the comments made by the Queensland Audit Office and start contributing to this discussion from a basis of fact and evidence.

The government has acted at every point in order to give confidence. We have underwritten the industry for an extended period from when we appointed administrators and we intend to underwrite the industry essentially for another two years at least, with a declining scale after that. That gives the

industry the appropriate opportunity to scale and structure itself to meet commercial demands. That is why the focus of the new board has to be a commercial operation. They still do not get it. They still do not get it that there is a conflict of interest between commercial operations and integrity functions. Those opposite should be celebrating the quality of the new integrity commissioner for racing. You could not get a better person and a better qualified person to do that job.

The final point I will make before I conclude is that the new minister has done fantastic work to move this bill to where it is. The government has acted in a timely, appropriate and at times forceful way to get us to where we are, to rebuild a new structure in a very short time. The effort that went into that from the department and everyone else involved was sensational. I support this bill, and shame on those opposite for not using one skerrick of fact.