



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Record of Proceedings, 9 November 2022

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 3)

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BETTING TAX AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (3.53 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Betting Tax and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The Education, Employment and Training Committee was tasked with the examination of this bill. The primary objective is to provide a more sustainable funding model for Queensland's racing industry. The bill achieves this through the introduction of a five per cent racing levy in addition to the 15 per cent betting tax rate; including free bets in the calculation of the betting tax; and providing for the hypothecation of 80 per cent of the annual betting tax revenue to the Racing Queensland Board.

The bill also proposes changes intended to ensure that country thoroughbred racing meetings in Queensland receive a minimum amount of the betting tax revenue paid to Racing Queensland. I am going to speak to the importance of supporting Queensland's regional and country racing. If you have not been out to a country race meeting, I encourage you to do so. It is so important for our local economy to hold those meetings. For many regional towns, their country race meeting is the biggest or the second biggest event of the year. This is where the town and country come together for a social day of catching up with friends and having a great time.

These race events are the major social event of the year. Generally they will also have a fundraising activity for local charities, so they are giving back to the community. I have been fortunate to attend many a country race meeting—from Mount Isa to Birdsville, Quilpie and around Gympie and Central Queensland. I have been known to enjoy having a bet and a couple of beers, and I love going to regional Queensland.

I know how important this bill is to our small regional towns. In Rockhampton in early July of each year, the TAB Northern Queensland Winter Racing Carnival happens. It features more than \$3 million in prize money and is launched at Callaghan Park. This two-day extravaganza at Rockhampton Jockey Club begins in early July and closes with the Cairns Amateurs in September. It starts with two days of big prize money and huge crowds for the \$100,000 Rockhampton Newman Handicap held on the Friday, followed by the \$150,000 Rockhampton Cup and the Magic Millions Capricorn Guineas on the Saturday. The Winter Racing Carnival then shifts to Mackay, where feature races are staged over two weekends beginning with the \$75,000 Mackay Newmarket Handicap and then, on the following weekend, the \$150,000 Mackay Cup and the Magic Millions Whitsunday Guineas.

The Northern Queensland Winter Racing Carnival is the centrepiece of thoroughbred racing in Central Queensland and North Queensland and is a major social event for these communities. Without the benefit of the betting tax, we would not be able to support this racing carnival and other events. These racing events are important to our local economy. People get dressed up to go out in their finery,

and it is an absolutely wonderful day. It benefits our local shops and there are parties afterwards at our hotels and clubs. For some country race meetings, people who are visiting from out of town fill motels. Of course, you also have those who are working in the racing industry who travel to the various regional race meetings across the state.

Without the funding of country racing, we would not have seen the \$2.3 million upgrade that has recently been carried out at Callaghan Park. The facilities for female jockeys at Rockhampton's Callaghan Park received funding for major upgrades as part of the Palaszczuk government's commitment to regional and country racing. The Rockhampton Jockey Club could cater for only four female jockeys in its current form, and this funding will triple the capacity of female riders, meaning that they can now cater for up to 15.

I welcome the upgrade to Callaghan Park's facilities which will also see improved flood resilience for the administration offices. As it sits beside the Fitzroy River, Callaghan Park will always face some risk of flooding. The new facilities will support 23 jobs during construction, which is scheduled for completion in time for next year's running of the Archer in May.

In the future, the Rockhampton Jockey Club would like to install the longest straight. They are currently working with the Rockhampton Regional Council. Once installed, it will be the longest straight found at any regional track—another thing to make Callaghan Park unique to the racing industry.

The Palaszczuk government understands how important events like the Archer and the Northern Queensland Winter Racing Carnival are to cities like Rockhampton. That is why we are delivering a new, sustainable funding model for Racing Queensland which sees all betting companies pay their fair share of tax, no matter where they are based. Racing plays a key role in Central Queensland. On an annual basis it contributes more than \$55 million to the local economy and provides more than 450 full-time jobs. The Rockhampton Jockey Club is one of the busiest racing facilities across the state, with close to 40 races staged each year.

As a committee we considered a range of factors relating to the betting tax act, the Racing Act and racing regulations. We met with a range of stakeholders, the majority of whom indicated support for the proposed changes. The current funding model for Racing Queensland was no longer sustainable and it was not sufficient into the future for that future planning. It is estimated there will be an additional \$80 million in revenue that the changes to the betting tax are expected to generate each year.

The proposed changes will provide Racing Queensland with more certainty and sources of revenue which are expected to reach approximately \$198 million in the first full year of reform. Through these changes we will be able to provide an adequate and stable source of funding for country thoroughbred racing, which will receive at least \$20 million a year. With racing in Central Queensland, it is so important to have those country events. It is the time when we all come together and enjoy each other's company. It really makes a difference to people's lives. When we look at what happened through COVID when we were not able to meet and things like that, we have since been able to get out, socialise and enjoy life. It is great fun having a bet and a few beers at the racetrack. I commend the bill to the House.