




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

Record of Proceedings, 25 October 2022

RACING INTEGRITY AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (4.09 pm), in reply: I thank the members of the House for their contributions to the debate. Whilst I welcome the opposition support for the bill, it is clear based on some of the contributions we have heard from them today that not much has changed since this original bill was debated in 2016. Aren't they all geniuses in hindsight? Everyone is a genius in hindsight.

As I have already said, passing the Racing Integrity Act 2016 was essential for addressing the systematic issues that were plaguing racing. The LNP fought against the Palaszczuk government's crucial integrity and animal welfare reforms every step of the way so I find it galling that we have on the one hand the member for Everton saying that this bill is long overdue while on the other hand we have the member for Surfers Paradise like a ghost from the 2016 debate launching a diatribe against QRIC.

Before I turn to the matters raised in the debate, I think it is worth revisiting, for the benefit of the newer members, some of the hysterical and dishonest allegations that we heard from the LNP during the debate six years ago. At the time, the members for Nanango and Warrego claimed the passing of the Racing Integrity Act would shatter confidence and spell disaster for the industry. Well, aren't they all geniuses in hindsight.

The member for Condamine accused the government of using the 2015 *Four Corners* program that led to the MacSparran report as an excuse to launch an attack on the racing industry. He went as far as saying—

New South Wales and Victoria have taken measures to address the practices of cruelty in the greyhound industry. The Queensland Labor government, on the other hand, saw the opportunity to take a hatchet to the racing industry as a whole across all racing codes. There was a gross overreaction in Queensland not seen in the southern states ...

The irony for the member for Condamine is that, no sooner was the ink dry on *Hansard*, the LNP members accusing us of overreacting had the Liberal-National government in New South Wales banning greyhound racing outright. That did not go well for them down there. New South Wales passed legislation in August 2016 to shut down the greyhound industry, plunging their industry into chaos and forcing the then premier, Mike Baird, to backflip on the ban in October 2016. That was the great overreaction of Queensland, compared to New South Wales. Aren't they all geniuses in hindsight?

Who could forget the member for Toowoomba North's bizarre prediction that we would run out of horses by 2019 because apparently the prize money was so bad. The member had this to say about the Racing Integrity Bill at the time—

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.

I recently attended the Weetwood race day in Toowoomba. I inform the member for Toowoomba North—all geniuses in hindsight—that there was no shortage of horses. In fact, what people from Toowoomba Turf Club did tell me that day is how excited they are for the inaugural King of the Mountain

slot race that will be held on 31 December. That new race in Toowoomba will run for \$750,000—they are all geniuses in hindsight—in prize money. It will be restricted to Queensland bred horses that are prepared by Queensland-based trainers.

Those opposite have no credibility when it comes to racing. So what did happen with the racing industry as a result of our reform six years ago, you may ask? The economic contribution of the Queensland racing industry has soared almost 60 per cent under the Palaszczuk government to a record nearly \$2 billion. That successful economic growth has been shared across all three racing codes since 2016.

Mr Hinchliffe interjected.

Ms GRACE: I will take the interjection from the minister, the member for Sandgate. Thoroughbreds are up nearly 50 per cent; harness is up 30 per cent; and greyhounds are up 116 per cent. Wagering turnover on Queensland product across all three codes was nearly \$7 billion in 2021-22. That is up from \$3.9 billion in 2016-17. The total prize money in breeding scheme payments across all three codes was nearly \$210 million in 2021-22, up from \$133 million in 2016-17. None of this would have been possible had the LNP got their way in 2016. Thanks to the Palaszczuk Labor government, the racing industry has changed for the better and is stronger than ever in this state.

I will now turn to matters raised during the debate. The member for Everton, despite voting against the original Racing Integrity Act, claims the government was too slow with this bill. The racing integrity reforms discussion paper was released in June 2019, and the government announced that we would establish a racing appeals panel. Unfortunately, in early 2019 the racing industry was hit with COVID. What we did in this state to maintain racing was incredible. They were able to continue and we worked with the industry. I was not the minister at that time, it was the member for Sandgate. It was a photo finish. We went out to consult the industry and they basically said, 'We have other priorities at the moment. We are fighting for our life. We want to keep racing alive. This is not the time to go out and start consulting about any amendments to QRIC.'

Those members opposite who are bemoaning the time it has taken were going to force the industry into prioritising this matter when they were basically fighting to stay alive. That is incredible. I do not mind if sometimes—

Mr Power interjected.

Ms GRACE: I take the interjections from the member for Logan. If there was ever a time we needed to consolidate and not disrupt, it was when the minister was speaking to the industry back then. We had COVID-19 right throughout 2020. I became the minister after the election at the end of 2020 and in 2021 we slowly but surely took our time when we got back on our feet to consult with them and make sure that it would happen.

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): The member for Nanango will not interject from another seat.

Ms GRACE: Member for Nanango, you should be in your seat. I do not mind taking interjections from the member for Nanango because we share a love for racing but only when she is in her seat. What we obviously needed to do was consolidate and that is what we have done. Here we are, and I thank those opposite for supporting the amendments because they are exactly the right thing for this industry.

The member for Everton asked for an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the 2015 Greyhound Racing Industry Commission of Inquiry report. They were in government at the time the *Four Corners* report came to life. There were 15 recommendations. I can advise the member for Everton that 10 recommendations and 61 activities have been fully implemented. This included the establishment of QRIC, which they voted against and which he and those opposite opposed every step of the way. The government did not support two recommendations so we are now down to 13. Two recommendations were suspended due to the significant reduction in greyhound breeding numbers so we are down to 11. The implementation of one recommendation by Queensland Racing relating to education and training of licensed participants is ongoing, as it should be. All of the recommendations have been implemented. For the member for Gympie to get up and say that they have not been done is completely inaccurate and is misleading the House.

The member for Everton and other members said that it was important that the panel members are of the highest quality and must have the respect of industry. For once, we agree. I agree entirely. As I said in my second reading speech, panel members will be appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of me as the minister for racing. At least six persons for appointment will have various types of experience. The chairperson and each deputy chairperson must be a lawyer with at least five years legal standing. I have spoken to QRIC commissioner Shane Gillard about turning his

mind to who we can have on this panel. I want the best people on this panel. There must also be at least three other members with expertise in relevant areas, including racing, veterinary science and racing chemistry.

I now turn to the contribution from the member for Surfers Paradise regarding the current integrity arrangements in this state. I say to the member for Nanango: referees and stewards often make a few mistakes. I do not think that the member for Everton would ever say that as a referee in the NRL he never made a mistake or a bad call.

Mr Mander interjected.

Ms GRACE: I will take the interjection from the member for Everton. Slight human errors that the process fixes are completely different to QRIC integrity issues of animal cruelty and health and safety.

No legislation is going to stop human error. Whether it is on the football field, the AFL field, the racetrack or whatever, it is always going to happen. For those opposite—all geniuses in hindsight—who think that we can eliminate those errors, they are dreaming because it is not going to happen. The current arrangements were put in place as a result of the greyhound commission of inquiry. Stakeholder feedback in response to the 2019 discussion paper indicated that in general stakeholders thought the current arrangements were working well. This bill maintains the separation between the integrity and commercial aspects of racing while addressing stakeholder concerns raised in consultation on the discussion paper.

A number of those opposite have raised cases involving people prosecuted in relation to racing. This demonstrates that they do not understand what the bill is about. QRIC does not prosecute criminal offences and these matters are not relevant to this bill. Prosecutions are conducted by the Queensland Police Service, not QRIC. I will say that again: prosecutions are conducted by the Queensland Police Service, not QRIC. Not all prosecutions are successful of course, and this can be for many reasons. That means that our legal system and the processes which we respect are always working. Unlike those who think that no matter what happens you ignore the process, we do not on this side.

In terms of cases that are relevant to this bill, in 2021-22 there were 1,721 original decisions made by stewards under the rules of racing and a further 498 decisions in the first quarter of 2022-23. In 2021-22 only 119 applications for review were made and most decisions were confirmed. For those who say that there is disaster and things are out of hand, the figures certainly are not confirming it, and they are the facts. When consulted, the industry did not seek to abolish the role of QRIC stewards. It wants these penalties they impose implemented faster and for the review system to be streamlined, and the bill delivers on that request.

I also note the member for Theodore's contribution in which he said that we need strong regional race meetings. I could not agree more. That is why since the Palaszczuk government came to office we have invested well over \$105 million in our country race program. This supports country racing through infrastructure grants, prize money, bonuses including the Queensland Thoroughbred Incentive Scheme, club-meeting payments, jockey-riding fees, superannuation and WorkCover expenses. Country racing in this state has never been so strong since the Palaszczuk Labor government came to power. Country racing has no greater friend than the Palaszczuk Labor government, and I will say that every single day.

I look forward to the member for Theodore's support of our betting tax reforms that will lock in greater long-term funding sustainability for country racing. We on this side of the House understand the importance of country racing. Since we have been in government—unlike the predictions of the member for Toowoomba North—country racing has been flourishing and doing exceptionally well because we have locked in prize money, TAB meetings, supported the bookmakers, infrastructure and the list goes on and on. The point-of-consumption tax bill will lock in the finance for country racing.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Minister, are you being mindful of the impending debate and not anticipating it? I would ask you to come back to your bill please, Minister.

Ms GRACE: I will come back to my bill. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your eminent guidance. We will ensure that country racing will continue to thrive in this state.

This bill is about providing a fit-for-purpose system of review for the decisions made by stewards under the rules of racing. Since coming to office we have passed nation-leading reforms that deliver higher standards of animal welfare and integrity across the industry, including the original Racing Integrity Act which established QRIC. I have a warning for the industry: if you do not do the right thing, and I have said it before, you will be caught and you will be dealt with. QRIC is a model that is unique to Queensland and created a clear separation between the integrity and commercial activities of the racing industry.

Despite what the member for Surfers Paradise says, QRIC does a fantastic job safeguarding the welfare of racing animals and maintaining public confidence in Queensland racing. If we listened to those opposite we would swear that racing was broken in this state, and we are far from that. The bill builds on our landmark 2016 reforms to enhance the integrity of the racing industry. Maybe those opposite should get out and about to some of their racetracks. Go talk to people involved in the industry. Go ask them about it.

Mr Perrett interjected.

Ms GRACE: I am happy to go to the racetrack with the member for Gympie, and I take his interjection: we will do that next year, member for Gympie. I have a bit of time for the member for Gympie, so I am more than happy to go to the racetrack with him like I did with the member for Nanango. We had a great day, and I ate one of her hamburgers as well. I suggest those opposite go around to speak to people in order to find out exactly what is happening because it is tick, tick, tick all the way.

The integrity of the racing industry to ensure timely implementation of disciplinary decisions while upholding the rights of industry participants affected by those decisions must be upheld. There has been lengthy consultation in the lead-up to the bill as well as through the inquiry by the Employment, Education and Training Committee. I thank it for its work and the member for Redlands for chairing. The widespread acceptance of the changes among stakeholders is evidence of the way the Palaszczuk government has listened to stakeholder concerns, prioritised what we needed to do during COVID and now we are ready to implement the integrity changes, and this bill delivers that. This bill will ensure a world-class appeals system complements what is already a world-class racing integrity system. I thank members for their support and commend the bill to the House.