




Speech By
Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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RACING INTEGRITY AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (11.35 am): I rise to make a contribution to the Racing Integrity Amendment Bill 2022. At the very outset I will say that the LNP will not oppose this bill as it is long overdue.

For many Queenslanders racing is a way of life. Whether it is a trip to the track on the weekend with family and friends or your livelihood working in the industry, racing contributes much to the social fabric of our state. That point is of course extremely pertinent to our regional and rural communities. Race meetings in those locations can be the lifeblood of the town, an occasion for people to gather from far and wide. It brings together communities and provides an economic injection to those regions. For some it puts food on the table; it pays the bills for many more. It is not just the racing industry directly that benefits from these jobs: there is a spillover into tourism and hospitality, just to name two more sectors.

On this side of the House we acknowledge and respect the contribution the racing industry makes to Queensland. The racing industry in Queensland now has more than 43,000 individual participants across all three codes and supports over 13,500 full-time-equivalent jobs. It is not insignificant. It is because of this contribution and status that the industry here must be beyond reproach. Having safeguards and rules and laws in place to uphold the integrity of the industry is an absolute must. It is also important to have a judicial process that is fair, well-informed and timely. Unfortunately, the industry has not experienced that in this term of government.

I would like to point out to the House that in 2018 the government released a discussion paper titled *Racing integrity reforms: review of the Racing Integrity Act 2016*. On page 1 of the explanatory notes to this bill it says that these reforms are in response to concerns raised in that discussion paper. It is a discussion paper from four years ago. Since that time and longer we have had an industry that has been in turmoil with regard to penalties, appeals, procedural fairness, natural justice and the timeliness of decisions. There are countless examples of where people's lives and livelihoods have been placed on hold or in some cases turned completely upside down because of the failure of the appeals process. Some decisions took an eternity. People with little understanding of the industry were making significant decisions that affected people's lives. There was the perception that Caesar was judging Caesar when appeal decisions were heard internally in QRIC and the system was also being played by others. The failings of the previous system caused incredible stress in the industry, more specifically with people's lives.

Despite the cries and pleas of people who have been in racing all their lives, this Labor government has moved to act at a snail's pace. I know that those opposite are happy to talk up racing, but when push comes to shove four years is an appallingly long time to sit on a discussion paper before addressing the concerns of the industry.

It is also important to remember that this is not a one-off either. Take the Greyhound Racing Industry Commission of Inquiry. That report was handed down in 2015 with 15 recommendations. The report went to the heart of racing integrity in Queensland—which is obviously what we are talking about

in the chamber today—yet seven years later, according to an answer to a question on notice from the minister late last year, only 10 of the recommendations were fully implemented. I invite the minister to give an update on the implementation of those recommendations and whether the remaining five are now implemented. It is typical of this government that they are quick to make announcements but hopelessly dismal at taking action in a timely manner after the fact.

Let us look at the Eagle Farm racetrack. The latest figure we have been given for the track is \$14 million, yet there are still some trainers concerned about its condition. If the racing industry is important to this government, the government certainly do not show it by being quick out of the gates to address key industry issues.

I want to thank the Education, Employment and Training Committee for their consideration of the bill, in particular my colleagues the member for Southern Downs, in his capacity as deputy chair, and the member for Theodore. I note that those opposition members did not submit a statement of reservation or a dissenting report.

The main objective of the bill is to reform the review processes for decisions made by stewards under the rules of racing by: one, replacing the current internal and external review processes for decisions made by racing stewards under the rules of racing with review by an independent panel; two, ensuring reviews are finalised within a reasonable timeframe; and, three, reducing serious welfare, human safety or integrity risks from being stayed pending hearing of an appeal by the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, QCAT. I note that the appointment of the chairperson, deputy chairpersons and members of the independent panel will be by Governor in Council. In establishing such a panel, Queensland will follow the approach taken by New South Wales and Victoria. If it is proven to be successful in those other jurisdictions, it would seem apparent that having such a panel in Queensland is a sensible decision.

It is incredibly important that the composition and make-up of this panel is given very serious consideration. It is important that the chair and the deputy chairs of the panel are of the highest quality. They must have the respect of the industry, and there are a number of ways we can ensure that. One of these ways is that they need to be appropriately remunerated, so I would ask the minister to not go cheap on these people. To have the respect of the sector, the chair must have a thorough knowledge of the industry. Racing people want to be assured that the person or persons deciding their future and their future livelihoods have a very good understanding of the industry. That was one of the criticisms of the previous system. I also urge the minister to ensure that the panel is resourced appropriately. The better resourced they are, the more effective they will be and hopefully fewer cases will go to QCAT, which should be the ultimate goal.

There are some other minor and technical amendments as part of the bill, including to provide for the publication of stewards' reports and other reports online in an effort to promote confidence in the integrity of the racing industry through transparent decision-making. Another amendment will remove the redundant requirement for QRIC to obtain and store fingerprints prior to licensing bookmakers.

This bill is long overdue. The industry has been crying out for a judicial process that is timely, well-informed, fully credentialed and not only fair but seen to be fair. I believe this bill goes a long way to making sure this outcome is achieved. We all hope that is the case because it is incredibly important that this industry remains fruitful and continues to flourish as it has been for the thousands of people it employs either directly or indirectly.