



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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TAB QUEENSLAND LIMITED PRIVATISATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (3.05 p.m.): I rise to add my strong support to this bill brought into the House by the Premier. It is a tremendous relief to speak following the member for Algeester; she made sense. Having heard the extraordinary drivel from the member for Warrego, who spoke before her, I was incensed and somewhat confused by what on earth that man could possibly have been talking about. I think he was most unclear in his own mind. He spoke for a long time about our dreadful economic management and how he did not believe that we had a surplus. However, he went on to say what we need in this state are big, big subsidies for country racing. So we cannot manage our priority and we cannot prioritise, but if there is anything—anything at all—that we should be spending more on it is the big one out there, the thing of which the people of Ipswich speak nothing else—country racing. I am very grateful to the member for Algeester, because she got us on a slightly better footing. I hope that we are now making a degree of sense in terms of economic policy. She certainly made sense in terms of social policy. We are on a smoother track than we were before.

As we know, this bill allows for the amalgamation of the Queensland and New South Wales TABs. It follows the amalgamation of the Queensland, Northern Territory and South Australian TABs and creates the biggest TAB in the country—even bigger than the notoriously aggressive TABCorp in Victoria. While there is a bit of angst about this bill among the more backward sectors of the racing industry—that is, the member for Warrego—it is clear among those people who have even a vague sense of how racing works and where it needs to go in the future, and those people who know anything about racing, that this bill had to happen. Racing is an international industry. Bets and even punters, horses, trainers and jockeys move freely around the globe. Some of the racing industries with which Queensland competes, such as Hong Kong, are far bigger than ours. If our industry is going to begin to compete on the international market, we need the best horses. To get the best horses we need higher prize money. To get the prize money we need a bigger betting pool and to get a bigger betting pool we need a bigger, amalgamated TAB. Those are the simple economic facts of the matter. This amalgamation and hence this bill are crucial to the future of racing in Queensland.

The Queensland government, I think very unfairly, has received a lot of criticism in the media and elsewhere, particularly from the dinosaurs opposite, for our reforms to the Queensland racing industry. If we listen to those troglodytes for more than a few moments, we would come to think that Queensland racing was in absolute decline, that there was a crisis all around and that the Queensland racing industry was somehow going down the tube. That is not the case at all.

Racing in Ipswich, for instance, has been professionally run by an excellent committee, a smart committee, comprising people like Wayne Patch, Jeff McLean, Ray Leskie, Paul Pisasale and others. Racing in Ipswich is very much going ahead. The Ipswich Turf Club is one of the few around that is in surplus. They now own the track in freehold, thanks to a decision by the state government to hand it over this year, and every year in Ipswich we run the biggest single race meeting in Queensland. Very few people would know that, but the biggest race meeting and the best race meeting in Queensland is not at Eagle Farm or Doomben. It is the Ipswich Cup. It is the biggest and the best race meeting in Queensland every year.

The Ipswich Turf Club, which is probably the best manager in racing in Queensland, understands that this bill absolutely positively has to happen. The undeniable truth is that there are only two things we can do for the racing industry in Queensland. We can either reform it, make it compete

and grow so that it has a future or we can let it wither on the vine. Sadly, it is wither on the vine that the troglodytes in the National Party have chosen.

One of the things that I very much hope comes out of this amalgamation is a better relationship between Queensland turf clubs and Sky Channel. Sky Channel is owned by the New South Wales TAB. As the monopoly provider of TV coverage of racing, it has been able to have turf clubs over a barrel and it has been able to do some very, very hard deals with Queensland turf clubs. In recent years a number of clubs have had their payments from Sky Channel for covering their races absolutely slashed. Sky Channel has very much been playing hard ball about that. To some extent they have left a number of clubs in quite a difficult position.

This amalgamation brings Sky Channel and turf clubs in Queensland into the same tent because they will have an interest in a single future. Sky Channel, as I said, is owned by the New South Wales TAB, which means that after the amalgamation there will be a very close link between Sky Channel and turf clubs in Queensland. I very sincerely hope that that leads to a better working relationship, that it leads to Sky Channel not playing quite as low or playing hard ball as they have sought to do in the past.

The reforms of the racing industry are not something that the Beattie government should or does apologise for. Racing reform should be an absolute political winner. The racing reforms that we have made over the last five years, including the initial privatisation of the TAB, the establishment of Queensland racing and a whole range of reforms, have given racing a future. While those reforms have been opposed at every single step of the way by the dinosaurs in the National Party, those people have absolutely failed to come up with a better alternative for racing in Queensland.

The fact is that tens of thousands of people make their livelihood out of racing in Queensland. As with sugar and every other thing out there, the only thing that we have heard out of the National Party when it comes to racing has been, 'Keep your hands off it and leave it alone.' But if we had done that, we would still see the situation in which hundreds of clubs run donkeys rather than race horses around the place, making very little money. The whole industry would be in decline as the good horses, the good trainers and the good jockeys go to where the big money is. Without these reforms to racing in Queensland, the big money would not have been here. It would not have been in Woop Woop and it would not even have been in Brisbane. It would have continued to be in Sydney and Melbourne. I know it is a cliché, but these reforms have been about growing the pie. These reforms have meant that Queensland racing is in a position to compete for the best horses, the best trainers and the best jockeys with Sydney, Melbourne, Hong Kong and the other big racing meets all over the world. Those people opposite have opposed them at every single step of the way.

I do not know what is worth saving if we are going to have donkeys running around in Woop Woop. What is the point of saving that? That is not an industry. In absolutely classic National Party style, these people have bowed to the lowest common denominator interests of the industry. They have wanted to hold out and just see the industry absolutely wither away. That is what we get from the National Party consistently when it comes to their own constituency. These people see country racing as being their thing. These people see country racing as being their constituency in the same way as, perhaps to a lesser extent, they have the same kind of feeling about the sugar industry. What does that mean? It means that they are so beholden to backward sectional interests in those industries that they cannot begin to move forward. They are absolutely beholden to the lowest common denominator. They are absolutely beholden to the worst interests in those industries.

So when it comes to country racing, just like when it comes to sugar, it is only a Labor government that can create a future. It is only a Labor government that can see where the future lies and it is only a Labor government that can create what is best for those industries in the long term. These people consistently put their heads in the sand because they have cane farms or race horses themselves. They consistently put their heads in the sand and just let the whole industry decline. The people of Queensland can see that. The people of Queensland, including the country people of Queensland, expect leadership from their representatives. But it has been that consistent inability to provide leadership and that consistent, too cosy connection with the worst influences in these industries that has led to the National Party having only the 12 seats it has today.

Sometimes it is a little bit hard in politics to provide leadership in our own backyard because there will be people who will think that they are going to lose out from whatever it is that we are trying to do. If we are going to create a long-term future even for our own people, we need to make the hard decisions. A Labor government has the guts to do that. We did it, for instance, in rail. Some of those decisions were very tough, but Queensland is now the only state in Australia that has its own railway workshops. We made some tough decisions, but we created a future for our people. If the National Party want to have a future for themselves that is exactly what they need to do. They need to have the guts to bite the bullet when it comes to creating a future for their own people and their own industries. Racing is an absolutely classic example of where they have failed to do that.

We have had this crazy man, the member for Warrego, going on for years now in his completely nonsensical way. The National Party supports this bill but the member's earlier speech did not seem to be indicating any support for it. The National Party wants to appeal to everybody but it does nothing. That is what we are seeing over and over again. They are just absolute apologists for the worst interests. They continue to ask people in the bush to vote for them just because they always have. If they are going to continue to be voted for, they need to show some leadership. Just as they are allowing their own industries to decline, just as they want to see racing slowly slip away and just as they want to see sugar slowly slip away, what is happening in the National Party? They are slowly slipping away.

It was not that long ago that the National Party held a huge majority in the Queensland parliament. I remember the seventies and I remember the Labor cricket team. It was not even that long ago that they held minority government under Rob Borbidge. How many of them are there now? There is a sad, pathetic 12 people.

It has not just happened all of its own accord. If the National Party continues to fail to show leadership for the people whom it regards as its own, those people will continue to walk away. The National Party, like the sugar industry and like what would have happened to racing under its leadership, will go the way of those industries that it has failed to lead: the National Party will just slip-slide away.

The National Party should be supporting the reforms to racing in Queensland every single step of the way. The reforms that we have put in place are the only way that racing will ever, ever have a future in this state. Racing is an international industry. It is not Woop Woop competing against Woop Woop West for the donkey trophy of 2003; it is the best horses in Australia competing against the best horses from overseas for millions of dollars in Internet, phone and on-course betting. This is big-time stuff. But racing will not have a future without the reforms that enable that competition to happen.

We are continuing to see this economic lunacy from the members opposite—this absolutely crazy stuff. The member for Warrego demonstrated it. I had to interpret his speech. He was actually saying that we are terrible economic managers and what we need is more money for country racing. It is the big priorities. What do the members talk about in here? They talk about more money for country racing. They talk about more money for the opposition office. They do not have any policies on anything else. I am very pleased to support this bill, because it is another one of our many, many reforms to the Queensland racing industry that ensure jobs for thousands of Queenslanders and that ensures a future for this industry.