



Speech by

**Andrew Cripps**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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## **RACING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (4.35 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Racing and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The stated objectives of this bill as outlined in the explanatory notes are to amend the Racing Act to establish one control body for the three codes of racing, being thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing; ensure that the control body has the necessary powers to manage the three codes of racing; abolish entities established under the Racing Act that can be established administratively by the control body; and provide stability and reduce the administrative burden and costs to a control body.

Those might be the stated objectives in the bill proposed by the Bligh Labor government, but the real objectives of this bill are the sinister plans to centralise power in the hands of Bob Bentley, the chairman of Queensland Racing who is the Labor Party's agent, and to destroy country racing clubs in regional and rural areas of Queensland. This is evidenced best by the abolition in this bill of provisions for country racing associations and the Queensland Country Racing Committee. These organisations will no longer have any legislative basis or protection from the Bligh Labor government or its agent, Bob Bentley, the chairman of Queensland Racing, and will lead to the removal of any direct input that country racing will have into the management and development of the racing industry in Queensland. This is bad news for racing clubs in regional towns and communities throughout the state. The Labor Party and Bob Bentley for many years now have been ruthlessly persecuting and targeting country racing clubs, and their agenda has driven many country racing clubs to the brink of folding.

The explanatory notes accompanying the bill state that these entities are unique to the thoroughbred code and have an advisory role, providing advice and recommendations to the current thoroughbred control body on non-TABQ racing matters. The explanatory notes go on to claim that, in the context of an amalgamated control body, it is inconsistent to have non-TABQ entities for only one code of racing established by legislation and that the new control body will have the power to establish advisory committees for non-TABQ racing. What an absurd proposition for the Bligh Labor government to put forward in the explanatory notes accompanying a bill before the Queensland parliament! Everybody knows that, of the three racing codes, the thoroughbred code has the most extensive network of clubs across the state and the most investment by individual clubs in local infrastructure.

The excuse offered by the Bligh Labor government, that country racing associations and the Queensland Country Racing Committee should be abolished because none of the other racing codes have developed similar representative structures for rural and regional racing, is completely ridiculous. The minister responsible for racing—not the racing minister but the minister responsible for racing—in the Bligh Labor government, Minister Lawlor, should be thoroughly embarrassed that a load of utter nonsense has been served up in this bill. Local racing clubs in regional and rural areas ought to have a strong voice in the administration of the racing industry in this state because of their historical significance. The LNP is committed to that. Obviously the Labor Party is not committed to that.

I want to talk briefly about the racing clubs servicing my electorate of Hinchinbrook. They are the Herbert River Jockey Club and the Innisfail Turf Club and two smaller clubs run by volunteers. In the case of the Innisfail Turf Club, it is what is known as a strategic club and currently has about nine race dates a

year, including two major race meets—the Innisfail Annuals and the Banana Industry Race Day which are always very successful events for the Innisfail district.

Although strategic clubs in regional towns like the Innisfail Turf Club, with more than one or two dates a year, are perhaps currently in better shape than smaller rural race clubs with only one or two race dates a year, there is real concern that this bill which amalgamates the boards of the three existing racing codes—thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing—will result in a staged withdrawal of many race dates from their calendar to support TABQ events in larger provincial cities like Cairns and Townsville.

The concerns of strategic clubs like the Innisfail Turf Club are well founded in view of the provisions of this bill which propose to remove provisions for country racing associations and the Queensland Country Racing Committee which have traditionally advocated on behalf of the interests of country racing and Queensland regional and rural communities and attempted, in more recent years, to protect them from the persecution of Bob Bentley and the state Labor government.

In contrast, the Herbert River Jockey Club is one of those small rural race clubs with only one or two race dates a year. The Herbert River Jockey Club has one race meet each year held over two days. It is a fantastic event. Like many annual race meets in other small rural communities, this event is a highlight of the social calendar for the Herbert River district. The ruthless persecution by Bob Bentley and his Labor mates in recent years has been doled out primarily through the stripping away of race dates and bringing in new regulations forcing small race clubs like the Herbert River Jockey Club to jump over higher and higher hurdles every year to comply.

This is a bullying strategy that has been designed to try to make small race clubs unviable. It is a deliberate strategy to sabotage the viability of small race clubs by driving up the cost of compliance year after year. The small clubs in my electorate, Herbert River and Innisfail, struggle to deal with the ever-increasing regulations. They struggle to deal with the uncertainty and the arbitrary nature of regulations that are imposed by Bob Bentley, under instruction from the Bligh Labor government, every year to make it harder for these smaller clubs. Smaller clubs such as the Herbert River Jockey Club and the Innisfail Turf Club are run by volunteers who work hard to provide a high standard of infrastructure and facilities. But they have been treated very poorly indeed by Mr Bentley and the Bligh Labor government.

Constituents in my electorate also enjoy racing events hosted by the Townsville Turf Club, the Townsville Greyhound Racing Club and the Cairns Jockey Club. The Townsville Turf Club is located in the electorate of my good friend the member for Burdekin. I support her contribution and the contribution earlier by the shadow minister, the member for Mermaid Beach, in respect of the concerns of the Townsville Turf Club regarding this bill. While I am primarily concerned about the small country racing clubs in my electorate, it is clear that race dates for provincial cities such as Cairns and Townsville will also be poached, under threat by Mr Bentley and the state Labor government when he tightens his grip over the racing industry in Queensland.

Minister Lawlor is overseeing a whitewash of the racing industry in Queensland, and for that he should be condemned along with the Bligh Labor government. The shadow minister responsible for racing, the member for Mermaid Beach, has set out very clearly the insidious arrangements proposed in this bill in terms of the new appointments to the new control body, Racing Queensland Ltd. The member for Mermaid Beach also outlined the self-interest that has been exercised by those going onto the board of the new control body and the lack of transparency and accountability involved in the proposed tenure of their appointments.

I welcome the very clear commitment by the shadow minister, the member for Mermaid Beach, that an LNP government in Queensland will be much more inclusive of the genuine participants in the racing industry, particularly regional and rural stakeholders, in contrast to the current closed shop arrangements that are being created and overseen by the minister run for the benefit of Labor mates.