

TOTALISATOR AGENCY BOARD — PRIVATISATION

83. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Premier:

I refer to repeated warnings about privatising the WA TAB, including from the former Premier of Victoria Jeff Kennett, the chairman of Racing Victoria, and most recently one of Western Australia's legendary and leading trainers in Fred Kersley. Will the Premier now categorically rule out privatising the TAB; and, if not, why should the racing industry pay the price for the Premier's financial mismanagement?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

When the Ernst and Young report was done for the government, a number of assets were identified as potential privatisations—the TAB being one of them. I think most members would agree that if we had a clean sheet of paper or whatever else and were inventing government, a betting agency would not be a part of government.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: We wouldn't have a potato marketing board either.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, we would not.

That is the reality. It is not a natural or even proper —

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Pilbara, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: A betting agency is not a proper or normal function of government. However, it plays an important role in the racing industry, which is a big employer, and provides revenue to that industry. I would say to the racing industry that this is the great roll of the dice. The racing industry is in difficulty. It is not just one Magic Millions sale. The industry is in difficulty —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Sometimes in this Parliament it is difficult to make a reasoned comment on an important issue. I am trying to do so. The TAB, if it were sold, arguably could realise up to \$1 billion. I do not know what the final figure might be. The Australian Capital Territory's TAB sold for about \$150 million. It is a financial asset of some value.

There are other issues facing the racing industry. We are trying to maintain two racetracks side by side in the eastern suburbs. My view is that those facilities are well below standard. They date back to the 1960s. They are not up to standard. That might be part of the reason why crowds are 2 000 or so.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Mr Speaker, it is so difficult to have a sensible debate in this Parliament.

These are the issues. This is the big roll of the dice for the racing industry. There could be a scenario in which the TAB is privatised, one of the major tracks in Perth is closed and the land sold, and the building of an outer metropolitan racetrack, training facility, stables and equestrian area could be all done, all funded. That is the one chance the racing industry will probably have in the next 50 years. The Minister for Racing and Gaming, the parliamentary secretary, the member for South Perth and I are talking to the racing industry. We are informally discussing the opportunities with the racing industry. There is a great opportunity for racing right now. The easy thing is to simply say, "No change—let's stay back in the 60s." That will not serve racing into the future. Racing has a great opportunity to connect with major racing clubs throughout Asia, not only in racing but also in horse breeding, selling, training—the lot. That is where the discussion is at. The government will not progress with privatisation this calendar year, but that discussion is taking place around the racing industry. It is the one great opportunity, the one roll of the dice, for racing. The member for Collie—Preston should be a part of it. He should engage in that because it could have wonderful implications for racing in WA.