

TAB — PRIVATISATION

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

I refer to Labor's repeated calls for the Totalisator Agency Board not to be privatised and to calls from his own backbench who are now realising that it is a bad idea.

- (1) Will the Premier be selling the TAB or not?
- (2) If the TAB is sold, will the Premier guarantee the same level of funding will be returned to the racing industry as is currently invested through Racing and Wagering Western Australia?
- (3) How can racing industry stakeholders expect to have any confidence in potential investment decisions if the government cannot provide any indication of how the racing industry will be configured under a privatised model?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

- (1)–(3) The TAB is amongst the list of assets that the government is intending to sell. There are a number of issues to do with the TAB and horseracing and its various codes within Western Australia. I noted with interest yesterday that the report coming out of the industry or through Racing and Wagering Western Australia actually made the point that Belmont probably did not have a future as a racecourse and that racing would be probably better served by having Ascot redeveloped to a higher standard and Lark Hill brought up as a second, supporting course, with facilities for breeders and trainers co-located at Lark Hill.

Mr M.P. Murray: And the TAB?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am just answering the member's question.

Mr M.P. Murray: It has nothing to do with the question.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It has everything to do with it.

Mr M.P. Murray: No it hasn't.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member needs to follow the bouncing ball and think it through. If the TAB is sold —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: If the TAB is sold, and my view is that it should be sold, then that provides an amount of money, potentially a very significant amount of money, part of which can be reinvested into improving facilities for the horseracing industry, because those facilities are old, tired and unattractive to patrons. I make the point that when the TAB was established it took the place of SP bookmakers and all the rest, and that was a good decision for its day. The TAB has operated well and has been profitable—I do not deny that—but we have only to look at a television set during a sports broadcast of any description and watch the large number of private betting agencies of various sorts being promoted, going into all sorts and ranges of odds, live odds and all the rest of it. In that environment, a publicly or government-owned TAB will never have the freedom to compete. It will inevitably decline because it simply cannot compete with private players, internationally and nationally, on betting and odds and with the amount of advertising. The TAB will inevitably become a smaller part, if you like, of the overall betting market. Its value will fall. Why not sell it, remove the conflict of interest and use some of the proceeds to modernise the archaic facilities of racing in Western Australia?