

RACING AND WAGERING WA — HARNESS RACING REFORMS

494. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

I refer to reports that Racing and Wagering Western Australia is considering both a reduction in racing dates and a reduction in the number of country harness racing clubs in a proposed revamp of harness racing in WA.

- (1) Is the minister aware of the effect such closures will have on country communities and the whole harness racing industry?
- (2) Is the minister aware of the perception of many clubs that the proposed rationalisations are designed to prop up the underperforming and under-attended principal metropolitan track at Gloucester Park?
- (3) Can the minister update the house on the proposed \$24.7 million allocation of industry funds to be spent upgrading Gloucester Park, potentially at the expense of country clubs?
- (4) Are these steps linked to the recently rumoured sale of the TAB?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

Mr R.R. WHITBY replied:

- (1)–(4) I thank the member for Roe. I appreciate the question because it allows me to restate this government's commitment to racing right across Western Australia. I recently was in Kalgoorlie with cabinet colleagues and I took the opportunity to inspect the Kalgoorlie racecourse, which has been around since 1896 —

Mr P.J. Rundle: Did you close the Kalgoorlie harness club?

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: No, I actually did not.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members! Member for Roe, you asked a multi-part question. I would like to give the minister the opportunity to answer each of those parts without further interruption given the time.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member is not good on detail. That is not true. However, I appreciate the role of all our racing clubs across Western Australia, and all codes. I know the contribution they make to the social fabric of our towns. I attend many remote meetings, and I am always struck by the turnout and the commitment of locals, often done on a volunteer basis, to have those race clubs continue. It is true that many of them are struggling because of the changing nature of rural communities, where we are losing local banks and businesses, and the number of people who populate regional towns. I do know their importance and their significance. In fact, I had a visit last week from the West Australian Country Harness Racing Association, and it just so happens that I have its full report in front of me, which I look forward to diving into, and it makes the case, very strongly, that it wants to retain as many meetings as possible. I told the association—and I am not above telling the member now—that I agree with that approach, and I agree with the contribution that racing makes to our state. I can tell the member that I will be a very firm supporter of continuing to see as many meetings as possible at harness and thoroughbred race clubs across Western Australia.