

Mr COLIN HOWLETT WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Hall) - Colin, you are aware of our terms of reference. I think you may have given evidence to a parliamentary committee before, and you heard what I read out in regard to parliamentary privilege. Are you okay with that?

Mr HOWLETT - I understand, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR - Okay. I will ask you to make a presentation.

Mr HOWLETT - Mr Chairman, unlike my former colleagues, I will read most of my notes. Unfortunately I do not have enough money to own a greyhound, a harness racer or a galloper. So that is my position.

Mr GREEN - I fly pigeons.

Mr HOWLETT - I am thinking about flying pigeons, Bryan. If you tolerate me reading this, it is in two parts.

CHAIR - That is fine.

Mr HOWLETT - I have written a letter to the Minister for Racing which I would certainly like to share with you.

Objection to the sale of TOTE Tasmania. The three racing codes in Tasmania provide significant employment to a broad range of individuals involved in small businesses, including tourism, in this State. Historically, the three codes of racing provide socioeconomic benefits to rural communities who are unable to provide the diverse job opportunities in more populated areas.

We wish to submit that private enterprise's first obligation is to its shareholders and not to the individual owners providing the product. Many examples exist where governments have forced transfers of ownership of publicly-owned enterprises and pledged its intervention would provide improved economic and customer service.

In many instances when governments decide to sell a public profitable enterprise it has a pecuniary interest to prop up a poorly managed budget. We wish to submit that in the case of the proposed sale of TOTE Tasmania the Government must be accountable to the industry shareholders and in any sale contract must make provision for realistic, long-term finance (indexed) for the infrastructure, breeding and prize money.

Mr GREEN - Excuse me Colin, when you say 'we' who are you talking about? Are you talking about the general public?

Mr HOWLETT - I am talking about many people in the greyhound industry and I am talking about -

Mr GREEN - But you say 'we must' as if you are representing a committee or somebody else. Are you on your own?

Mr HOWLETT - I am representing life members of the greyhound industry; I am representing many people who are unable to come along and attend the meeting today.

Mr GREEN - You are saying that we must be satisfied -

Mr HOWLETT - Do you want to discredit my attendance?

Mr GREEN - Not at all. I am asking the question whether you are representing yourself or representing another group because it sounded as though you were talking about a committee or somebody else who -

Mr HOWLETT - I am talking about the racing code and if you let me go through the entire process, you will probably learn more of where I am coming from.

Mr GREEN - Fair enough, Colin, go right ahead. I was only trying to help.

Mr HOWLETT - There is a little heading 'Sustainability for the greyhound industry'. Historically the greyhound industry has been treated as the poor relation by governments over many years. And I have heard that repeated and inferred many, many times this morning.

The TCA on the Hobart Domain accommodated greyhound racing and training activities for a long period of time until the racing authority/Government needed additional reasons to spend significant funds to upgrade the harness racing track at the Royal Showgrounds at Glenorchy.

The racing authority was keen to secure funds for the harness racing and training facility at the Royal Showgrounds, however, they needed additional justification to obtain government funds. Eventually all greyhound activities accommodated at the TCA ground were transferred to the Royal Showgrounds.

No say, similar to what is proposed at the moment. The transfer of greyhound racing to the Royal Showgrounds presented many challenges linked to infrastructure and many difficulties relating to the shared facilities.

People who are in the operational side of greyhound racing would be able to share those challenges with you with lures breaking down, boxes not working properly, track disintegrating to the point where race meetings had to be postponed and all those sort of challenges. And that is the intent and the spirit of what I am saying about challenges.

Subsequent to the greyhound racing and training being transferred to the Royal Showgrounds the southern Tasmanian component of the greyhound industry incrementally lost its independence and became more reliant on outside influence.

That statement is purely focused towards the Government. The greyhound code had more sustainability at the old TCA grounds because they had an independent lease arrangement with the principle of the TCA and in many respects people would argue that they had more future there had they not been manipulated and taken away from their principle home.

For numerous reasons some greyhound participants preferred to use privately-owned training facilities. However, over time the privately owned facilities in southern Tasmania disappeared. Thirty years ago there would have been 10 to 12 privately-owned training facilities for greyhounds, some of which were registered with the national body. My family had the first semi-circular track at Richmond registered during Mr Morgan's administration at the TCA ground. You had to go through a process there to go the tracks registered but that was one particular track. Many others were registered under the national greyhound regime.

Greyhound Owners, Trainers and Breeders Association was active in asking the Government to provide funding to commission and operate a much needed straight and circle greyhound training facility. Again, we were unsuccessful in obtaining funding. However, the GOTBA was mindful that the racing authority was starving the industry of infrastructure facilities and without alternative training facilities the greyhound industry would not be sustainable.

The following events have been documented and are in a separate briefing covering the GOTBA and the Howlett family providing funding for developing two training tracks on crown land at Brighton. The events over the past 23 years regarding the intent and spirit of the industry, which was intended to be a 99-year lease occupancy for the greyhound code, of approximately - and there is debate about whether it is 11 hectares or 12 hectares, but it is in that area of ground - 11 or 12 hectares of ground at Brighton which adjoins the horse training facility at Brighton. It is on the south-eastern end of the trialling facilities for harness racing and gallopers. Our understanding is that it is still under the one title. Historically the greyhound industry has not had the influence of other codes and in many respect has been handicapped from the provision of sustainable infrastructure. The racing authority, to the best of our knowledge, has not put money into training facilities other than on the proper principal racecourse venue.

Sometimes under difficult circumstances our participants have struggled to remain in the industry, which makes a significant contribution to the Tasmanian economy. Following large sums of money being spent on the horse training complex at Brighton, TOTE Tasmania is currently mowing grass on the straight greyhound track at Brighton. To the best of the greyhound code industry that is about the only dedicated money off the racing track proper that has been provided.

Employment and downstream benefits - racing authorities must recognise that the three codes of the racing industry provide significant employment throughout rural Tasmania.

Financial support for the other industries - historically governments have provided financial support for industry employment, however there is little evidence of the three industry codes receiving recognition in the same way. In fact, it is extremely difficult to access individual greyhound industry infrastructure programs which would support sustainability.

Essential tools required for a sustainable future for the greyhound industry - to provide sustainability the Government must enter into a legal contract providing a 20-year blueprint plan acknowledging that greyhound racing is an industry and future allocation of funds to be indexed to CPI for the provision of infrastructure, stake money, which must be fair and equitable and be performance-based.

The reason we say that is that is the greyhound, as I understand at this very moment, from a betting point of view, is producing a very significant amount of betting revenue to TOTE Tasmania. In fact, it is getting very close to the galloping code.

The greyhound code must be provided with a fair percentage of revenue produced from betting turnover which must be divided into infrastructure, development and stake money. The allocation of funds must be tied, indexed and distributed to an independent group delegated by the code to represent the entire participants.

The Joint Standing Committee on Environment, Resources and Development are requested to reject the sale of TOTE Tasmania, based on not being in the best interest of the industry and the Tasmanian economy.

I certainly would like to be questioned on some of these things but, in the end, I thank the committee for providing me with the time to produce this.

CHAIR - Thank you, Colin.

Mr HOWLETT - I have a letter here that went to the minister.

CHAIR - Do you want to table that?

Mr HOWLETT - Do you want me to table it rather than read it?

CHAIR - Yes, you can table that, if you wouldn't mind.

Mr HOWLETT - This deals entirely with the Brighton fiasco with land. Mr Chair, there are two or three additional copies here if any individual member would like one.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr GUTWEIN - Colin, I am sorry I missed the first couple of minutes of your presentation. You mentioned that the greyhound code needs a 20-year blueprint and that under that there would be provision made for infrastructure spending for stake money etcetera. You said that it needed to be performance-based; I am wondering what you meant by that and how that fits in.

Mr HOWLETT - The reason we say that is simply that governments will say that they cannot guarantee revenue from government to government. In our view, it would be quite simple if it was performance-based, providing the Government is not permitted to run down an industry and that is the way it appears at the moment. As I said, and I am repeating myself, the greyhound code has no influence, politically or otherwise, or it doesn't appear to have had any influence over the years that I have been involved.

I was a long-life member of the Greyhound Owners, Trainers and Breeders Association and some 23 years ago I had seven or eight years involved with the association. That is how my family and I became involved with Brighton because we knew it was absolutely essential. If it is performance-based, and the Government is not allowed to run down the code, which it appears it is doing at this very moment, providing that is treated fairly from a performance-based point of view, I think we are talking about revenue earned from betting. At the moment the greyhound industry is producing very close to the amount of money that the gallopers are producing, well in excess of the harness racing. I think it could be very close to a photo finish between the amounts of money that the galloping code and the greyhound code are producing in revenue. The argument would be that if they do not perform and they are treated fairly - and that will have to change because they have never been treated fairly - they would be quite happy to have it performance-based on betting turnover.

Mr GUTWEIN - That is fair enough.

Mr HARRISS - I want to go from the back of that. I want to know, Colin, do you have the statistical data to support that statement that you are getting close to the contribution that the gallopers make?

Mr HOWLETT - I do not have it here but I am sure I can access it for the committee.

CHAIR - If you could do that, thank you. You can provide that to the secretary when you can.

Mr BOOTH - Colin, thank you for your statement so far. What do you see as the threats if TOTE were privatised? Where do you see the greyhound industry being in the future?

Mr HOWLETT - Without being facetious, at the moment we getting our grass mowed on the straight track, which was provided by private money, and the Government absolutely did not, to my knowledge, put one cent into that. So the pluses are, at the moment, that TOTE Tasmania has been good enough to have the grass mowed on the straight trialing track at Brighton. That is a plus. We have made the evaluation that there is a better risk that TOTE

Tasmania will treat the industry fairer; if we can prove to the politicians that we are not being treated fairly, we think there is a better proposition with the TOTE.

Needless to say, at the moment, at the Brighton Council the Government seems to be running a coordinated effort to incrementally squeeze the greyhounds out of the Brighton trialing facility. It is questionable whether, in fact, what the Brighton Council is doing is fair and reasonable from a planning perspective because, as I understand, that entire 11-12 hectares that we speak about is annexed as one title to the Brighton training complex. When the straight track went in there and the circle track was put in there, we were told that we did not have a planning problem because that section of ground, that 12 hectares, was already zoned for training purposes.

CHAIR - Colin, I think we need to move back to the core issue that we are here for today and it is about the sale of TOTE. I understand that is an issue that you have.

Mr HOWLETT - With the greatest respect, Chair, it is linked very closely to the sale of TOTE. If you rule differently I will have to accept that but I would think you are being a bit hard on me if you say it is not linked.

Mr BOOTH - Chair, for confirmation, it was following from a line of questioning about the effect of the sale. What Colin is detailing is a general support in the industry, off-track and on-track. I think it is relevant in terms of what I asked him.

Mr HOWLETT - The facility up there is extremely important for the future sustainability of the industry, for training, for people who want to use the facility to get the best performance out of their product for race nights. A lot of people do not like training their product on the track on which they race. I do not understand the technicalities but they will tell you and I can provide that information if you so desire. It is absolutely imperative that the racing code does not lose that 12 hectares of land that was originally intended.. We were duded. I have heard comments here earlier where I believe the industry was duded, because when we went in there the intent and spirit was that we had a 99-year lease on that 11 or 12 hectares of land, which was growing white wattles at the time.

CHAIR - Okay, I understand the nexus.

Mr BOOTH - Do you think the total aggregated industry as whole would be able to come up with a blueprint for the future in terms of your funding needs, support, and infrastructure to maintain your present culture?

Mr HOWLETT - I am absolutely certain they could come up with a business plan. The answer to that is, yes, we can. But on past performance, I would not like our chances.

Mr BOOTH - So there is a lack of trust in what the Government -

Mr HOWLETT - There is a local trust. As I say, it is unfortunate but the greyhound racing code has never had the interest, really. Geoff Pearsall was the only elected member that I

can remember who took an interest in greyhound racing. It was about the time he was minister that this took place at Brighton - 23 or 24 years ago.

Mr BOOTH - In terms of a privatisation and sale of TOTE, the areas that you would lose out on would be generally the off-track support that you are currently getting, off the racing track support?

Mr HOWLETT - Private enterprise is generally interested in bottom lines and unless there is a very robust legal contract, there is no way. You only have to cast your mind back to other public enterprises that have been sold. It is always said it has been for the benefit of the customer but it generally does not turn out that way. There is the lack of trust. There is the lack of previous support. There is the lack of private money being spent to provide these facilities that are now being eroded.

CHAIR - Thank you. Are there any further questions to Colin? Do you have a closing statement, Colin?

Mr HOWLETT - I thank the committee for hearing me. I plead with members of the Legislative Council not to pass this bill to sell TOTE Tasmania unless there are long-term legal and binding contractual arrangements to protect us. In my view, the galloping code will be okay. They have the right doors to open and they will be okay. I am very concerned about, to a lesser degree, the harness racing and the greyhounds, and the greyhounds are the ones that always miss out.

Mr BEST - A long-term contract for funding for the codes; is that what you are saying?

Mr GUTWEIN - That is a blueprint you are talking about, is it?

Mr HOWLETT - I am talking about a proper strategic plan with objectives to keep the industries, with particular reference to the greyhounds, vibrant and robust and producing revenue for the State of Tasmania.

Mr BOOTH - You feel that the obligation of Government, before they consider a sale, is to make sure they consult with you, get that blueprint, look at it and factor in whatever arrangements are made?

Mr HOWLETT - Absolutely.

CHAIR - Thank you.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.