

Legislative Council

Hansard

Wednesday 10 December 2025

The President, Mr Farrell, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

[excerpt...]

MOTION

Referral of Greyhound Racing Legislation Amendments (Phasing Out Reform) Bill 2025 to Joint Standing Committee on Greyhound Racing Transition

[4.31 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, Mr President, I rise to speak on the motion from the member for Murchison, and I think it's a really understandable motion to have been put forward and, quite frankly, the government has put us in a mess on this one, no two ways about it. It would be unparliamentary to say it, but they've really shafted everybody on it, quite frankly. My position's really clear in that the outcome here, the policy outcome of transitioning out of this industry is one that I support.

I've been very clear about that and have been for a long time, and been public about it. I've been clear about that with the industry folk that I've been interacting with, particularly in recent times through the committee that I'm a member of. However, the way the government has gone about this has just been disgraceful. This is exactly what happens when a government cuts corners, when a government acts at all times, we can now see, in its own political self-interest rather than the public interest and evidence-based policy interest. It's completely happy to discard all good process and good governance to serve its own ends. That's how we've landed here today, which is really sad because I think it's done an absolute disservice to all the different stakeholder groups in this discussion and to this Chamber, quite frankly.

I think that's incredibly disappointing, to say the least, to say a mild parliamentary word rather than another one, but it's incredibly disappointing that we have been put in this position. Every side of this is now experiencing some form of detriment. We've got animal welfare advocates out there in the community, of which there are thousands. They are genuine, caring people who love animals, who regard them as sentient beings that deserve our protection and who in many instances do two things: they both work in a very practical way to deliver on that, by caring for animals, by volunteering for organisations that care for animals by adopting ex-racing greyhounds and others, but they also campaign and advocate on this issue and have done for years.

It's a result of that very effective and tireless campaigning that we see at least movement on this issue here in the parliament, finally, because it's lagging the community view. We know that consistently, time after time in polling across recent years, including as recently as August, after the government's announcement was made about transitioning out of this industry, 74 per cent of Tasmanians supported that decision. This is an industry that is at the end of its social licence; it's been moving towards that for quite some time, and nobody could say otherwise.

Quite frankly, the vast majority of Tasmanians, three in four, agree that this is an industry that should come to an end; then the question just becomes: how should it come to an

end? That should be something that's talked about and discussed and consulted on and done respectfully, and that's absolutely not what the government has done.

Bringing in this legislation now, under this circumstance and in this way, has made it very difficult for there to be good outcomes for just about anyone. This is a problematic industry and now it's been encouraged to hope that there might be a reversal of policy decision here by impeding the passage of the legislation; but with legislation brought under these circumstances in this way, it's very difficult for a responsible Chamber, such as we are here, to pass.

It looks like on the numbers of things, we can probably all see what is telegraphed here; it's likely that this motion passes and this bill is sent to the committee, and so be it that that may be the will of the Chamber. That will delay passage of the legislation. I suspect we will still get legislation not dissimilar to what we've got before us, a process would have occurred though, and elements of that process will be important, particularly for certain stakeholders, but we will be delaying, and we will be encouraging those industry participants to hope that there might be a different ultimate outcome by doing that.

That's a shame because there's still an unlikelihood that that's going to be what transpires. Certainly, looking at this legislation isn't about looking at the policy decision that sits behind it, just as, I'm sure, when submissions are sought, it is the policy decision that sits behind it that will receive masses and waves and huge numbers of submissions about it from both sides, no doubt.

It's a problematic industry. We know that there have been horrific practices in this industry in times past, but also carrying through to now, quite frankly. I accept that reforms have occurred, I accept that various improvements have been made, but my goodness.

We know that there are some lovely people participating in this industry. We've met some of them today, in briefings. They love their dogs. They're small operators. They are the very acceptable face of this industry and they're the ones put forward, and I understand why. For them, I have compassion about the way this has been done, but equally clearly and highly concerning - and of enormous concern to anybody who has an inkling of care for animals in our community and in our state - is the fact there are still plainly very bad actors in this industry, acting atrociously, causing extreme harm to animals.

That is absolutely going to be built-in. It's built into this industry, and that's partly because apart from the lovely local operators, you have big boys in this industry, and overlaying all of it, you have the gambling industry, which is an incredibly harmful, voracious industry that will assert its interests, its financial interests, to the nth degree, campaigning against anything that comes in its way.

That's tricky for us. We're interacting with an industry that has those different layers in it. Of course the ones put before us are the very palatable, very empathetic ones who are our local communities, who are participants in this industry, and who are in their hearts very genuine, and I accept that; but when the big parts of the industry - the powerful interests, the financial interests in this industry - send someone down to our state to lead a campaign against this policy that was announced, and that person tells the local people, 'Don't participate in consultation, don't get involved in having discussions about where to from here' once this decision had been made, then that's incredibly mischievous. It's problematic, it's harmful, and I think it's actually cruel.

That's what happened. Much as the announcement - the absolute backflip from the government for its own political self-interest, of course - was abrupt and awful for the industry to experience in that way, there was immediately put in place, at least from the Racing Commissioner's role, an intention to develop the transition plan, and we've got time up our sleeve for that because it isn't until 2029. It's about three-and-a-half years from now, given it's mid-2029 and we're at the end of 2025.

We have some time. That's why a transition plan would be needed but, of course, the Racing Commissioner, as he explained to us, was then in a pretty tricky situation, inviting people to consult and be part of a working group and talk with him about what's needed to feed through into that plan, to feed through into initial legislation, to form a basis for further development of the plan. That was stymied, and I think that was stymied not by the genuine interests of this industry, but by the big, powerful interests of this industry. That's really sad because the confusion, the hurt and the anger that would have been there when this policy was announced back in August, could've begun to be healed and assuaged from that starting point if engagement with the commissioner had begun in good faith then, rather than being discouraged at that point, and that's a shame.

I absolutely feel for the Racing Integrity Commissioner. He's been put in an incredibly difficult position by the government. He, in good faith, is developing the transition plan, he has formed a working group, he has invited industry to be part of that and beyond that initial invitation, from what he has described on the record to the committee already, is that he has been continuously reaching out and seeking to engage, and that sounds very positive.

He's also been in contact and doing extensive research with other jurisdictions that have done similar transitions, to inform his work around the transition plan and about the drafting instructions for this bill because when you, as he's described, look to other jurisdictions who have gone through or are going through a transition process out of this industry, there are some clear warning bells that sound over what needs to happen to ensure that outcomes are good for participants, but also for animal welfare and for the broader community. That's what the Racing Integrity Commissioner has expressed very clearly, that his job is to think of the interests of those three groups, if you like; the participants, the animals in the industry and also the Tasmanian community, because there are consequences.

If we do see this escalation in breeding trying to get ahead of an end date of breeding which would have, if this bill passed, been 1 January for new breeding but now maybe a little later. But, of course, what he has clearly heard from other jurisdictions is people will rush to try to breed quickly before an end date that's put in place. Given the announcement, the abrupt announcement, given him being tasked with the transition planning, given him being tasked with feeding through into the drafting instructions for this bill, he's now trying to get best outcomes, to give certainty to participants, to give protection to animals and to give the Tasmanian community the opportunity to have its interests seen to. In that space, what we're talking about here is how much is it going to cost the Tasmanian community?

There has been a clear commitment to a just transition. I have heard that clearly. It's been expressed in various places on the record. We need to keep pressing for that. The details of that are not clear yet, they come further down the track, but we do need to be clear that there is a fundamental starting point that's needed, which this legislation, from what we understand to believe, is the basis for that. It's simply fairly straightforward. It does two things: it gives the commissioner powers that are required, particularly for auditing and investigating across a transition period of time, and it sets up expectations and limitations on things like breeding, which addresses animal welfare issues for transition.

That's the bill. We're not debating the bill. I realise that. We're debating whether we send it to a committee, but what I'm speaking about here goes to my thinking around the advisability of that.

This is a tricky one. As I said, I understand members in this place wanting to have more information and more time to consider something which is a policy decision from government being given effect - that is consequential; for groups of Tasmanians, it is very consequential and is permanent, although it is a phase-out. It's not immediate but it is permanent, ultimately, in that phase-out. So, we do, of course, all want to do our jobs responsibly and respectfully here. I understand that, and, as I can gather in the room, there's an interest to see this sent to the committee. If that happens, hopefully it is something the committee will be able to turn around quite quickly and have something come back so that any delay on some of the protective things in this bill isn't too long. We don't end up having a detriment to animal welfare that is too great. We know it's going to be a matter of hundreds of new animals brought into the industry and that is concerning to me primarily on animal-welfare grounds. Second, it makes it more expensive for the Tasmanian community to undertake the transition - the more the industry has desperately grown as a last-ditch effort ahead of a phase-out. That's problematic.

The committee will hopefully be able to bring something back to this Chamber, and the Chamber will then hopefully feel that two things have happened: one, that there's been a respectful process that at least allows all stakeholder groups on this matter to be heard in some sense. It's not just the participants of the industry that need to be heard; it's people in the Tasmanian community that need to be heard; it's, as the member for Mersey said, other potentially associated industries that need to be heard; it's absolutely the animal-welfare folk who are dealing with the outcomes of this industry that need to be heard, so all of those people will have a chance.

It will also allow more information to be on the record, so members in this place when this bill comes back, will feel they have information available to them to be able to make a decision, because the rubber will hit the road then. If this bill goes to a committee now and then comes back, the vote on that bill really is going to be about whether the phase-out goes ahead in this orderly and planned way, or whether, potentially, the government needs to find a different way to do it, which may be more rushed because we've taken up too much time. It may be less orderly than this; it might be done through measures that don't come through this place - I don't know. It could be as simple as just defunding, because ultimately that is what this is pegged to - 2029 is the end of the deed. I don't think anyone wants to be in that situation. It's a tricky one.

I'm always an advocate for good process in this place and for treating people respectfully. I'm also, though, an advocate for listening to the expert advice that's provided to us. Shame on the government for dropping us all in this position with its behaviour and its decision made under those circumstances, which was wrong and should never have happened. Since it has done that and the commissioner has had to step in to undertake the process, his clear advice to us at this point is that passage of this bill will provide better outcomes for participants, for animals and for the Tasmanian community. I'm listening carefully to that expert advice from the commissioner, and it really concerns me to put that aside. I don't think there's detriment in this bill, unless you don't want the policy to be enacted in the first place.

Of course, I understand that the participants in the industry want to do everything possible to try to push back on that; that's understandable. This bill, in and of itself, is not detrimental, other than it gives effect to a policy some don't want and others have desperately worked for years. I'm going to not support the motion to a committee on the basis of being

advised that given the situation we're in, the commissioner is saying this is what's needed. I understand that's probably not going to be the prevailing mood of the Chamber and so be it. I will certainly participate henceforth if that process occurs.