

deserve a regulatory framework built on genuine consumer protection, on genuine accountability and a genuine commitment to putting people first.

**Ms BOOTHBY (Racing)(in reply):** Madam Speaker, I thank the scrutiny committee for their work they have done in looking at this Bill and the opportunity to respond noting that a number of the matters raised are either not legislation amendments or related to this Bill and are more appropriately considered through existing administrative arrangements, or a future review process.

This Bill has two primary objectives: amend the *Racing and Wagering Act 2024* to enable the establishment of Racing NT as the race control body for thoroughbred and greyhound racing in the Territory; and strengthen the management of potential conflicts of interest within the renamed Wagering Commission.

In relation to the scrutiny committee's recommendation 2, section 16(j) of the Act already empowers the commission to direct wagering licensees to implement consumer protection and harm minimisation measures. This aligns with section 3(d) which establishes the protection of the public from the adverse impacts of unsafe wagering as a central objective of the Act. Accordingly, no further amendment is considered necessary.

Recommendation 3 of the scrutiny committee proposes that delegations be required to be in writing. This is unnecessary as delegations are already governed by departmental policies and procedures. Current commission delegations have been in place since July 2024 in accordance with section 17 of the Act.

Recommendation 4 suggested granting the director of racing and wagering the power to direct racecourse licence holders to implement consumer protection and harm minimisation measures related to the racing industry. However, such measures relate to wagering licensees and fall within the remit of the commission, not the racing industry itself.

Recommendations 5 and 8 propose amendments to the explanatory statement; however, it has already been tabled, and no amendment is proposed at this stage. The matters raised are already sufficiently addressed administratively and operationally.

In relation to recommendation 5, reporting on the racing and wagering fund will be captured within the annual report of the department supporting the director of racing and wagering, currently the Department of Tourism and Hospitality.

In relation to recommendation 8, if exercised, a notice that the responsible minister has made the charter of rights and responsibilities will be published in the gazette rather than publishing the charter itself.

Recommendations 6 and 10 raise matters for consideration during the three-year review, and it should be noted that NT legislation cannot regulate members of other jurisdictions. However, the commission members in the NT will be prohibited from holding accounts with any wagering provider licenced under the Act.

Penalties under the Act will also be reviewed as part of the three-year evaluation. The current penalties represent a substantial increase from the repealed Racing and Betting Act of 1983, rising from a maximum of 175 penalty units to 2,500. Any further increases may require a separate legislative framework similar to that governing the Liquor Commission.

Recommendation 7 seeks to prohibit commission members from wagering on races conducted in the Territory. Once this Bill is enacted, the commission will no longer regulate the racing industry and members will be prohibited from holding accounts with NT licensed wagering operators. There is therefore no basis to prohibit wagering through an interstate provider on NT races.

Recommendation 9 concerns the timeframe for lodging complaints. The Bill extends the existing period from 14 days to 60 days with discretion from the commission or director to allow extensions up to a maximum of two years. This upper limit is intended to prevent unreasonable retrospective claims, and there is no proposal to extend it further.

Recommendation 11 proposes conferring jurisdiction on the NT Civil and Administrative Tribunal jurisdiction to review certain decisions. This matter will be considered at a later time during the technical review. The proposed changes to commission membership, including prohibitions on owning racing animals and holding accounts with NT wagering operators, will strengthen governance and reinforce the separation between regulator and industry.

Establishing Racing NT as the racing control body for thoroughbred and greyhound racing will support a more commercially focused structure and address concerns identified in the NT racing industry review regarding potential conflicts of interest. Improved governance and operational practices are expected to enhance the quality of NT racing products leading to increased participation, sponsorships and expanding marketing offerings by wagering operators, particularly in the online sector.

Finally, removing all racing-related functions from the commission will enable it to focus on wagering regulation and more effectively address outstanding complaints.

I now wish to start where this debate should have started: out on ground, at the track. This is not just about legislation; it is about people. It is about the bloke standing on the rail at Fannie Bay—the Member for Fannie Bay talked about going to the Darwin Turf Club last night and listening to industry. It is about the small team in Katherine running a race day that keeps the town ticking over. It is about the trainer up before sunrise, the strapper washing down a horse in the dark—because it is very early in the morning—and the small business that counts on race weekend to pay wages.

That is what we are talking about. This industry contributes around \$120m to the Territory economy. It supports jobs across our regions. The Member for Namatjira talked about Harts Range races; that is a remote region in the Northern Territory, out of Alice Springs, that benefits from racing. This brings people together and supports our Territory lifestyle. As the Tourism and Hospitality minister, I see this firsthand. Racing events do not sit alone in isolation; they fill hotels, support our pubs, clubs and cafes, and bring people into towns that rely on that extra lift. You only have to go to the packed Winnellie part—I cannot wait to take the Member for Johnston one day—to the greyhound Darwin cup to see it being spent.

**J Davis:** I am waiting for my invitation.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** That money and energy all goes into local people and local businesses.

Our government has just launched the Northern Territory Visitor Economy Strategy, taking us through to 2032, with a target of growing our economy to \$3bn. Racing is a part of that story; it always has been, and I am the minister driving that. At the same time, our government has been clear about restoring our Territory lifestyle, not as just a slogan but as something you can actually feel—events, togetherness, things that bring Territorians out of their homes and into the community doing more of what they have always loved.

Racing sits right in the middle of that, so when we talk about this Bill, let's be clear: this is about backing that industry, making sure it is set up properly and has a framework that works, not just on paper but in the real world.

I listened carefully to the submissions put forward to the scrutiny committee and the contributions put forward today. Not all of them say the same thing, and that is expected. Some want more, some different settings and some are heavily focused on harm.

I hear you loud and clear, Members for Johnston and Nightcliff, about harm. Most of your speeches were about gambling harm. Please note that this Bill is not about gambling harm; it is about our industry, lifestyle, tourism and hospitality and the framework to set up the Racing NT body to split racing and wagering altogether. We will do other work on harm, but this is not that, so do not conflate the two.

This is the nature of that space; it is inconsistent. What is consistent is the support that we give to this industry for clear structures and strengthened governance. I hear loud and clear that there is support for improving integrity. I get that, which is why I am making these changes.

I reiterate that gambling harm has been raised and that this Bill is not trying to do everything. It is focused on governance, the structure and the regulator being strong, clear, credible and effective. Without that, there really is no future.

This Bill is focused on getting the framework right. That does not mean other issues are ignored, but it means that this legislation will do its job. Of course, work on root causes and harm minimisation continues by government, as it should.

I understand that racing is changing across the globe and in the Northern Territory. It is under more scrutiny. At the same time, it is becoming more competitive. The jurisdictions that get the fundamentals right will attract the investment, participants and major events. Other locations are shutting down racing. In that lies our opportunity because this matters in the Northern Territory; we are the home of racing. It is in our DNA. It was

the CLP government that brought in the framework to allow betting agencies to set up here. That is 1,000 jobs for Territorians in the racing industry and the betting industry, allowing them to put food on the table for their families. That is important and cannot be dismissed.

I will end by saying that we just had the Alice Springs Cup Carnival. It was moved back to the long weekend. I am waiting to hear the numbers, but from all accounts, despite what Alice Springs is going through, it was a successful weekend. People were out and about at the racetrack. We need to be backing regions like Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. The Tennant Creek races are on this weekend coming. Last year it was a strong success with good numbers. One of the cup winners went on to do something even better in Victoria.

We hold our own when it comes to racing in the Northern Territory. I am a strong supporter, as the minister in this government. When I go around the country I talk about racing in the Northern Territory. I will continue to back racing because if you want to have a punt on a Saturday at the track, you should be able to do that and have a bit of fun.

I look forward to taking the Member for Johnston with me to show her how many people it employs at the track.

**J Davis:** I am not trying to stop the jobs.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I am trying to remember any piece of legislation in this House that the Member for Johnston has supported ...

**J Davis:** I would love to support one so much; give me one.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I do not remember any of them. It does not matter what you are talking about. You could be talking about mining, tourism, Defence, the economy or anything; she does not back any of it.

Thank you for listening and indulging me.

I comment the Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

#### **Consideration in detail**

Clauses 1 to 3, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 4:

**J DAVIS:** I move amendment 1 to clause 4.

This is inserting definitions for conflicts of interest and register of declared interest. This amendment inserts two new definitions into the Bill. The reason for this amendment is straightforward. The Bill imposes obligations around conflicts of interest but never defines what a conflict of interest actually is, which is a significant drafting act.

If the law will require members to disclose conflicts, exclude themselves from decisions and face consequences for noncompliance, the term needs to be clearly defined in the Act itself, not left to interpretation or convention.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clauses 5 to 8, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 9:

**J DAVIS:** I have a couple questions and an amendment.

Will provision be made for recording and reporting publicly, such as in the annual report, when the wagering commission delegates any of its powers and functions to a public servant?