

GOLDEN MILE TROTTING CLUB — RACE MEETINGS

Grievance

MR K.M. O'DONNELL (Kalgoorlie) [9.12 am]: Greetings, Mr Speaker!

The SPEAKER: Greetings, member for Kalgoorlie!

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: My grievance today is to the Minister for Racing and Gaming and relates to Racing and Wagering Western Australia's decision to remove race meetings from the Golden Mile Trotting Club. The removal of local race meetings from the club has been very disappointing news for Kalgoorlie–Boulder. The club has been an important part of the Kalgoorlie–Boulder and wider goldfields communities since 1904—well over 100 years. It is one of the oldest clubs in the region and, with Kalgoorlie–Boulder celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, we can see that the club is well cemented in the region's history.

The Golden Mile Trotting Club has been at the centre of many of Kalgoorlie–Boulder's annual events. Its core business is, of course, racing; however, it offers so much more to our community, through its generous support of local charities. The club holds many fundraising events throughout the year, including “Give Me Five For Kids” and “Cash for Kilos Corporate Challenge”, raising much-needed funds for important causes. The club also provides opportunities for local groups to get involved and engage with the community, such as the Air Force cadets brigade, which takes on the role of manning the gates at events, where it receives donations toward national and international events. In addition to supporting local charities, the club is also behind bringing the community together for key community occasions, including New Year's Eve celebrations, providing a safe, family-friendly annual event. The club is a great supporter of local employment, with 27 paid positions employed for race nights at the club. Its events also provide opportunities for local small businesses, including food vendors and family entertainment, such as face painters and bouncy castle operators. Also, many local suppliers service the club, including horse feed suppliers and veterinarian services.

The charities, small businesses and groups that I have just mentioned stand to lose a great deal through the loss of race meetings at the Golden Mile Trotting Club, as will the greater community. This club is important to our regional residents. Like many country towns, we do not have the variety of entertainment and facilities that exist in the metropolitan area, so the club's value becomes so much greater. In addition to the support of residents, the club is strongly supported by local and Perth-based trainers, mining companies, small businesses and the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder. Those in the industry based in other parts of WA value the opportunity to attend race meetings in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. It provides them with the chance to enjoy many other aspects of the goldfields region during their visit. With many members of the goldfields community involved in the racing industry, there is concern that we may lose a number of these individuals, who choose to relocate closer to Perth, in the absence of local race meetings in Kalgoorlie–Boulder.

Losing residents can have a significant effect on the community, particularly as regional people are often involved in multiple community groups or activities. It is not unusual for someone involved in one activity, such as racing, to also be a community volunteer, as well as being a member of a local sporting team. When this person leaves town, they leave a gap in the community. If this person has a family, that is possibly four or five people leaving town, with the involvement of each of them in the community lost and having an impact on the rest of the community. The loss of residents is felt very strongly by regional towns and it is probably very difficult for people in the metropolitan area to appreciate the level of impact this has on a community. The same goes for the loss of key groups and facilities in regional towns. The community relies on clubs such as the Golden Mile Trotting Club for their support and the services they provide. This club has great potential and strong community support. It has submitted a business case for development and expansion, and I believe that, given an opportunity to prove its capacity for growth, under a trial arrangement, it would demonstrate the value of maintaining the race meetings.

I would now like to put some questions to the Minister for Racing and Gaming. On the basis of fairness and proper consultation, why, despite promises to the contrary, was the Golden Mile Trotting Club not given the opportunity to meet with the Racing and Wagering WA board prior to a decision being made to withdraw race dates and effectively close down the state's second oldest club? Is the minister aware that the claim by the CEO of RWWA, that local participation rates at the Golden Mile Trotting Club have dropped in recent years, is wrong and misleading, and that in 2017 locally trained starter averages were the second highest in the last eight years? Since the decision was made to withdraw race meetings from the GMTC, has the number of licence renewals increased or decreased this year; and by how many? Has the number of new applicants increased or decreased this year; and by how many? I have requested a meeting with the chairman or the board, and have had no response over quite a number of months. Could the minister please assist me in arranging or approving that meeting? I thank the minister for his time.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Racing and Gaming) [9.17 am]: I thank the member for raising this matter, and joining many others who have already raised this matter with me in recent times, both in this place and outside the chamber, and also in the other place. To that end, I acknowledge the member for South Perth for having raised this issue previously, and Hon Kyle McGinn, MLC, and Hon Colin Holt, MLC, both members in the other place, for having also raised the matter on behalf of the club. I acknowledge the member for Kalgoorlie for joining the ranks of all those who have previously raised the matter with me.

Racing and Wagering WA is the principal racing authority, established under an act of Parliament, with a specific task to act on behalf of the entire industry. I will quote from section 35 of the Racing and Wagering Western Australia Act 2003, “Functions in relation to racing in general” —

Without limiting the functions of RWWA under Parts 3 and 5, it is a function of RWWA —

...

- (b) to foster the development, promote the welfare and ensure the integrity of metropolitan and country thoroughbred racing, harness racing and greyhound racing, in the interests of the long term viability of the racing industry in Western Australia;

I know that individual clubs and individuals, since I have been the minister, feel aggrieved and that they are somehow the focus of RWWA, and that there is some sort of conspiracy or malicious intent associated with the way that they have been dealt with. The truth is that RWWA is acting on behalf of the people of Western Australia, and specifically on behalf of the entire racing industry of Western Australia—all three codes, all the many thousands of people who derive their employment and sustain themselves from the industry, and all the communities right across the state that see value in that industry. That is its role, and it means that, by necessity, at times it will make some hard decisions that impact on individuals or clubs, because it has to make those decisions on behalf of the entire industry.

The industry, across the board in all three codes, is increasingly witnessing diminishing crowds and returns. As we indicated when we announced that we would introduce a point-of-consumption tax and address the sale of the TAB to ensure that we provide certainty and sustainability for the entire industry, that issue needs to be addressed. The historical source of funding for the industry is diminishing. The way people bet and spend their disposable income on wagering has changed and that has eroded the historical source of funding, so we must address that. Part of addressing that means some tough decisions.

I have to respond to some of the observations the member has made, because they are not entirely accurate. Racing and Wagering Western Australia has worked collaboratively with the Golden Mile Trotting Club for many years. I am aware that the club has struggled to receive sufficient nominations to conduct a full eight-race card with full fields of 10 in each of the past three years. The club’s sustainability was questionable as it did not have a sufficient number of local trainers or horse numbers to stand alone, and it was heavily dependent on visiting trainers and horses to ensure that meetings could stand up. Unfortunately, the trend from industry appeared to be that participants were refraining from nominating their horses for the club’s meetings.

Following the 2016–17 season, the club race season was reduced from 15 races to 11. Last year, RWWA committed to working with and assisting the club. It did what the member is asking me to do now. It has done that already. It worked with the club and approved a hardship grant payment of \$30 000 to GMTC to assist the club to pay some outstanding debts. The 2017–18 season was also not well supported by local or visiting trainers, resulting in poor field sizes and fewer races being run. Only 22 per cent of race fields at Kalgoorlie were sourced locally. For the last three years, the Golden Mile Trotting Club has consistently run fewer races than Albany and Narrogin have, due to lower nominations, and it has had smaller field sizes.

Wagering data, while commercially sensitive, supports the downwards trend of GMTC. I have seen that data. It is not a conspiracy. We cannot reveal that data, but it confirms a downward trend. The decision by the RWWA board in March to cease allocating races to the club was difficult but necessary, as the cost to industry to support the club was not sustainable on an ongoing basis. This has been repeatedly explained to members of both houses and through representations made directly to my office. Subsidies that have been previously granted to the club are not sustainable moving forward as they are an expense to the rest of the industry. RWWA’s CEO, executive and senior leaders travelled to Kalgoorlie on 20 March this year to meet with the key stakeholders, including club president Michael Lucas and secretary–manager Esso Delaney, in addition to City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder CEO John Walker and Mayor John Bowler, to personally deliver the news of the board decision and the rationale for that decision. The club has been told.

I am running out of time. I want to address the member’s specific questions. As I indicated earlier, there has been a gradual decline across the industry in participation across all three codes and reduced participation numbers. I have a table that answers the questions that the member asked about the number of licences. There is one note to

be made. At this time of the year, because some regions have not yet commenced their seasons, the numbers for drivers and driver–trainers are not as they will be. They will grow. We can see, historically, that they will be higher. They are a bit down because of that, so do not assume that the driver and driver–trainers licensing figure this year reflects any substantial drop. Until the season has commenced, we will not really know the full number, but there has been a decline over the last four years, regardless, in both those categories. I will table this document and provide it to the member; that answers the question that he has asked.

[See paper 2007.]