



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Notice of Motion

16 February 2017

**GREYHOUND RACING INDUSTRY BAN ADVERTISING
CAMPAIGN**

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (12:47): I move:

That this House:

- (1) Notes the cost of the Government's advertising campaign banning greyhound racing.
- (2) Considers the spending of more than one million dollars as unnecessary, particularly to gain public support with inaccurate information.
- (3) Calls on the Deputy Premier to explain the justification of the campaign.

The decision by the former Premier in July last year to unilaterally ban greyhound racing across New South Wales with merely 12 months notice was indefensible. Three thousand jobs across New South Wales would have been lost. To make it worse, Mike Baird spent more than \$1 million defending a decision he ultimately backed away from. Facing revolt from The Nationals and tens of thousands of people signing petitions calling on him to reverse the ban, the former Premier threw his proposed changes under a bus along with more than \$1 million of taxpayers' money.

For many in my electorate the decision stripped away livelihoods without any warning and with flimsy justification. In Wallsend the closure of The Gardens racetrack would have cost the local economy \$17.69 million every year. In one way or another, 6,010 individuals are directly involved with the track. That is 6,010 people whose livelihoods would have been thrown upside down by Mike Baird's captain's call. One person impacted was local trainer Mark Watt. In 2009 he suffered a major heart attack followed by open-heart surgery. He was unable to continue employment. He became depressed until his sister gave him a greyhound. He fell in love with the dog. He trained it and raced it.

He wrote:

My life is dedicated to the love I have for my dogs. I'm not asking for sympathy, I am just telling you how it is for me. My pride, my joy, my happiness and my life are these dogs.

Advertisements, which a senior bureaucrat feared would be perceived as propaganda, asked the question, "What is the real cost of greyhound racing?" For thousands of my constituents the answer to that question is simple. Greyhound racing is beyond monetary cost; it means community, it means jobs, involvement, inclusion, hobbies and lifestyles. My constituents in the industry were gratified that their voices were finally heard, but they were left wondering why they have been vilified by this Government. What makes it worse, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

A rule usually reserved for public health or safety emergencies was used to expedite a \$1.6 million advertising campaign by the NSW government in support of its decision to ban greyhound racing amid an industry backlash.

To add insult to injury, a "creative brief" drafted by the strategic communications director of the Department of Justice, which was obtained and published by the *Daily Telegraph*, stated:

Take into account the intended audience [of the advertisements]. A large number of the target group potentially have low levels of literacy.

That has not been my experience, nor has it been the experience of any member of the Opposition. Unlike the description of greyhound owners given by the Department of Justice, the hundreds of people who got in touch with me and my colleagues, urging us to oppose the greyhound racing ban, are compassionate, intelligent people who were just asking for Mike Baird to listen to them. In order to silence his critics, Mike Baird invented a civil emergency so he could circumvent the rule requiring a peer review be carried out, as is required under the Government Advertising Act for campaigns that cost \$50,000 or more. Under the Act, the department's plans are supposed to undergo a peer review or cost-benefit analysis for a campaign costing more than \$1 million. This can take place retrospectively only if the campaign involves "an urgent public health or safety matter or is required in other urgent circumstances". Interestingly, when Brenton Scott, chief executive of the Greyhound Breeders, Owners and Trainers Association, was interviewed by the *Guardian Australia*, he said:

I cannot recall a government ever using public funds to protest against a community like ours in this way. We have every right to be stating our position for maintaining the industry, and for the government to use public funds to come out and reinforce information which we have said is false is outlandish, outrageous and unprecedented.

We agree. It bewilders me that Mike Baird thought it was acceptable to spend a \$1 million to justify an unjustifiable decision. It seems that the former Premier was operating under an illusion. I call on the Government to explain how using the public health and emergency safety exemption in the Government Advertising Act can be justified. I call on the Government to justify the condescending attitude of bureaucrats towards those involved in the greyhound racing industry and to justify how it could spend \$1 million vilifying thousands of honest, hardworking people who love their dogs and just want them to race.

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (13:16): I thank the members for Epping, Shellharbour, Riverstone, Campbelltown and Wollondilly. None of us—not one person on this side of the House and not one person on the Government side of the House—supports animal cruelty. That is out of the question. I welcome the member for Orange, who is in the Chamber. I am sure that he supports this side of the House on this issue. The member for Epping referred to the advertising campaign, which was good because he got to the crux of the ad campaign; but we differ from his opinion. According to the member for Epping the advertising campaign had three purposes. According to those on this side of the Chamber it did have three purposes. The first was to put out propaganda, the second was to discredit greyhound owners and greyhound-racing enthusiasts, and the third was to close the industry outright. That was the Government's purpose when it wasted \$1.6 million of taxpayers' money. That is a lot of community money to waste.

Members on this side of the Chamber have outlined many of the important projects in their electorates that that money could have been spent on. We are all desperate for funds for important projects in our electorates, but the Government spent \$1.6 million on propaganda. The member for Epping insulted me slightly when he claimed that we had not read the McHugh report. Those on this side of the Chamber were pouring over the 80 recommendations, trying to get an understanding of them. We recognised that the recommendations were sensible and we supported them. We certainly read the report. The member for Shellharbour spoke eloquently. She talked about public money and how it could have been spent more wisely rather than on a propaganda campaign.

The member for Riverstone spoke sensibly but did not address the issue of how much money the Government wasted on the almost illegal advertising campaign that it pushed through at the expense of taxpayers. The member for Campbelltown spoke eloquently about the crux of the issue: the Government got it wrong. I agree with him. The member for Wollondilly almost made some very eloquent comments. He began by saying the biggest regret he had was voting with the Government to ban the greyhound bill. I am pleased that he was so honest, and I am sure if others were honest they would echo that regret. Indeed, it is very telling that Government members who opposed the bill or abstained from voting on the bill were not promoted to the ministry. Was this their punishment for having the courage and the guts to stand up for the industry and their constituents? I have seen it happen before and I guess I will see it happen again. It is sad that the Government would do that. I also agree that only a small number of people in the industry were doing the wrong thing. If that were the case, why then did the Government invoke this ban? Why did we not catch the crooks? I urge members to support this motion.