

THE HORSE RACING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Summary Bill Report

The Bill

The main purpose of this law is to enable **the current** operators of Down Royal and Downpatrick racecourses to make applications to the Horse Racing Fund (“the Fund”).

This will be done by making amendments to the Horse Racing (Northern Ireland) Order 1990:

- Specifically named operators at Down Royal and Downpatrick racecourses will be removed
- Future changes will be made through secondary law (can be brought forward by the relevant Department)
- Racecourse will be able to submit financial plans together or separately

The Issues

The 1990 Order allows operators at Down Royal and Downpatrick to make applications to the Fund to support their operating costs.

However, the Order names specific operators at these sites.

In 2019 a new entity took ownership of Down Royal. It has therefore been unable to apply to the Fund.

Downpatrick has also been affected because all Fund allocations were suspended while the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) took advice on state-subsidy issues.



What Did We Do?

The Bill was referred to us in April 2021 for scrutiny and we asked our research team to analyse it and present any potential issues to us.

We also gave members of the public and stakeholder organisations the opportunity to give their views and feedback on the Bill through an online call-for-evidence that was open from 25 June to 20 August 2021.

We asked the following organisations to attend a Committee meeting so that we could hear their views and ask questions:

- **Officials from DAERA**
- **Down Royal Racecourse**
- **Downpatrick Racecourse**



What Did We Find?

We heard that allocations from the Fund have been crucial in supporting Down Royal and Downpatrick over the past 30 years. The inability to apply to the Fund has placed significant financial strain on both racecourses.

We also heard how important the activities at these racecourses are for the local economy, generating income for restaurants, accommodation and hospitality.

We received 8 responses to our-call-for evidence and the **vast majority** supported the Bill because it will allow payments from the Fund to resume, which will ensure the sustainability of horse racing at both Down Royal and Downpatrick.

However, stakeholders raised a number of issues:

- One organisation was resistant to Fund allocations being made to a private company that now operates Down Royal. We sought assurances from DAERA on this and are satisfied that there is no concern in this regard
- The scope of the Fund is very narrow, and it might be worthwhile expanding it to allow, for example, greyhound and point-point horse tracks to apply
- It would be useful to review the level of fees that are charged to bookkeepers annually which are used to resource the Fund, to ensure that they are proportionate to the level of income derived from local horse racing events

What Do We Think?

We agree with the overall aims of the Horse Racing (Amendment) Bill and that it is important to ensure that operators at Down Royal and Downpatrick can access Fund payments to support their activities.

Therefore, we will recommend that the Assembly pass the Bill and we have not put forward any amendments.

We also think it is important to undertake a review of the Fund to look at its scope and how it can be modernised, and will be recommending that DAERA take this forward.

What Happens Next?

The Bill will move to the next step of the legislative process. Our full report will be provided to all Members of the Assembly to help inform their considerations and decision on whether the Bill should pass into law.