



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 7 December 1999

GAMING MACHINE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (No.2)

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—ONP) (4.23 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on the Gaming Machine and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999. One Nation's stance on this issue has always been one of concern for the average bloke and his family and for the impacts that gaming has on the community. The legislation is the last of a series that has implemented many changes within the gaming industry. We have supported the legislation because it has sorted out many inadequate structural and procedural aspects of the gaming machine industry. This Bill adds to these improvements. Therefore it, too, will receive our support. Our concern is for the effects that gaming has upon society which still exist. I reiterate One Nation's rejection of laws that step over the boundaries of individuals' choice and promote the decay of a decent society.

I am pleased to see that one of the changes that the Bill makes is to allow the Queensland Gaming Commission to take into account societal and community matters when making its decisions. What confuses me, however, is the lack of this type of power in the first place. Why has it taken until this piece of legislation to make a simple amendment which ensures that the societal and community consequences are taken into consideration when the Queensland Gaming Commission assesses applications for gaming machine sites? I would have thought that the effects upon society would have been one of the most important considerations that the Queensland Gaming Commission should have taken into account prior to and during the application process.

I have said before that there is not much that I can do to stop gambling and gaming machines in this State, but I do stop to consider the far-reaching moral considerations of legislation. Gaming is one of those issues that, regardless of what the figures or the experts say, has negative societal effects. Charity organisations such as Lifeline, St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army, the Smith Family and a host of other charities, including the likes of Caboolture Community Care, can tell real horror stories in relation to gambling. They will tell you of people who spend their family's income on gambling at the expense of necessities such as food and clothing and, more often than not, the rent.

Quite a number of people fall behind in their rent and then seek the assistance of members of this Parliament to prevent them from being evicted, including from housing provided by the Queensland Housing Commission. These charities know this and they pay for the existence of that family until the next payday arrives. Drug addiction certainly is not the only addiction in this country. Each and every one of us knows it and we pay for it each and every day.

I have been told—and I have no reason to disbelieve it—that the busiest times for ATMs in and around the Treasury Casino is about 2 o'clock in the morning. That is usually just after Government departments, other agencies, financial institutions and other institutions have transferred the salaries of their workers into bank accounts. To indicate how bad and perhaps how corrupt our addiction to gambling has become, recently a potato chip manufacturer was placing Scratch-It tickets into chip packets. What sort of generation of gambling addicts are we trying to produce?

Perhaps if religious institutions and charities had their way, many rules in relation to gaming might exist, such as a cap on the total number of poker machines, the removal of the capability of those machines to accept currency notes, prohibition on machines to accept credit cards, requirements that machines have automatic shut-down periods to break a betting cycle and a requirement to display the real odds of winning. These are just a few that they might consider. The point is that gaming should

not be encouraged but should be discouraged and that the real societal effects of gambling should always be examined. The focus should not always be on the amount of revenue that can be made; the impact upon the family unit and the general wellbeing of society should be well and truly taken into account.

It is for this reason that poker machines should not be situated in shopping centres, as the Minister clearly indicated. There is no need for it and it is completely unacceptable. The idea of placing gaming machines in shopping centres can only be to attract more people to the centre so that retailers can make more money and so that these machines can create a new money-making fetish. It is a greedy and selfish way for retailers to attempt to draw customers into their establishments in order to make money, and it is completely unacceptable. I am sure that if that did happen, rather than seeing children abandoned in cars in car parks under the casino or in the inner city, we would see them floating around the malls and shopping centres. I suppose that if they were in the mall at least they would have a chance to get some fresh air and perhaps purchase a cool drink or something. However, it is not the sort of freedom that we want to see our children forced into.

The Minister summed it in up in his second-reading speech when he said—

"It is entirely appropriate, in my view, that clubs and hotels continue to provide gaming machines to their members and patrons."

After all, patrons and members of clubs know exactly what exists in those clubs. That is the reason why they go to those particular clubs and give them their patronage. If their intent is to play on these machines, they know that they are available; and they also know what auxiliary things occur in that club. The Minister went on to say—

"It is not appropriate to allow the gaming machine facilities into shopping centres and other public areas. They ought to be available to meet demand, not flaunted to create it."

Allowing poker machines at shopping centres is not meeting demand; it is flaunting it. Gaming machines should not be in shopping centres. We have just debated a Bill which dealt with touting for business in relation to motor vehicle insurance. We spoke about tow truck drivers touting for business. I think that putting gaming machines in shopping centres is really touting for business. I think the same avenues of debate apply here as were debated in the previous Bill. Gaming machines should not be in any public area where children are present. How young do we want our young people to begin gambling? What is mum going to do with little Johnny while she is having a go at the pokies for an hour in between buying the groceries and perhaps doing the banking?

I do not deny that there is a demand for poker machines and that they do provide some benefit to the community. After all, as has been highlighted by a couple of other speakers, many charities and community organisations benefit directly from the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund each year. Clubs often use some of the profit from the machines to offer cheap services to their patrons such as meals and to fund functional workings of the club. Many people enjoy a play at the pokies, and they have the right to do so. But poker machines have their place, and that place is definitely not in shopping centres. I am pleased to see that the Treasurer and I both agree on that matter.

I am generally satisfied with this Bill. It furthers the regulations on the gaming industry and accounts for the future growth of technology in this area. I am particularly pleased with the amendment to ensure that the community and societal factors are taken into consideration when the Queensland Gaming Commission assesses applications for gaming machine sites. I have already expressed my opinion in this regard.

I also share the same concerns which the member for Gladstone highlighted in relation to a reduction in penalties. That is an area of concern for me as well. I look forward to the Minister's response to the member for Gladstone, as that will also answer my query and, I hope, alleviate any of the fears that I have with respect to the reasons behind the reduction in those penalties. Any move to tighten up the industry and to further ensure that all business is conducted with integrity is a positive one. Whilst expressing my scepticism of any beneficial effects that gambling has upon society, I and One Nation will be supporting this Bill.
