



Speech by
**Hon. BRIAN
LITTLEPROUD**

MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

Hansard 17 August 1999

INTERACTIVE GAMBLING (PLAYER PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs—NPA) (10.11 p.m.): I am pleased to follow the member for Toowoomba South in this debate tonight. He has reiterated the stance of the Opposition, pointing out that it was not necessary to have this sort of legislation, because the original legislation had the power to correct the situation that is before us.

When this story broke a couple of weeks ago, I am sure that everyone took an interest. My summation of the feeling of the people of Western Downs would be that they quickly made an assessment of the situation. They would say that yes, the Treasurer has shown poor judgment politically. They know that there has been talk of an inquiry, or a decision as to whether there should be an inquiry. They are holding their breath that the full facts will come out, but they will withhold their decision. Apart from that, they say, "Well, that is just what happens in politics in Brisbane."

It is a little sad that the media expect members in this State House to take part in a blood sport and to attack one another. They feed off that and get coverage, and they think that they are doing that for the good of the people of Queensland. But I represent the people of western Queensland, who say that they are tiring of this. Today we have made no progress as far as making Queensland a better place is concerned. But members should not blame the Opposition, because this is the first opportunity we have had in two weeks to present our case. The case being put forward by the Opposition today about there being no need for this legislation is correct.

I have listened intently to the debate on this particular Bill all day and to the debate on the 6 o'clock motion. It seems to me that this is classic damage control on the part of the Government: first of all, speak up, confuse the facts and muddy the water; and secondly, besmirch the Opposition. The Premier promised the people of Queensland that he was going to lift the standards of Parliament. Yet every time he gets to his feet and faces any sort of pressure from the Opposition, he launches into personal attacks on the Leader of the Opposition or whoever else on this side of the House is raising the issue. He is the man who is trying to convince the people of Queensland that we have to lift the standards of Parliament. I can tell him that it is not going over very well. He needs to think about that.

When the Bill was finally put before us in the House today, I looked through the Explanatory Notes. I refer members to page two and the subheading "Consultation", which states—

"The Bill has been drafted to reflect the significant community concern regarding the relationship between elected officials and interactive gambling licence holders."

I have talked about muddying the waters. That is one hell of a long sentence which, when summarised, says, "Consultation—none! Consultation—absolutely nothing!" It is a bit of a farce. As I said before, it is an example of this Government trying to muddy the waters, to confuse the issue, to throw around a few facts and a few fancy words. The Premier is good at that. He could appear at the La Boite theatre seven days a week. He changes his tone of voice. He gets his wife to come along and hold his hand. She gives him advice and holds his skirt. But it all comes down to: consultation— none!

Throughout the day I have been listening to the Premier. When he was speaking this morning during question time, he made the comment that the licence given was a provisional licence. I have listened to all the comments made by the member for Ipswich in the past couple of weeks and never,

ever did he use the defence that it was a provisional licence. But the Premier said earlier this morning that it was a provisional licence and that, if things do not go well, he will take it away.

Then members heard the Premier's second-reading speech to this Bill. He stated in part that the licence awarded to Gocorp was on a conditional non-exclusive basis for a limited 15-year term. So all of a sudden it is a conditional licence. But he went on to say that the licence that went to TABQ was non-conditional, yet it was for 15 years, with exclusive rights, and then a 99-year term. My interpretation of "conditional" would be that conditions would apply. The Premier cannot tell me that conditions did not apply to the licence that went for 15 years for Gocorp with a 50% take for the Government. There were certain conditions laid down. Similarly, when a licence was given to the TAB for exclusive rights for 15 years but with a 99-year term, there were conditions laid down. So they are both conditional licences. So what a lot of bull! What a lot of bulldust! The Premier has tried to muddy the waters. He has been too smart by half in trying to confuse the issue. He has gone back to the classic tactic of besmirching the Opposition and confusing the facts. We have caught him out in that regard.

I reiterate that the member for Ipswich never once said that this was a conditional licence. So it is interesting for members of the public and members of the House to go back to the second-reading speech. The Premier has not been consistent in the way in which he has applied these words.

The next thing I want to mention is the probity check. I have been a Minister twice. I have had a fair few dealings with Treasurers and the Treasury—not with great success on many occasions. I am getting a smile from the member for Bulimba. But whenever I have gone along to have a bit of a yarn to Treasury officers, I have never found them unprepared or wanting for details. They will pull you apart. I find it hard to accept the member for Ipswich when he says that he received advice that everything was hunky-dory and that they had checked out all these people. Yet the Courier-Mail and members of the Opposition can come up with the facts about at least two people who were directors of Navari and other companies that showed that they were shonky. I just cannot accept that good Treasury officials did not give that sort of advice to the Treasurer. If they were at fault, what has happened to them? Have they been reprimanded? Have they been given the axe? Have they been shunted out and new blokes brought in? Or have they been given a chance to come forward and say publicly, "This is the advice I gave the Treasurer. This is the advice I gave the Cabinet. This is the advice I gave the Premier, and it was overridden"?

There are people in the Western Downs electorate, which I represent, who have doubts that Treasury officials, who are professionals—real professionals who for years have been catching out Ministers who have been trying to get easy money at the expense of someone else—all of a sudden could be so poorly advised that they did not check out the records of the people who were tied up with those companies. That is the other doubt expressed by the people of Western Downs.

The next thing that I want to talk about is the memorandum from the Premier. It was pointed out ably by the member for Toowoomba South that on the very day of the opening of Parliament, the Premier wrote a memorandum. The adrenalin was flowing. He was smiling. He was the Premier of Queensland. His was the office that made everything happen. He faces great difficulty in making the people of Western Downs understand that a memorandum could go from the chief of staff in his office to the Treasurer's office saying, "Give poor old Bill D'Arcy a bit of a hearing here. He has been pushing this for a long time", and the Premier knowing nothing about it. Pigs might fly! And the pig industry is in bad shape. I find that hard to believe, and I think the people of Queensland find it hard to believe, too. It brings no credit to this Premier, who wants to muddy the waters and gloss over those things without an explanation.

Today, when there was a ruling from the Chair, the Premier was on his feet grandstanding. He is better at using words than I am. He said, "I am prepared to table the legal opinion." He did not say "one page". He said, "I am prepared to table the legal opinion." But when we asked for it to be tabled, he put down one page.

Mr Swarten: You had better have your hearing tested.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: I can hear and read. That was a pretty poor attempt by the Premier to muddy the waters. He was caught out again.

The memorandum from the Premier cannot be dismissed as being the product of a busy man saying, "Give poor old Bill a bit of a hearing. Get him in there and give him the pushover." Suddenly we find that three Labor Party mates have a hell of a good deal. I am not going to buy that. I used to be a schoolteacher. The kids used to tell me why they did not do their homework. The Minister for Public Works knows what I am talking about. We have been through this matter over the years.

Speaking about the Minister for Public Works brings to mind another problem. The Minister's chief policy adviser—

Mr Swarten: No, he is not.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: He is emphatic about that, but it is irrelevant. I want to make this point—

Mr Schwarten: My chief policy adviser is Peter Johnson.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: Yes, but you had a chief policy officer called Don Livingstone. He was on the Minister's staff. I want to make this point. Ministers' staff work whenever the demand is there. They could work 12 hours a day, 14 hours a day or 16 hours a day. A person working in the Minister's office does not have much spare time. However, here we have a bloke who has a family company which has been involved in all sorts of manoeuvres in order to obtain this licence. This might be completely unfounded, but I wonder if the bloke had to do some of his business calls from the Minister's telephone. That question has to be asked. I certainly hope that the Auditor-General or the CJC looks at that matter.

My experience when I was a Minister was that ministerial staff worked longer hours than I did. They had me prepared in the morning and they would pat me on the back at 7.30 p.m. when I had had enough. Even at that stage they were still preparing me. People are asking me, "How come this bloke is out there doing this sort of thing while he is working hard for a Minister?" I am not reflecting on the Minister, but this question has to be answered.

I was taken by a suggestion contained in a press release issued by the member for Toowoomba North. We all know that the Queensland TAB is going to be sold. This sale will put more money in the Queensland coffers so that we can build some roads on the Western Downs. With a bit of luck, we might get a dam or two if I can convince the Minister for Environment that we have to do something to create jobs.

If we are short of a quid, why the dickens did we not go through the process of making this Internet licence part and parcel of the TAB sale? I have read the Premier's second-reading speech. He glosses over this fact by saying, "One was a licence for 15 years at a 50% take for the Government and the other was a licence for 15 year term at only 20%." That is a lot of bunkum. The Government is looking after Queensland. Why could the Government not say, "We will take back this licence, create a brand new licence and put the Internet gambling into the TAB when it is sold off to the public." If it was done this way it would mean more money for Queensland and we would all be winners.

However, it seems there has been a tilting of the scales. I would not be unkind enough to say this, but other members have inferred tonight that it is better to look after one's mates in the ALP than look after the people of Queensland. I put that question to the Government. How about putting it with the TAB and selling it off?

It is becoming obvious to the people of Western Downs that there is a broader issue. The people understand that the member for Ipswich had done something pretty silly politically. They are pleased to see that an inquiry has been set up. My constituents talk to me about other matters. For instance, they say to me, "What about that fellow Don Brown, president of the Queensland ALP? He has just been appointed as Chairman of the Industrial Commission. Crikey, that's a bit on the nose, isn't it?"

Sir Robert Sparkes is a constituent of mine. He is a Queenslander of great intellect. If he had asked for something special when he was president of the National Party, members opposite would have hollered like mad.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: But we didn't do it. You did something for Don Brown, didn't you? Sir Robert Sparkes did not receive \$170,000 a year.

Mr DAVIDSON: I rise to a point of order. The member for Lytton is interjecting from other than his correct seat.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: The Leader of the Opposition raised the question of appointments to all sorts of electricity bodies in Queensland. Six out of seven people on the council representing south-east Queensland have direct affiliation with the Australian Labor Party. People in Brisbane made a lot of noise about this and said it was a bit over the top. I have a better understanding of the situation. The ALP vote in western Queensland is so low that the Government probably did a bang-tail muster and that is all it could get.

I suggest to the Government that it is being pushed by people who have self-interests and this seems to be one of those cases. The people of Queensland are not fools. They do not like to see this sort of thing happening. Union membership is getting lower and lower. The Government has just put through a piece of legislation that looks after its union mates. Now the Government is making appointments and issuing licences that seem to lean towards the Government's friends. The people do not like that. The Australian Labor Party went down the gurgler three years ago because it became very unpopular and out of touch.

Mr Schwarten: What happened to you?

Mr LITTLEPROUD: Yes, we have gone down the gurgler, too. I will live with it. I am still here.

Mr Swarten: You got here on Labor Party preferences.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: Yes, but I am still here. Winners are grinners. We have a situation where the Labor Party is gaining a reputation for not being on the square about things. This piece of legislation is all about damage control. It is a classic case of control: confuse the facts and besmirch the Opposition. We had to have this debate today because this is our first chance to say something about this matter.
