



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 7 December 1999

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

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (3.43 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Gaming Machine and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999. At the outset, I indicate that the Opposition will be supporting this legislation. I will refer briefly to three aspects of this Bill. The first aspect is that this Bill extends, particularly in clause 21, the range of issues that the Gaming Commission must consider when permitting gaming machines in establishments. They have to take into account social and community issues. The second aspect of the Bill, which covers the vast majority of the clauses in the Bill, is really the final stage of the implementation of the gaming machine white paper. The third aspect of the Bill relates to a number of other miscellaneous Acts, including the Wagering and Lotteries Act, the Keno Act and similar legislation, to reflect the ongoing changes that are occurring in the gaming industry.

My colleague the member for Indooroopilly, the shadow Minister for Families, will speak in a little more detail about the social and community aspects of gaming that the Opposition believes ought to be considered when gaming machine permits are issued. There is no doubt that gaming, gambling and the prevalence of gaming machines is becoming more of a social problem. In that regard, the Opposition supports the Government's initiative in this Bill. I realise that, in many respects, the Treasurer has foreshadowed already further things coming out of his gaming review. However, the Opposition believes that more attention should be paid to the social impacts of gaming. We need to explore things such as better information about the potential risks that people face when they participate in gaming activities, better support services for problem gamblers and their families, perhaps tougher restrictions on access to automatic teller machines and lines of credit, perhaps more Government regulation with respect to consumer protection, and perhaps tighter controls on advertising.

When I was involved in the white paper, I explored those aspects of gaming with organisations such as Break Even. The previous Government and I were addressing those issues and I think that it is appropriate that this Parliament and the current Government continues to address them.

However, I want to say one thing about the white paper, which is something that I emphasised time and time again in my negotiations and public performances in respect of it, and that is that the white paper was not about increasing the types of venues into which gaming machines could be placed. Representatives from numerous organisations, such as the cabaret association, came to me and said that they wanted gaming machines included in their venues. I made it quite clear that that was not the purpose of the white paper; the purpose of the white paper was about the kinds of issues that clubs and hotels were facing with rapidly changing technology and their ability to remain competitive with other types of gaming that were coming on to the scene in the not-too-far distant future, such as the Internet and eventually home gaming products through interactive television. Those things are a reality. They are going to be there. It seemed to me that if clubs and hotels were going to continue to operate and perform, particularly their important social functions, they were going to have to compete in a new technological environment and we had to permit the mechanism for that to occur. That is what the white paper was about. As I said, time and time again in public meetings and in private meetings that point was made with those various organisations.

It is interesting to note that the access to gaming machines comes via liquor licensing. That was done originally by the Goss Government when it introduced gaming machines into Queensland. It is

important to understand that the reason for picking liquor licences as an access point was that it represented a hurdle over which an organisation had to jump to allow gaming machines onto its premises. At that stage, liquor licences were regarded as a mechanism that restricted people's ability to access gaming machines and, in some respects, if an establishment could have a liquor licence, then adults were in attendance—people had to be 18, they had to have the right to vote. If those people possessed those attributes that were generally accepted in a democracy, then it was felt that they should have access to gaming.

Mr Lucas: It was also good criteria for the suitability of character of a licensee, as well.

Dr WATSON: I agree that another issue associated with the issuing of a licence was the character of the individual involved in the operation. It is important to understand that the liquor licence was seen not as a mechanism for expanding the incidence of gaming but as a barrier to entry. It was a restrictive mechanism.

Over the past couple of years, the way that the general liquor licence has been interpreted and allocated has really changed because of social requirements that have come with the advent of the cafe society and other kinds of restaurants that want access to a wider range of entertainment and beverages. Therefore, I can understand why there is a greater tendency to move outside the restrictive area of hotels and clubs to which the liquor licences generally applied. Now, the liquor licence is no longer such a restrictive mechanism. While a criterion that could be used or that should be used—

Mr Hamill: I'm glad that you didn't mix singular and plural.

Dr WATSON: Yes. While a criterion should be used, it is not the be-all and end-all. It is a criterion and perhaps other criteria are also appropriate.

Mr Hamill: We'll make sure that gets into the mass media, or whichever medium you choose.

Dr WATSON: Other criteria could be or perhaps should be used. Clause 21 in the Bill allows the Gaming Commission to consider other criteria. The social and community impacts of gaming ought to be taken into account when looking at where and when gaming machines are to be approved. I am sure that this is the beginning of a broadening of the criteria and a narrowing of the types of establishments that will be permitted to have gaming machines. That is an appropriate way to go and it is consistent with the way that we would have gone.

The second aspect of the legislation that I wish to refer to is the implementation of the white paper. This was always going to be a lengthy process, for a number of reasons. Firstly, with the introduction of licensed machine operators and so on, we introduced a significant change in the way that the gaming machine business is conducted in clubs and hotels. It was always intended that that be done in stages, and it has been done in stages by the previous Government and this Government.

We always said that it was our intention to come back to the legislation, and indeed that was a recommendation of the white paper, which identified the administrative problems that needed fixing. Those issues were left till the end because they could wait. I think that this is the final chapter.

Mr Hamill: It's more like a volume.

Dr WATSON: Yes, the final volume. I am realistic enough to understand that, as society and technology changes, other modifications will have to be made to the excellent legislation that was introduced by the previous Government. Having looked through the Bill and spoken with the Treasurer's staff and the staff of the Office of Gaming Regulation, I am satisfied that the changes that are proposed in the amendment Bill simply fix up the kinds of things that we had always intended to be fixed up.

The legislation amends a series of other Acts, such as the Wagering Act. This reflects some of the changes that are taking place with the privatisation of the TAB and the implications of that for the people that the organisation employs, as well as the people employed under other gaming regulations. That has to be taken into account. Some of the other changes relate to products in the broad gaming area that are covered by different Acts and that need to be taken care of. I have pleasure in supporting the Bill.
