



Speech by
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MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

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GAMBLING

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (11.23 p.m.): A major recent independent study into the gambling industry in Australia conducted by the Australian Productivity Commission has reached some startling conclusions as to the effects of gambling on the social fabric of our nation and our State. This report, which was completed in July, indicates that last year in Australia some \$11 billion was spent on gambling. Last year, over 80% of Australians gambled, and 40% gambled regularly.

Gambling has a high social and financial impact on our society. One in four problem gamblers reported divorce or separation as a result of gambling; one in 10 problem gamblers said that they have contemplated suicide due to gambling; and nearly half of those in counselling have reported losing time last year from work or study due to gambling. As a matter of fact, each year problem gamblers lose on average nearly \$12,000 with the consequent impacts upon their spouses and children. It is estimated that around 330,000 Australians have significant gambling problems with 140,000 having severe problems.

The South Oaks Gambling Screen, or SOGS, which is the most widely used and validated test throughout the world for detecting problem gamblers and which has been applied in all past Australian problem gamblers prevalence tests, has categorised Queensland as having the second highest rate of problem gambling of any State or Territory in Australia—coming second to New South Wales—and notes that Australia has a significantly higher level of problem gambling than that of a number of other Western nations. Estimates in the Productivity Commission report of July 1999 show clearly that Queensland has the second highest gambling problem behind New South Wales. The report is most startling when it shows that in this nation annually there are 50 or more suicides due to gambling problems and that 86 problem gamblers are going to jail. The report also details a range of other problems and concludes that financial and emotional hardships are being suffered not only by individuals but also by Australian families as a result of losses in gambling activities.

Of course, the changes that are occurring in our society, particularly with the advent in recent times of Internet gambling, are going to aggravate the gambling problem. Surprisingly enough, in 1998-99, 86,000 Australians gambled on the Internet and 55% of them were aged between 18 years and 24 years of age. Today, over 150 Internet sites offer online gambling in Australia. Although the new technologies may lead to virtual reality casinos and network adventure game betting may be able to develop technology such as fingerprint identification to safeguard against social harms, technologies are also able to create more manipulative environments for gamblers, with computers being able to collect information on the participants, such as their level of skill and type of play. So we are virtually going to have a casino in our own homes.

The vast increase in accessibility provided by Internet gambling, that is, 24 hours a day—and we should not forget that it will be 24 hours a day, not like getting into a motor car on a weekday or a Saturday afternoon and going to the racetrack; this will be available 24 hours a day in people's own homes—requires only an Internet connection and there is no travel or dressing up involved. There are no restrictions on the number of access points. A person can be disorderly or drunk and still play in the comfort of their own homes. The games are multilingual and thereby increase accessibility to non-English speaking people. The computer game style of the games means that people will be playing them without realising the amount of money that they are spending. Clearly, there will be

greater difficulties in prohibiting minors from Internet gambling, which currently we are able to do with the physical gambling establishments. Effectively, there has been the removal of the reality check or natural barriers that going to the races or waiting for the croupier imposes.

Questions are being raised in relation to the changes that are taking place to gambling. It is little wonder that in recent days counselling organisations such as Relationships Australia have indicated that there are growing problems within families and the community generally in relation to gambling. It is fair to say that unless the Government pays closer attention to this social problem within our community, it will continue to grow. As I say, the Internet is going to increase gambling problems substantially.

Also, as well as the introduction of Internet gambling, the gaming machine people themselves have proposed to put gaming machines not only into clubs and hotels but also into shopping centres. Recently, I was thankful that the Government refused the installation of gambling machines at Indooroopilly Shoppingtown, which is located in my electorate. There was a push to put a large number of gaming machines into that shopping centre. That would have made gambling far easier.

Of course, a lot of people in this Chamber and elsewhere like to have the occasional punt, or put money occasionally into Gold Lotto, or whatever. However, that is vastly different from Internet gambling.

Time expired.
