



Speech by  
**Mr DENVER  
BEANLAND**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY**

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Hansard 7 December 1999

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

**Mr BEANLAND** (Indooroopilly—LP) (3.55 p.m.): As the shadow Minister indicated, much of this Bill deals with technical amendments. However, clause 21 does not relate to technical amendments solely. Clause 21 states that when considering applications—

"... the other information or material the commission may have regard to includes information or material about social and community issues."

This is a particularly important matter.

Under the chairmanship of the member for Cleveland, the Government has been undertaking an inquiry into gaming machine gambling for some time now. In fact, I understood that the report of that inquiry was due to be issued in the middle of this year, which is almost six months ago, but still it has not surfaced. Unfortunately, during that time we have seen an influx of applications for poker machines, particularly in shopping centres. This is of real concern. Certainly there has been an increase in poker machines in a number of areas, but people are primarily concerned about the availability of poker machines in shopping centres because of their ready access to people going about their ordinary everyday activities such as shopping.

The annual report on machine gaming for 1998-99 states that in the 12 months to 30 June 1999, there was an increase of 87 machine gaming venues in Queensland. Licensed club machine gaming venues increased by two and hotel machine gaming venues increased by 85. Of course, it is with hotel gaming that the problem of poker machines in shopping centres is occurring. I noticed that just the other day the clubs organisation expressed some concern about this issue. I am sure that the Treasurer is well aware of that. In that 12-month period, the total number of gaming machines in operation increased by 4,430, which is an increase of 1,149 at licensed clubs and some 3,281 at hotels. That in itself is quite significant.

It is for that reason that people like me and others on this side of the Chamber are pressing the Treasurer to release the report, as the recommendations that come from that inquiry can only be a step forward. Not for a moment is anyone saying that we should not have poker machines. They are a way of life in this State now. They have been in clubs since the beginning of the Goss Government and now they are located in hotels as well. However, as the shadow Treasurer, the Leader of the Liberal Party and member for Moggill indicated, a problem occurs when one tries to tie poker machine licences to liquor licences. While I can well understand why that was done in the first place, it is fair to say that we have now moved away from that situation.

Situations exist where Brumby's bread shops have been turned into taverns or licensed restaurants that have poker machines. Premises that used to be Sizzler or Pizza Hut restaurants now have poker machines. At Belmont Road, Tingalpa, the owners of premises that used to be a doctor's surgery, which is located next door to a child-care centre, have applied for a gaming machine licence. Indeed, the new operation will have its own child-minding facilities. Again, that is in the middle of a shopping centre that is just down from the road from a hotel.

Although the majority of people use gambling—whether it be at the racetrack, poker machines or whatever—as an entertainment, for enjoyment and an outlet, unfortunately the figures indicate that growing numbers of people are addicted to gambling. It is a disease that leads to poverty, crime and drugs. It is a disease that means children go to school without food. In many cases, children of addicted parents miss school. They simply do not go to school at all. It is a disease that results in people losing their homes and their dignity. It is a disease that engulfs the total lifestyle of those who are addicted. This is a particularly important issue. It is for that reason that we are looking forward to reading the report that must be about six months overdue. It was originally indicated to me that the report of the inquiry being chaired by the member for Cleveland was due around June or July of this year—somewhere in the middle of this year. I read some statements to that effect.

I stress that Opposition members' concerns relate to poker machines in shopping centres. A new mechanism needs to be put in place for the granting of poker machines. I accept that the Bill provides that the commission may have regard to information and material about social and community issues. In the past, that may have been appropriate for the establishment of clubs. Most clubs are stand-alone facilities. We all have them in our electorates. For many clubs, poker machines have been very successful. For many smaller clubs, poker machines have been unsuccessful. I will not take the time of this House to go into that. However, circumstances have changed. The only way to tackle this issue appropriately is to give people the opportunity to object. In future, consideration must be given to applications for poker machines as distinct from applications for general liquor licences that allow licence holders to seek a poker machine licence. A separate application process should be required so that people have an opportunity to object to the Queensland Gaming Commission.

It has been discussed in this place and elsewhere that local governments should handle that process. I do not know that that is a very good idea. I do not think that would be an appropriate system. The Queensland Gaming Commission is the appropriate authority to consider all the facts. Local governments do not consider all the facts in relation to this issue. A number of local governments that have gaming machines in shopping centres in their region are opposed to them. Time will tell how successful they will be in their opposition. An independent appeal structure similar to that existing in the town planning process needs to be in place. It is unfortunate that the situation has developed in this way; nevertheless, that is how it has evolved.

Previously, the restricted number of general liquor licences meant that poker machines were limited. The general liquor licence was a barrier, as it required a certain type of facility and the licensee had to be of good character. Recently the process has developed, and all that has changed. I understand that the Office of Gaming Regulation and the commission are inundated with applications by people who are wanting to get in before the report of the inquiry is presented. The public needs to read that report, digest it and make some comment on it. Then some action can be forthcoming in relation to that matter. I suggest to the Treasurer that consideration needs to be given to placing a freeze on poker machines in shopping centres. I am not referring to clubs, stand-alone hotels or other circumstances that we have recognised generally over time. If there is to be some delay in considering the report, consideration needs to be given to halting the rush to install poker machines in shopping centres.

People have often raised with me the question of whether gaming machine figures were included in retail sales. The ABS figures show that the definition of "turnover" includes retail sales, wholesale sales, takings from repairs, meals and hiring of goods—except for rent, leasing and hiring of land and buildings—and commissions from agency activity, for example, commissions received from collecting dry cleaning, selling of lottery tickets and so on, and net takings from gaming machines, etc. If the net takings from gaming machines are included in the figures, it is little wonder that retail sales continue to rise, because that would be a considerable figure.

It is worth while noting that the figures to 30 June 1998—the latest set of figures that I was able to obtain—show that 80.1% of all bankruptcies were non-business bankruptcies and 19.9% were business bankruptcies. Many of those bankruptcies were people who have gambling addictions and who have become totally carried away. As a result of my recent comments, I have received quite a number of letters expressing concern by people who are aware of the problems of gambling. They are discovering that family members are becoming addicted to that particular vice. It is a growing concern. In common with the former Government, this Government provides counsellors. Relationships Australia and Lifeline are two organisations that do counselling work that come to mind. Relationships Australia has the biggest contract with the Queensland Government. I understand that those counselling services are inundated and are not coping very well because of the large number of people who are becoming hooked on poker machine gambling and who are suffering problems associated with that addiction. Those people require counselling on a variety of subjects, including financial counselling with the Break Even counselling service, in order to help them out of their many problems.

Governments have done very well. The last Treasurer's Annual Statement shows an increase of 28.3% in revenue from gambling machine taxes. Those tax receipts are up by some \$52.4m. I know

that the community is awaiting the Government report. I hope that that report will make some differences that will lead to some legislative changes.

The proposed change in the legislation concerns the word "may". I understand that is because of the way the legislation is currently worded. More changes are needed in order for it to state "must take into account", because the Gaming Commission could receive applications from stand-alone clubs for an increased number of poker machines. Depending on where the hotel or club is situated, it may not be necessary in those circumstances to go through a whole process of canvassing social and community issues to cover the ambit of those aspects. Of course, with respect to new ones being set up in shopping centres, I believe it is essential—it is a "must" and not a "may". That is another reason that the Treasurer needs to exercise some vigour in relation to that section. As a result of recent changes, a wholesale change is needed.

Through emotive advertising we need to get across a message about gambling and gambling addiction. We have advertising about road rage and road accidents. There needs to be better advertising that advises people about where to go if they become addicted to gambling and to warn people about the addiction of gambling. No doubt some people are hooked on Gold Lotto or Oz Lotto, but the poker machine sector seems to be the growing sector of concern right across-the-board.

This is becoming a big social issue. It is of particular concern to families and community groups. This problem is not isolated to a few groups within the community that have spoken out in the past about problems to do with gaming and gambling addiction. Unfortunately, this is a disease that has taken off within the community and which affects many families and individuals. Recently, a person hooked on gambling was convicted of murdering their grandmother because of their addiction. Addicts will go to any lengths to lie, cheat and mislead people.

Not very long ago someone remarked that problem gambling can lead to the breakdown of the family unit and the individual, the loss of employment, financial security, self-esteem and friends, and that it can also lead to theft, lies and a loss of trust. This disease, once it takes hold of people, is very debilitating. I urge the Treasurer to take action and see that the report is produced. I and many other people within the community expected that report in the middle of the year. It is long overdue. We trust that there will be some worthwhile recommendations in it. I ask the Treasurer to give in-depth consideration to some of the issues that I raised today and previously and which I know other people in the community are raising with him. I am aware that there is an advisory committee and I am sure it is also raising the problems of gambling addiction with the Treasurer. It is in the interests of all Queenslanders that the Government takes action in this regard.

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