



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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INTERACTIVE GAMBLING (PLAYER PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (12.16 a.m): I am pleased to respond to the Interactive Gambling (Player Protection) Amendment Bill before the House. This Bill is the result of a desperate attempt by the Premier to cover his tracks in this sleazy, corrupt affair. The Premier has basically lost the plot; he has panicked when he has been caught out. That is the simplest way to sum it up. He has reacted to the media. He is running around, blaming everybody except himself—and, of course, his Treasurer.

Let us have a look at how the events unfolded. A group was looking for an Internet gaming licence. The group commenced making inquiries during the period of the previous coalition Government. No licence was issued. In comes the Beattie Labor Government in 1998 and, on the day that the new Government was sworn in, out goes an instruction for the Premier to contact the member for Woodridge regarding an Internet gaming licence. That licence was issued by the Treasurer—a Labor Treasurer in a Labor Government for the Labor mates. The Premier would have us believe that he did not know of the impending licence. No doubt he wants us to believe in the tooth fairy! The question is: how many discussions were held between the Premier and the Internet gambling stakeholders? The Premier would sink to any gutter level to try to blame and involve others.

I have Jupiters shares, obtained in the original float in 1983 before I became a member of this Parliament. That float was similar to the Suncorp-Metway float, the Telstra float and possibly the future TABQ float as well. I was like any other Queensland mum and dad who bought shares. The Premier tried to associate me with doing something illegal; he tried to suggest that I should be unable to participate in the parliamentary debate because I own shares in a casino.

I refer to a Sunday Mail article, which states—

"Premier Beattie seized on Mr Hobbs' involvement in a bid to divert attention from his government's crisis over the Net Bet Affair.

He said Mr Borbidge's defence of his frontbencher was 'hypocrisy so thick you could peel it with a potato peeler'."

That goes to show what sort of a man we are dealing with—someone who will sink to that level and say anything and do anything to try to shift the blame from himself on to those people who are entirely innocent. That is a perfect example of what we are dealing with here.

The Premier is a lawyer. I do not know whether he is a good one or not—probably not—but he would and should know that I own those shares in common with the community, with no conflict of interest whatsoever. I have obtained a letter from the Clerk pointing out exactly that. Without reading the entire letter into the record, in summary it states—

"I therefore do not see any reason for you to not maintain your shareholding in Jupiters and vote in Parliament."

That should be the same for any other member of Parliament who wants to have shares, like any other mum and dad out there. They should be able to do that to have some understanding of how the share market operates and hopefully have a better understanding of commerce in the future. We do not want to have a system whereby we go out there into the gutter and find people who have never tried anything and never done anything in their lives and say, "You will do. We will take you in and make you a parliamentarian."

Mr Lester: The State will go broke.

Mr HOBBS: The State will absolutely go broke. It is a sad thing that we have this mentality in Australia of trying to drag people down. Why do we do that? The tall poppy syndrome is prominent here. If anybody tries to get ahead, people want to drag them down. I went to America recently and the absolute opposite is the case. It is no wonder the United States is a superpower.

Mr Lester: People who go ahead employ people.

Mr HOBBS: That is right. The Premier obviously plays very loosely with the facts, as we have seen in many instances tonight. The Premier indicated that he had a letter from me which somehow involved me in this Internet gaming licence. The Premier stated this on several occasions. I think it is important that I actually read the letter he had which supposedly involved me in this affair. He raised the matter in the House tonight. He did it on several other occasions, intending to implicate me as a former Minister involved with this affair.

Mr Borbidge: A dishonest slur from a dishonest Premier.

Mr HOBBS: A dishonest slur from a dishonest Premier, as the Leader of the Opposition says. I have here a letter with the letterhead of the Minister for Natural Resources to Mr Bill D'Arcy. It states—

"Dear Mr D'Arcy

AUSTRALIAN ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT LTD

The Minister for Natural Resources, the Honourable Howard Hobbs MLA, has asked me to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 15 December 1997 on behalf of Australian Online Entertainment Ltd in relation to time delays in the granting of a licence.

This matter does not come within the ambit of the portfolio of the Minister for Natural Resources, however, I have taken the liberty of forwarding your correspondence to the responsible Minister, the Honourable Joan Sheldon MLA, Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for the Arts, for her attention and reply direct.

Yours sincerely

Scott Sturgess

Senior Ministerial Policy Advisor"

Mr Borbidge: An acknowledgment.

Mr HOBBS: An acknowledgment.

Mr Borbidge: Of course, they don't acknowledge their correspondence—not to us, anyway.

Mr HOBBS: My staff did the responsible thing on my behalf and responded. So here we have this dishonourable person trying to drag somebody into the mire.

Dr Watson: So your staff did not give a directive to the Treasurer to do something?

Mr HOBBS: No. That is a very good point. The Premier often puts the best spin on the argument. It is the same with everything he does. People must understand that that is the sort of person we are dealing with.

Mrs Edmond: That's really dreadful, to put the best spin on things!

Mr HOBBS: I welcome the Premier to the House. We are pleased that the Premier has come into the House. It is wonderful.

Mr Beattie: I have been out the back listening to you.

Mr HOBBS: I am sure the Premier has. He has been out all day. We were wondering where he was. We were worried about him.

Mrs Edmond: Back to reading, Daffy Duck.

Mr HOBBS: We are dealing with quite a serious matter.

I am pleased that the Premier is here, because this is a very important issue. I raise with the Premier that I believe there are people who will be disadvantaged by this legislation, particularly those who may end up holding a gaming licence in some shape or form. I refer the Premier to the disqualified persons list on page 9 of the Bill, which we will no doubt deal with later on. It talks about disqualified persons. The Bill sets out that a regulation will be developed in the future in relation to these particular people, who will be penalised if they in fact hold a licence.

We may have a situation where a person—this applies to a councillor or the spouse or child of a councillor, or a staff member of a member of the Legislative Assembly, or a person whether or not of a similar class of persons mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (e) prescribed under a regulation—who has some shares and who decides to go into some sort of office, whether it be local government or whatever the case may be, may have to sell those shares, perhaps at a discounted rate. We do not believe that section needs to be in the legislation.

I do not think those conditions are appropriate and they should not be in the Bill. Why on earth should a councillor from Burketown, Boulia, Townsville or Toowoomba be penalised? We are talking about a regulation that may be brought in in the future. I would like the Premier to set out in his speech in reply to the debate on the second reading of the Bill what he proposes in the regulation in the future in relation to these sorts of people. I presume that he is looking to try to make this legislation Gocorp specific, but if that is not the case we want to know what the situation will be.

When we really look at it, what is the difference between having Internet gaming shares, casino shares and Carlton United shares? Carlton United owns more poker machines than anybody else in the country. The pubs probably have more poker machines. I think there has been a fair bit of panic in relation to the development of this legislation and we are seeing that there will be some problems with it.

The Labor Treasurer issued the licence and the Premier obviously knew about that. Today the Premier avoided answering whether he had met with the applicants. It is quite clear that the Premier knew what his Treasurer was doing. Can members imagine for one minute that the issuing of a multimillion dollar licence by the Treasurer would not have been discussed with the Premier? Can honourable members imagine that happening?

The Government is big on press releases. The Premier held a press conference when he shredded his Christmas cards! Here we have a Government issuing a multimillion dollar licence and there is not even a two-paragraph press release. To me it does not really add up.

Mr Borbidge: It is most out of character.

Mr HOBBS: Absolutely.

Mr Gibbs: You've got to remember: you're always a bit slow. That is why it does not add up for you. You are always a bit slow.

Mr HOBBS: I do not know about that. Some people may say that.

Mr Gibbs: It's like, "What is the meaning of life?" I am trying to answer it.

Mr HOBBS: I may be, but then again I may not be. Why is this legislation being rushed through the House? There has been no consultation. There is no confidence out there. The history of legislation rushed through this House, such as that relating to native title, is that huge numbers of amendments are needed. That will happen with this legislation as well. In other words, the Premier is trying to crack a nut with a sledgehammer.
