



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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GAMING MACHINE COMMUNITY BENEFIT FUND

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (7.12 p.m.): I rise tonight to bring to the attention of the House what I believe is a misuse of funds distributed under the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund. I would say at the outset that this fund has been of enormous value to many worthy community groups whose potential ability to raise alternative funds is very limited. Unfortunately, there are always those who misuse and abuse such schemes.

The North Burnett Regional Economic Development Council, an organisation with a grand sounding name but which in reality constitutes a very small group of people, has been successful in acquiring funding to establish a so-called community newspaper in Monto. Monto is already serviced by the Central and North Burnett Times and the Central Telegraph, both of which are very good local newspapers. They play a tremendous role in the community and provide a great service to the community.

It seems absurd to me, and quite wrong, for public funds from the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund to be used to compete with such local businesses. This group is currently trying to sell advertising space in the Monto community, thus competing for business with the established papers. I am concerned that people with publicly funded positions are currently using those positions to set up this operation. I am also concerned that there is no check or control on the editorial content of this publicly funded publication. The potential certainly exists for it to be used for political purposes by a small group of people with political aspirations, claiming to be a community group. No-one would suggest that this is an appropriate use of any Government funding. No-one would suggest that regional newspapers that have kept faith with their communities for many years should be subject to this type of competition.

It is a grave misuse of the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund to use grants from the fund to set up operations that compete with small businesses anywhere. It is a grave misuse of such funds to set up operations that can be used by fringe political organisations posing as community groups.

I urge the responsible Minister to review the allocations of the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund so that this inappropriate situation can be rectified or at least never repeated. There are a great many very worthy community groups that deserve all the help that they can get. I urge the Minister to ensure that the allocation process concentrates more on checking the bona fides of those groups so that the funds are used to benefit the whole community.
