



Speech by

Mrs J. SHELDON

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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GAMING MACHINE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—LP) (3.46 p.m.): I wish to make a few comments about the Gaming Machine and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Although I do not wish to cover any ground that has been covered already in this debate, I note that the Bill was put in place when we were the Government, and for the obvious reasons explained in the second-reading speech to the original legislation, some of which have been re-explained in the Treasurer's second-reading speech to this amending legislation. However, I am concerned at the major thrust of these amendments, namely, retrospectivity. I understand that there will be an amendment from the Treasurer that affects that.

Mr Hamill: It has been circulated.

Mrs SHELDON: Yes. I was going to ask the Treasurer this question later, but I will ask him now: will that retrospectivity cover a five-year period in respect of any club that has entered into a contractual arrangement for revenue sharing in good faith?

Mr Hamill: Like the Opposition's amendment, it deals with licensed sites and gives a five-year sunset period.

Mrs SHELDON: I ask the Treasurer: if a club has entered into what is currently a legitimate arrangement but will still be out of pocket in five years or may not be so covered by that amendment, will he compensate those clubs?

Mr Hamill: I will respond later.

Mrs SHELDON: The Treasurer must know what he is going to do now.

Mr Hamill: I do.

Mrs SHELDON: I would certainly like to hear his response.

Mr Hamill interjected.

Mrs SHELDON: The Treasurer should feel free to respond as he wishes. That is my concern. Obviously, the Treasurer has not thought about this and I have just put this into his mind; hence he is going to go and find out an answer. I think that is important, because clubs——

Mr Hamill interjected.

Mrs SHELDON: I was prepared to share my time with the Treasurer.

As the Treasurer knows, some clubs have entered into a legitimate arrangement under the existing legislation. I have a great abhorrence of retrospective legislation unless it is put in place to specifically benefit an individual or group of individuals. Many clubs— I understand there is not a huge number; the figure given to me was 17; I do not know whether the Treasurer has any advance on that figure—entered into a legitimate arrangement on a profit sharing basis under the current legislation. Some of them are small clubs and most of them are surf-lifesaving clubs.

There is no doubt that surf-lifesaving clubs perform a very great service to the community—and a voluntary service. In no way should they be adversely affected, hence my question about compensation for clubs which somehow may not be covered by this safety net five-year provision or which, even if they are, may still be out of pocket because of something that they legitimately went into.

I know that surf-lifesaving does get Government funding, but the requirements on our surf-lifesaving organisations are getting greater and greater. I think the tragedies that we have seen on our

beaches this summer emphasise the greater need for more patrols and more services and how much beach safety and surfing protection is a vital part of our lifestyle in Australia and, more particularly, in Queensland. I would not like to think that the surf-lifesaving organisation was disadvantaged in any way.

I have received letters from representatives of the surf-lifesaving organisation saying that they had tried to see the Treasurer, but he would not see them. They also brought up this question of compensation, but they could get no answer from him. If the Treasurer has answered them, that is fine. However, it was not long ago at all that I received a letter in which those two complaints were raised. I think that the surf-lifesaving organisation is a very legitimate one; a number of us depend on that organisation for our safety in the surf and the tourism association depends on it very much. So it should be helped—and certainly not hindered in any way—to provide better services to the community.

Obviously some of the other clubs have been concerned about how this could affect their revenue, and I would like to table today a petition containing 89 signatures from the RSL club in Caloundra. They are concerned that there may be an encroachment on their viability if big revenue sharing bases, particularly southern corporations, are allowed to come into our State, and one can fully understand that. The RSL club in Caloundra is a very good club. Those members who are smart enough to come into my electorate and spend their Christmas holidays there will realise the great services that club provides.

Mr Fouras: Are you having five bob each way?

Mrs SHELDON: This club does need support and it needs to have its point of view listened to. I thought that was what we were here for: to listen to the points of view of all people and not take judgmental positions on one side or the other, as the member for Ashgrove is currently doing.

This club has used its profits; it has ploughed them back into the club. It is providing great service to its people. It has been enlarged. It is a very comfortable, attractive club. As treasurer for two years running, I presented that club with awards of excellence for its cuisine. It had won the best restaurant award on the Sunshine Coast for clubs, and if honourable members have eaten there, they would certainly substantiate that. I think their concerns have to be taken into consideration, and I will table that petition when I conclude.

It is very important that we make sure that we look after our own industries in this State, and I do think that the amendment to the legislation goes a long way towards doing that. That was certainly the thrust of the Opposition's foreshadowed amendment, on which I worked with the current shadow Treasurer. I am very pleased that the current Treasurer has seen the wisdom of our amendment and has pretty well adopted it in full measure. We support much of what is in the Treasurer's foreshadowed amendment, the retrospectivity of which has an impact on clubs.

I notice that the Treasurer has also put an inquiry into place to look into the effects of gambling and gaming on the community. I do think that that is a good idea. I hope I am not being cynical when I ask: has this just come in from Treasury and the Treasurer, because I assume that form of revenue to the State will be taken over when the GST comes in? They will not be so dependent on such a revenue if the GST is supporting it. Having been in the Treasurer's position, I am sure that he looked at that angle of things.

I think that the effect that gambling and gaming has on our community is very apparent. It is a growing effect. This was possibly not foreseeable when it was first brought in or to the extent of the current problem. It does affect a lot of families, and there is no doubt that there are addictive gamblers. I am well aware that there were addicted gamblers before we had gaming machines, but for some people it is a cheaper form of gambling and they do become very addicted to it. To others, it is a good form of recreation. It is a good form of tourist recreation. It does bring revenue into the clubs that they were not getting previously. Under the Gaming Machine Benefit Fund set up under the legislation, quite a bit of that money goes back into the community, and I do not think that that should be forgotten.

We know—and I knew as the former Treasurer—the number of applications for revenue that come into the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund. We are well aware of the funds that were distributed and how thankful those various community groups were for the \$7,000, \$10,000 or \$15,000—whatever amount they got out of that—because that often went to supplying some essential item that they needed. One that comes to mind is the Caloundra Volunteer Coastguard in my own electorate. That committee allocated \$15,000 for new engines. With that extra money, they were then able to buy the engines for a new boat. They would never have been able to do that otherwise. That is just one example of the benefits that accrue right throughout the State. No doubt the Treasurer will also take that into account when he is carrying out this review.

Even though money is used to that effect, I think we could put more of that revenue into family support mechanisms and into mechanisms of support for those who have gambling addictions. Not all people have a gambling addiction. Often people work out how much money they can spend and then

spend it appropriately and enjoy what they are doing. They have a bit of fun. Others find that they are absolutely compelled to gamble, be it gaming machines, racing or whatever— indeed, even two-up. They are compulsive and cannot stop. I think we could put more money into helping such people.

Indeed, the revenue to the State has increased as the number of machines has increased, as they have become more popular and as clubs have grown bigger. I think that we could look at hiving off more money and funnelling it into those areas. I ask the Treasurer to give consideration to that and see what increases in assistance can be provided. There is no doubt that there is a cost to the State and to the nation from people with gambling difficulties. We have only to look at the breakdowns that occur in families for that reason. Any money spent on providing this sort of help is most probably a dollar well spent and will save the community two or three dollars down the track.

Finally, when we are debating legislation such as this, it is important that we look at both sides of the argument. We have certainly seen very good representation from the clubs. We have seen equally good representation from Surf Life Saving Queensland. Both their points of view must be taken into consideration, but I think it is essential that no-one is left out of pocket because of this change when they legitimately entered into a business arrangement under contract, which they were entitled to do under the current legislation. If people are left out of pocket, the legislators are being very unfair to those people in our community. I ask the Treasurer whether he will consider seriously the question of paying compensation to anyone who is not really satisfied financially under the safety net arrangement that the amended amendment will provide.
