



Speech by

**Mr M. HORAN**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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Hansard 17 August 1999

**INTERACTIVE GAMBLING (PLAYER PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (9.51 p.m.): Honourable members really have to wonder why on earth are we having this debate and why on earth this legislation is before the House. We have had the Premier come in here time and time again and before the media to protest the innocence of his Treasurer and to protest the innocence of the whole process and saying, "Everything is okay; it will be proved right by the various inquiries that are going to be held", but we are still seeing this legislation. Why have we got this legislation? Because he knows deep down that the whole process has been corrupt and the whole process has been sleazy!

Gocorp is really only a creature of the smelly, sleazy deal that has been done behind the scenes to see this company get the rails run, to get first opportunity to have a crack at the \$200m in projected profits that are available for the first company that gets the Government-backed licence for Internet gambling. This whole process today has just demonstrated the guilt that is emanating from the Labor Government. We have a Government that has done nothing under its leader but backflip to backflip since this whole thing broke on about 26 July. That, incidentally, was the date of the Atherton Cabinet meeting where Treasurer Hamill gave a full briefing to the entire Cabinet.

**Mr Borbidge** interjected.

**Mr HORAN:** Yes, not a single Minister here. That is typical of the day. We had the Premier come in and give only half a second-reading speech today to one of the most amateurish, bodgie pieces of legislation we have ever seen.

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE** (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.53 p.m.): In the absence of a Minister in charge of the House, I move—

"That the debate be now adjourned."

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Nelson-Carr): Order! We will just continue.

**Mr HORAN:** As I was saying, the fact that there is not even a Minister in the Chamber is typical of the way this whole day—it has been like amateur hour. We had the Premier come into the Chamber and drop this legislation on the table and immediately the shadow Minister had to speak to it without one second in which to do any research to ascertain what it was about. It was the first time in my eight years or so in this House that I have seen a Minister introduce legislation and only half a second-reading speech. The Premier read about nine pages and then we had to sit here and listen to him rave on for another 15 or 20 minutes in a performance that was an utter disgrace and cast discredit on this House.

When the Premier interjected and swore at the Clerk during the shadow Minister's speech, that was the first time I had ever seen such behaviour in this place. In this House the Clerk is like the referee at a football match: he should be untouchable; he should not be subject to such abuse. It was like the captain of the other side giving the referee a push in the chest. Honourable members know what would follow if someone did that: they would be put out of the game for life. Yet day after day we see this Premier strut the theatrical boards of the media, holding his arms akimbo and saying, "I am accountable and I want to bring in new standards."

What were the standards we saw? For the first time ever in the history of the Queensland Parliament the Premier swore at the Clerk. That is a great standard! Then we heard only half a second-

reading speech. He treated the rest of the Parliament with absolute disdain. There was no time whatsoever given for this side of the House to prepare for this debate or research this Bill. From go to whoa the whole thing has been nothing but amateur hour from a bodgie outfit. If a person bases something on sleaze and corruption, the product that comes out the other end is going to be as corrupt and as sleazy and as amateur as what has gone in at the beginning.

As I said, the public have just about had enough of this Premier and his theatrics, but this particular issue takes the cake because the genesis and the catalyst of this issue of the Gocorp scandal was the direction that the Premier gave to his chief of staff Rob Whiddon in the very first hours of Government—just after they had been sworn in—that he sent to Treasury that Mr D'Arcy, a member of his Government, was to receive a preferential meeting. I do not think anything can be clearer than that particular direction. That direction was from Rob Whiddon, who is regarded as meticulous in the way that he attends to his duties. He said—

"The Premier has requested that you urgently have an appropriate staff member discuss Internet gambling with Bill D'Arcy MLA, who has raised some concerns with him."

That is when they were given the rails run; that is when they were put through on the fence; that is when they were given the opening that took them to first past the post; that gave them an extra \$50m to \$200m windfall. This crowd has won lotto because they have been given the rails run. Would honourable members not think that something such as this would have been done with such propriety that there would have been advertisements all over Australia asking companies and organisations to apply? These licences are worth \$200,000 apiece, but they have just been thrown away with gay abandon.

I would like to go back to the Atherton Cabinet meeting. What we are seeing in this whole episode is the way the Premier has been so quick to throw people to the winds. I have said before that, if the Labor ship starts sinking, in this case the first bloke to jump off will be the captain—the Premier. He will not stay there to the end. He will jump first and leave the rest of them on the rusting hulk. What we saw in Atherton was a full briefing of the Cabinet by Treasurer Hamill. What happened after that? One Minister raced out in a rage, grabbed the phone and commenced to berate his ministerial staff in Brisbane asking, "How did this happen? What is all this about?" and so forth—

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Mr HORAN:**—not that he probably did not know. That was the outrage that occurred. That was the opportunity for the Premier and the other 16 members of Cabinet to take some action. They had the opportunity, having been briefed by the Treasurer.

The Treasurer has always had the power under the existing Act to cancel any particular licence. Even if the Treasurer himself was too stupid to see the problem with all his Labor mates—and I do not think he was stupid—I think that the decision the Treasurer made was a cold, calculating and deliberate decision. He knew what he was doing. He knew the risks, but he wanted to involve his Labor mates in this sleazy, corrupt deal. He is going to hide behind the cloak of process. That is what Cabinet members are hanging their hopes on. He wants to say, "Yes, the process was right", but behind the process has been this system, this desire, this intent to give his Labor mates the rails run ahead of anyone else and to make this absolute killing of up to \$200m.

I will just quote some sections of the Interactive Gambling (Player Protection) Act of 1998. Under the heading Decisions about interactive gambling licence not to be justiciable, the Act states that a decision can be made and it is final and conclusive. The Act states that a decision-

"(b) cannot be challenged, appealed against, reviewed, quashed, set aside, or called in question in another way, under the Judicial Review Act ..."

We have already heard the Treasurer say in the media, when he tried to hide behind the skirts of his senior bureaucrats in Treasury, that he was worried about the Judicial Review Act. He blamed them for the advice they gave and said he had no other way to go. The Act states further—

"... or otherwise (whether by the Supreme Court, another court, a tribunal or another entity); and

(c) is not subject to any writ or order of the Supreme Court, another court, a tribunal or another entity ..."

This afternoon the Premier tabled a couple of sentences of legal advice. There are 15 pages of legal advice, but he produced only the little bit at the top of page 15. The legal experts were obviously trying to cover themselves. The bloke working the stop-and-go sign on the side of the road would know from reading this that the Treasurer had the absolute right to quash that licence. Why did Cabinet not give that direction? I think the whole Cabinet is guilty. When it got the advice in Atherton, it knew the problem and the trouble surrounding it, so it was going to cover it up and try to continue and huff it out. The Cabinet has been brought to book by the events of the past three weeks.

I said that this legislation was based on sleaze and corruption. This legislation is so amateur and so wrong that we cannot believe that it has come out of the Premier's office or the Treasury—wherever it has come from.

This legislation is endeavouring to take away 26.5% of Gocorp. Topki and Navari make up 26.5% of Gocorp, the company that was granted this licence after so-called probity checks and a strict selection criteria. This legislation will wipe out the 12% of Navari and will dramatically and irrevocably change the structure and the content of Topki. So 26.5% of Gocorp is irrevocably changed or taken away. If this legislation is passed, those opposite cannot say that Gocorp is the same company that was granted the licence. It is just not. How can the licence still be valid when the make-up of the company that was granted the licence is changed to such an extent? This legislation is so cheap, sleazy, amateur and wrong that it is unbelievable. As I say, it is the product of sleaze and corruption. That is probably the reason.

If this legislation is passed, Gocorp—it will not be the real Gocorp but another organisation altogether, because 26.5% will have been wiped out—will continue to hold the licence. I am certain that that decision would be subject to challenge. No-one has the right to a licence unless they have been through the process, with the probity checks and the checks on financial, management and organisational structures. The company that holds the licence if this legislation is passed would be only a shell of the company that gained the licence in the first instance. It would be only 73.5% of the original company.

What is the financial structure of this new organisation? What is its organisational structure? What experience does this new structure have regarding e-commerce and IT? What is the experience of this new company with regard to similar ventures or other associated ventures? It is a substantially different company. There is no way in the wide world it could continue to have a licence. The licence would have to be scrapped and the process gone through again.

Gocorp is like an old racehorse that has broken its legs. It needs to be destroyed by being shot between the eyes. The process needs to be gone through again. I repeat: I cannot believe that this Government is bringing into this House legislation that, if passed, would result in a different company holding the licence. Gocorp will be only 73.5% of what it was before. It would be a dramatically different company. How can that new company hold a licence in any shape or form? This new company—with different structures, different financial backing and different management structures—should go through the whole process again, like everybody else, otherwise the process is as corrupt as we have seen it to be in the past three or four weeks.

I turn to the part that the Premier has played in this whole process. There has been a massive effort by the Premier to try to distance himself from the process, to try to distance himself from his bumbling, fumbling Treasurer and to try to continue to promote this holier than thou image, with his arms out saying, "How clean and accountable this Government is." He is trying to stage a cover-up of mammoth proportions.

We only have to look at some of this legislation and at the people the Government says will be disqualified to realise how quickly this legislation has been thrown together and how cheap and amateurish it is. It states that a disqualified person would be a councillor of a local government. What do the councillors of local government in Queensland know about or have to do with Gocorp unless they are one of the Labor mates, such as Mr Pisasale of Ipswich? There are only about three or four councils in Queensland that have Labor involvement—in places such as Townsville, Brisbane City and Ipswich. There are about a thousand councillors in local government in Queensland. Does this mean that a councillor in the Diamantina Shire or on the Bundaberg council, or his or her children, cannot have any involvement? It is just a nonsense. It is just stupid. If those opposite have put that prohibition in the legislation, why have they not included Federal members of Parliament? They would know as much or have as close an association as would anyone in local government. I think that demonstrates quite clearly how ridiculous this legislation is.

The stupidity of the legislation drives home the fact that this is just a stunt and a cover-up. The Premier wants to go out and say, "We have banned members of Parliament and their children from any association. We have banned people from local government—even if they come from Bedourie or Weipa or somewhere else and would not have a clue what it is all about—and their children from having any involvement in this." It is just a publicity stunt, just as the whole sorry episode of the past three weeks has been. We have seen nothing but backflips and stunts as the Premier has endeavoured to cover up this monumental stuff-up by his Treasurer and as he has endeavoured to disassociate himself from this whole process.

We can never forget that the catalyst to this was that one of the very first things the Premier did in the early hours of the new Government, just after it was sworn in with all the pomp and ceremony and tea and biscuits, was send a direction to Treasury to give Mr D'Arcy and his Labor mates the rails run. That is what started this whole sorry mess. People who have been around know that if they get a

directive from the Premier—the boss—then they are supposed to act. This message was very strongly worded. It was a direction. The big message was: make sure these people get a very early interview. These people got the early interview. They got the preferential treatment. They got the rails run.

The people of Queensland want to see no more cover-up. In the media the Premier, in another one of his little stunts, said that as soon as the Auditor-General's report is finished the CJC should conclude its investigation because the people of Queensland are sick of inquiries. The Premier does not want the CJC to continue, because he knows that in all the little nooks and crannies and hollow logs there are Labor scandals everywhere. The word is around the State. We are hearing it from senior people who have said that they were pushed. We are starting to hear about real estate deals all around the place. We are hearing all sorts of things. The public expects that the CJC will investigate this to its absolute limits, because there is a lot more to this than meets the eye.

It is just a disgrace that we are here tonight debating this legislation, because it is just a cover-up for corruption and sleaze. This is some of the most disgraceful legislation that has ever come into the House. I do not think many of us on this side of the House can believe that those opposite have put before us legislation that dramatically changes a company, makes it 73.5% of what it was, so that it is no longer what it originally was—far from it. And the Government is still going to give it a licence! The new organisation—the 73.5% of Gocorp—has not passed the test. It has not been through the probity checks. It has not been through the financial, organisational or management checks at all, but it is still going to get a licence. How corrupt is that?

I certainly hope that those other members who are considering this Bill and who have to make important decisions about which way they will vote will take that into consideration. We are voting on shonky, bodgie legislation that does the Parliament of Queensland no good. It is no wonder that people are saying that the public have had enough of politicians when this sort of rubbish comes before the House. It is just a political stunt to cover up the greatest stuff-up that we have ever seen from a Treasurer in this State and the greatest cover-up that we have ever seen from a Premier. This will bring about the downfall of the Labor Government—don't anybody worry about that—provided the CJC does its job and goes up all the hollow logs and checks out every possibility of corruption.

We have never, ever seen something that is so unfair and which has given one organisation such a leg up and such a rails run as this. And to think that the Treasurer of this State, who holds responsibility for the final decision, would make a decision such as this just demonstrates the arrogance and the cold, calculating way in which the Labor Government in power treats the people of Queensland with disdain and distaste.

Time expired.

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