



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (4.17 p.m.): I also commend the Minister for going ahead with restrictions on the location of gaming machines. I intend to make a brief statement that I have been meaning to make for a long time. We hear a lot about how bad gambling and gambling addiction is, and I do not deny that this is devastating for families affected by problem gambling. However, the benefits to the community from gambling are immense. For example, a small hall in our area received a Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund grant of around \$11,000. Jaggon Hall would not have received funding from any source other than the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund. It is my belief that the benefits that flow from gambling in the form of these grants—sometimes small grants of, say, \$3,000 or \$4,000 for a kindergarten, a school, a hospital and so on—far outweigh some of the negative points with respect to gambling. This point is often overlooked. For every 100 gamblers in society—for example, every person who plays the pokies on a Sunday—there might be one problem gambler. The same applies with respect to alcohol use. Plenty of people consume alcohol, but not all of them are alcoholics. In my opinion, the—

Mr Lucas: It is about striking the appropriate balance.

Mr NELSON: Yes, that is exactly right.

This is a difficult issue, and I do not have the answers to this problem. However, as a person from a rural and regional community, there is no bigger highlight in my day than when I am advised—and I cannot remember which Minister sends this advice to me; it might be the Treasurer—that a Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund grant has been allocated to a hall, a school and so on. Those grants are of particular importance to the community. Some communities do not see those benefits rolling in as often as they would like.

Although there are problems associated with gambling—and this might be flying in the face of political correctness or the current attitude—I really think that we should not always look at the negatives that come from it. Whilst I do welcome restrictions on places where gambling can occur, I would not like to see a time when the benefits from it did not flow through to the community—so that Jaggon Hall, for example, could not be upgraded—because we restricted the use of gaming machines too much. With those comments, I support the Bill.

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (4.20 p.m.): I, too, would like to commend the Minister for the restrictions on the location of gaming machines. At this point in history, people are really worried about social structure. Poverty is becoming more prevalent. We hear daily of children having to be fed breakfast or another meal at school because mum and dad did not have enough money to feed them at home. This is due to many reasons, but gambling would be one of them and drugs and alcohol would be another.

The member for Tablelands said that he is very appreciative of the grants and so on that come from gambling. I believe that most communities are thankful for that funding. However, I think it is sad that the money has to come via that means. People have generally lost their generous nature. Once upon a time if a community needed a new hall, people got together and came up with fundraising ventures and the hall was built. Now it has almost become accepted that people go begging to the gaming machine fund for some money to build a hall or whatever.

I was very concerned at the thought of gaming machines going into shopping centres because, as the Minister said, it was creating a new clientele for the future. Children would be attracted to the lights, whistles, bells and so on. Someone very close to me put their life savings through gaming machines in a matter of three or four years, so I know what damage they can cause. I also know that, for those who control the habit, they are a great deal of fun. For the community in general, as I said, there are some rewards in the funding that is provided to build new halls or venues in which children can play.

The issue of educating people in relation to gambling also has to be addressed. Places in which counselling can be provided need to be more widespread. People should be able to access those services at any time—day or night—and I think in a lot of instances they can do that already. However, in rural communities that is not necessarily so. It is often difficult to find aid for people who have these sorts of problems.

I think we all realise that the saddest aspect of gambling is the bashings, theft and other crime that it can lead to. These people do not steal only from strangers; the odd carer or two has been known to help themselves to a disabled person's finances to feed their gambling habit. In fact, we have heard of such a case recently. I congratulate the Minister on the part of the Bill that addresses that issue.
