



Speech by  
**Mr DENVER  
BEANLAND**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY**

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Hansard 8 November 2000

**GAMBLING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr BEANLAND** (Indooroopilly—LP) (4.40 p.m.): In rising to participate in this debate today, I wish to raise a few of the issues that I think need to be aired. The legislation covers gambling, particularly gaming machines—a very important and major growth area, particularly in recent times. I often listen to people who tell me about gambling in the United States. People do not really appreciate that in the United States gambling outside of Las Vegas and Atlantic City is quite restricted. In some States it is very restricted indeed, even in the horse racing industry. There is not the breadth of gambling across the United States that we have in Australia generally. People in this State do not generally seem to be aware of that. I suppose they see the Hollywood sagas which normally show Las Vegas or Atlantic City with gambling 24 hours a day, with the big casinos that have a whole range of poker machines and various other forms of gambling. In those two centres gambling is a major industry.

Gambling arrived in Nevada in the United States because Nevada, apart from having a silver resource, is a fairly poor State. They were looking to gain from an industry and they saw that gambling was not operational in other States of America. They saw this as an opportunity for Nevada to gain something. Honourable members will notice that it is not in the capital of Nevada, Carson City; it is down in Las Vegas, which has grown enormously since the war years.

I return to the legislation that the Minister has before us today. I note that the commencement date of this legislation has been changed from 1 September 2000 to 1 December 2000. I noted that from the amendments the Minister sent around a while ago. I was wondering how this was all going to occur without changing that date. But even if that date is changed to 1 December, it is now 8 November and the commencement date would still be 22 days away. That is not a great deal of time for clubs and hotels to be able to adhere to the new legislation the Minister is putting through today. After all, in various places there are some significant changes of which people would be aware.

I am sure that the Minister has consulted with the club industry. It has probably indicated to its members the range of changes, and the same goes for the hotel industry. Nevertheless, these industries still have to look at the legislation and the amendments and be informed exactly of the changes. There are a lot of stiff penalties if they do not adhere to this legislation, and rightly so. I am not complaining about that at all. The point I want to make, though, is that there are only 22 days from today in which to ensure that these people are fully aware of this legislation.

With respect, even though the Minister has consulted widely—I am not arguing that point; I am sure he has, particularly with the club industry office bearers, the senior people within industry—I am concerned about the people in the smaller clubs who are not necessarily included in this second round of consultation and who are fairly busy looking after their small club. I am not talking about the larger clubs; I am sure they would be up with it. However, it will be a fairly tall order for the smaller clubs in particular and some of the smaller hotels that will be picked up in this legislation if they have poker machines.

I think the Minister needs to give a little leniency in regard to some of the smaller operators to give them time to make sure that they have changed their programs to be in line with this legislation, which does have some significant effects on the industry. We cannot walk away from that.

I notice also that we still have not got this year's gaming machine annual report, which I hoped we might have. I asked a question of the Minister some time ago about an issue to do with poker machines, and he referred me to the annual report, but of course the annual report still has not arrived. I am sure the Minister will want to get the legislation before the annual report arrives, because that will contain the number of poker machines that have been approved over the past 12 months and a whole range of pertinent information relevant to this debate. For some reason the Minister will not even answer the questions on notice in relation to those issues.

I wonder what the Minister has to hide. Perhaps it is the fact that I happened to notice, when the Budget came out this year that the gaming machine tax collected by the State Government had reached a record \$309m for the 1999-2000 year. Since July 1998—a couple of years ago—it has gone up by \$124m to \$309m, an increase of 67%. It went up by \$124m to \$309m over two years in the time of this Government. That is based on the Treasurer's own figures from his annual statements. I presume that is correct. The annual statement for 1998-99 contained those figures. That is the latest official record.

The amount of revenue that the State receives is a major issue. It has been growing rapidly in recent times, as has the number of machines both in hotels and clubs to a lesser extent. The issue always raises a number of other pertinent matters which I want to touch on briefly. One of those issues relates to the terminology that is used in a number of taverns. I refer to the use of the word "clubs" by taverns. I did not see anything in the legislation, having gone quickly through it, that relates to this, but I am concerned about it. I would like the Minister to address this issue.

I have noticed some taverns promoting themselves as clubs. I am not sure how they get away with this, but it seems they do. I was going to write to the Minister about it, but then I noticed that we have this Bill before the Parliament so I thought I would wait and raise it here. I hope to get an answer in relation to how these taverns are able to use the word "club". I do not know how that occurs, but I have seen it displayed and a couple of clubs have raised it with me. I was going to write to the Treasurer, but because we have the ability—

**Mr Hamill:** And I have raised the issue with the Minister for Tourism because I think it is an issue over licensing.

**Mr BEANLAND:** The Minister may give me an answer later. I appreciate that.

**Mr Hamill:** I will suffice with that one now.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I want to get the proper answer—the correct answer—from the Minister because I want to report back to my clubs exactly what is going on in relation to this. I was going to write to the Minister, but when I saw that this Bill was before the House I thought I would raise it now, save writing and get the answer from him in the House on the spot.

**Mr Hamill:** I have just given you the answer and now you are filibustering.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I say to the Minister that there is no point duckshoving it off to the Minister for Tourism because that is not going to get us anywhere.

**Mr Hamill:** I don't have responsibility for the Liquor Act. I don't have the Liquor Act.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I want this Minister to do something about it, as my clubs do. I think it is only fair to say that clubs are clubs and taverns and hotels are that—taverns and hotels. There is no point in sending it across to the Minister for Tourism. I am not having a go at the Minister. She is not here at the moment. She may not even be aware of the whole issue. It is a matter for the Treasurer as the Minister responsible for this legislation to ensure that this is brought to the attention of the Minister for Tourism—if that is the case—and to have some action taken in relation to it. If that is the case, then I am surprised that he did not include something in this legislation to amend the Liquor Act, if that is the Act in which the issue is picked up. This relates to poker machines. I am sure this relates to taverns and hotels, as there are some that seem to advertise themselves as clubs.

In the Minister's ministerial statement on 12 April 2000 in this House, he said that the Productivity Commission report on the Australian gambling industry shows that some 77% of problem gamblers make extensive use of gaming machines fitted with note acceptors and that note acceptors on gaming machines in all venues, including casinos, will be limited to receiving \$5, \$10 and \$20 notes. The acceptance of higher value notes will be prohibited. That is desirable. I notice that the Minister has relayed this message in a number of other forums. I have heard the Minister making similar statements on the airwaves. However, I am concerned as to how this is going to be implemented. Who is going to pay for this?

It will be quite expensive to change the machines. Like most things, I am sure someone can come up with the technology to change the way they operate. It probably exists already. However, I am not aware of the way in which the system will operate and I am very concerned as to who is going to pay for changing the machines. Many smaller operators are certainly not in a position to pay. I dare say that even some of the larger operators will find it somewhat difficult. I am sure casinos can well afford to

pay for changing the machines, but I am concerned about the small club and hotel operators in the suburbs around the State, particularly in the smaller towns. Who is going to pay for it? What is the cost? The Treasurer has mentioned this a number of times, but he has not given the costs, the time span and so on. There needs to be further information as to how the system will work.

I understand that hotels and clubs have no credit betting and that, in fact, credit betting is illegal. The maximum bet at one time for a club is \$5. However, I believe there are no limits for casinos, and the Treasurer can correct me later if I am wrong, because the rules have changed in recent times. Gambling addiction is a problem within the community. It is not something that one can get away from. For example, personal bankruptcies in Queensland account for 80% of all bankruptcies in the State. Fewer than 20% of bankruptcies are business bankruptcies. These matters are difficult to understand, but one reason for this statistic is gambling addiction, because people get into financial difficulties. Alcohol and drugs are other issues that can also come into play, but one of the major causes is gambling addiction. It is a soul-destroying issue. It destroys families, marriages and homes. This is an issue which needs to be looked at very seriously indeed. Unfortunately, it is a growing problem within the community.

The Government must ensure that a responsible gambling strategy is put in place. The Treasurer will say that in recent times the Government has put a strategy into place, and the Government has certainly made some changes. However, whether that strategy is appropriate and goes far enough is another matter altogether. Clubs also have to ensure that they have a code of practice in place and that they abide by that code of practice. To be fair, I think most clubs do that. However, there are a number of other issues that we as a community and the Government need to look at in relation to this issue.

There has not been any real effort in the area of public awareness and public education to ensure that people are aware of the problems of gambling addiction. There are many ads about gambling on television and radio, in brochures and so forth, but there is not much effort put into the problem of gambling addiction. This is a separate issue that needs to be looked at. There is a whole range of advertising for scratchies and other forms of gambling, but again there is no public awareness or public education when it comes to gambling.

In relation to cigarette smoking, it is very clear what the message is. In relation to drink-driving, the message is very clear—that is, a person is an idiot if they drink and drive. However, there is no public awareness or education in the community about the problems of gambling addiction and how these issues take hold. The Government has a long way to go in looking at this issue—further than it has gone in recent times. The figures speak for themselves.

I mentioned the increase in revenue from gambling, particularly gaming machines, that this Government has received over the past couple of years. It is quite a windfall. Last year \$1.2m was spent on gambling addiction programs, and I understand that that is going to increase this year. However, the Government spent only \$1.2m when it received well over \$300m—in fact, \$309m—in gaming machine taxes in the last financial year. There is a huge gap to make up in relation to public awareness programs in this area.

I continually hear that retail trade figures have increased enormously in recent times. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics information I have been given, we should not forget that retail trade figures include net takings from gaming machines. Gambling is fairly prosperous at the moment. There is a large amount of it. The retail trade figures are propped up by the increase in gambling. The section headed "Definition of Turnover" in the Explanatory Notes in relation to the ABS figures on retail trade states quite clearly—

"... wholesale sales; takings from repairs, meals and hiring of goods (except for rent, leasing and hiring of land and buildings); and commissions from agency activity (e.g. commissions received from collecting dry cleaning, selling lottery tickets, etc.)."

Therefore, net takings from gaming machines are included as part of the retail trade figures. However, this figure is often overlooked. When the retail trade figures are booming, it should not be forgotten that one component is the net takings of gaming machines.

There are a couple of other issues I want to touch on. The Bill proposes that the Queensland Gaming Commission can issue guidelines. In his second-reading speech, the Minister talked about the proximity of gaming machines to schools, shopping centres and the like. It is all very well to mention that, but the fact is that there is no indication of where these are going to be and how the system is going to operate. As I understand it, there will be no gazettal of this by regulation but an instrument will be put in the Gazette. The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee picked up on this fact when it went through the Bill. The committee made comment on this at pages 16 and 17 of Alert Digest No. 10, tabled on 22 August. It stated—

"The committee has previously commented adversely on provisions which permit matters, which it might reasonably be anticipated would be dealt with by regulation, to be processed through some alternative means which does not constitute subordinate legislation."

That is an important issue. The guidelines the commission is going to pursue will be published in the Gazette. These are the sorts of things that the Parliament ought to be made aware of. The only way to do that adequately is to ensure that they are put through by regulation and then tabled in this place.

I make reference to the fact that Labor previously found this sort of proposal unacceptable when some time ago the coalition introduced a Bill that did something similar in relation to another matter. It is interesting that in this case the Treasurer finds it completely acceptable.

Another matter raised by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee relates to the "creep provisions", which allow for increases in the number of machines in clubs, hotels and so on, up to the maximum number. Of course, the Minister has made some changes in relation to this but, at the end of the day, increases will be able to occur without the need to advertise or inform the public in a whole range of circumstances and situations that will arise.

Because saturation point is being reached in the community, particularly in relation to shopping centres, there need to be improved provisions. Councils have them under town planning requirements, whereby people have to advertise their intentions, people have the right to object, objections are considered by the councils and appeals go to the local government court.

That sort of process does not occur in this instance. In this situation, people go to the commission. I think there might be recourse to the Minister in some instances, but there are no independent appeal rights and provisions as there are in relation to local government matters under the town plan. I think this is a vastly different situation. There ought to be provisions similar to those, provisions that are vastly different from what the Minister is proposing.

Time expired.

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