



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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CLOSURE OF CLUBS

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (11.06 p.m.): I rise tonight to alert members of this House to a significant problem that is occurring in regional Queensland. Indeed, this is an issue that I wish I did not need to raise but, unfortunately, it is important for all honourable members, particularly those with electorates in regional Queensland, to be aware. In fact, it was expressed to me well by Mr Les Nash, the chairman of the far-north Queensland zone of Clubs Queensland. As he says in his submission to me, "All clubs are hurting. Clubs are in crisis." He is referring particularly to small clubs in Queensland. He makes reference in the documentation he provided to me to the numbers of clubs which have already shut down or are otherwise in difficulty and may shut down if they do not find some solution to their problems. They are, of course, asking for the support of their local members in working out the most appropriate solution and whether in fact Government has a role in assisting them.

I first of all mention some facts in relation to clubs in Queensland. There are approximately 1,000 licensed clubs in Queensland. Approximately 1.3 million people in Queensland are members of clubs. Until now, clubs have generated a total of 23,000 full-time equivalent jobs, both directly and indirectly, every year. Clubs contributed over \$200m in cash and in kind to the Queensland community in 1998. The sad news, however, is that nearly 20 clubs across the State have either gone into receivership, administration or have closed their doors in the past year.

Mr Nash and others in the club industry have expressed their concern that, unless we jointly look closely at the problem and understand what is occurring, we will not find the appropriate solutions. There is no doubt in far-north Queensland that many of the clubs such as the Cairns RSL, the Tully RSL, Kazaly's, Brother's and others are making a very real contribution to the community. Yes, they may have a particular core membership that reflects a sporting activity, returned servicemen or another particular group that they look after first and foremost. Beyond that, many of the clubs contribute more widely by offering their facilities to a wide range of community groups or even in money to organisations and events within their local communities.

What has caused these problems to begin with, which may indeed, as Mr Nash suggests, get worse unless we take action? Clubs Queensland believes that the roll-out of poker machines to hotels has contributed. We should face the reality that the corporations behind many of the hotel chains, including the brewers, means that the hotels have at their disposal a level of marketing and promotional expertise that many of the smaller clubs do not have.

Clubs Queensland admits that, for some of the clubs, the level of management and expertise is a significant part of the problem. But they do not have the resources to compete in this market. Rightly or wrongly, successive Governments have allowed the roll-out of gaming machines to hotels, so we have to deal now with the reality that we have. The competition out there is very tough and that is a significant factor.

Another factor that is certainly showing in the Cairns area is that there appears to be a kind of saturation of the market—so many venues and so many gaming machines available that that is enough and from here on in the competition is so severe that in fact some venue or another will have to close down and withdraw from the market.

I place on record the concern of Clubs Queensland, via Mr Nash and the far-north Queensland zone, that licensed clubs, unlike casinos and hotels, are community-owned, non-profit and member-

driven organisations— as such, they exist for the benefit of the whole community—and that many clubs are struggling to cope with serving their communities, in part they believe through changes to legislation. Nonetheless, they point out that, whatever the reason, if they close down it will be their communities that are the losers. They are calling out for our assistance. I suggest that not only I but also other members of this House should provide whatever assistance we can.
