



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 8 November 2000

GAMBLING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (8.34 p.m.): I will make a brief contribution to this interesting debate we are having tonight. Before I became a member of Parliament, I never understood why politicians got all wrapped up in the gaming debate, and especially on a day like today. Yesterday Australians bet over \$100m on a horse race. I bet a fair bit of money on Mr Nelson which, of course, got flogged. The point of the matter is that Australians are gamblers by nature.

I was just looking through the speech of the member for Barambah, who mentioned two-up and so on. The fact of the matter is that Australians have always been gamblers. Australians have always loved a bet.

Mr Kaiser: Life's a gamble.

Mr NELSON: Life is a gamble in this country, especially in the seat of the member for Woodridge. Walking down to Woodridge plaza is a gamble.

Mr Musgrove: That's a disgraceful slur on the good people of Woodridge.

Mr NELSON: Damned straight it is.

Mr Kaiser interjected.

Mr NELSON: Kingston State High School is in a much better area—in the electorate of Logan. The point is that Australians love a bet. Betting has been an institution in this country for—

Mr Hamill: Did you win the tie?

Mr NELSON: It depicts the frogs from Kuranda. I ask the member for Cairns to back me up. It is the Kuranda Skyrail tie. I digress after being rudely attacked by the Treasurer.

The point of the matter is that Australians love a bet. We have casinos in every capital city in this country. The TAB is an institution. It is a well-known fact that Australians love to gamble and bet. Personally, I do not know what the hysteria is all about. As the member for Mansfield says, the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund is a wonderful institution. It gives money to people who would usually not receive it. It gives money to clubs, organisations and community groups that usually would not get access to that level of funding. Recently, my electorate received \$11,000 to do up a hall. That hall would never have received money under any other Government funding scheme. It allows kindergartens to access a large pool of funds.

The very few people in the community who misuse poker machines or allow themselves to get bitten by the gambling bug are the same as those who misuse alcohol. A few people in the community overindulge in drinking and get drunk, but that does not mean that we should limit the amount of alcohol out there for everyone. I guarantee that if legislation were brought in tomorrow to ban the rampant use of alcohol there would be hell to pay.

I make this statement right now: I am not much of a gambler. I do not see the point in poker machines. They do not impress me and I do not go to the casinos.

Mr Hamill: Nor me.

Mr NELSON: No. I am lucky to go to the casino once or twice a month while I am in Brisbane. The point is that these things are around. I do not have a problem with them. Most of the people in my

electorate to whom I speak do not have a problem with poker machines being put into clubs, hotels or pubs. It is about time that as politicians and as community leaders we grew up in relation to this issue and said that it is up to the people to make a decision. We put these things into clubs. If people want to use them, they use them. If they do not want to use them, they do not. We are not chaining grandmothers to poker machines and telling them that they have to spend their money there. That is an active choice that people make. We have to stop mollycoddling people and saying, "We will protect you from the horrors of gambling." It is a conscious decision that adults can make if they want to make it.

As I said, the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund is a fund that gives much-needed funds to community organisations that otherwise would not receive them. That is an institution that we have to protect and maintain in its current state. Having said that, I for one think that we need to back off on all of this. Of course these things need to be regulated. However, we should think long and hard before we go about making some of the rampant statements that are made. Regardless of their politics, there are a lot of people who make some heavy-handed statements about poker machines, the evils of gambling and so on, yet yesterday as a nation we bet \$100m on a horse race. I think that should send a message to everyone, and it is not a bad message. It is a message that as Australians that is the sort of thing we do, and I do not think it is a bad thing.
