



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 31 July 2001

GAMING MACHINE AMENDMENT BILL

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (2.58 p.m.): I am pleased to support the Gaming Machine Amendment Bill. I was pleased in 1999 to be asked by the then Treasurer, the Honourable David Hamill, to join a team of parliamentarians reviewing gaming machines and gaming in Queensland. As part of that review, I was pleased to consult with clubs, pubs and casinos, with concerned community groups and with others—those who use gaming machines and who enjoy them in a modest way across state from Brisbane to Cairns and places in between—about the downsides of gambling.

In our recommendations arising out of that review, we were very careful to make sure that we took account of all of the players in the hotel and club industry. Through the actions of the short-lived Borbidge government, of which Mr Horan was a part, the balance between pubs and clubs was changed as the roll-out of gaming machines beyond the original intention of the Goss government at the time of the introduction of gaming machines to Queensland was allowed. I recall well those days, because at that time I was an alderman on the Cairns City Council. The general view in Cairns was that gaming machines, if properly controlled, were a part of modern life and that as long as they returned a benefit to the people of Queensland, as long as they were controlled properly in terms of offering any potential for crime or lack of safety and as long as their numbers were controlled and remained of benefit to small clubs in regional Queensland—in places such as Cairns—they would be okay.

Of course, some other people opposed the introduction of gaming machines. Those people were small in number; nonetheless, their voices were heard. I recall their concern about a potential proliferation of gambling-related problems in Queensland. What has happened in the city of Cairns is that a proliferation of gaming machines has indeed occurred, particularly since 1996. I am sorry to say that it is my view that we now have an excessive number of gaming machines for a city the size of Cairns, particularly in the CBD area. At last count, within a three-kilometre radius of the Cairns CBD, we have over 750 gaming machines. That does not include those available at the Cairns Reef Casino, which is also located within the Cairns CBD.

That means that gaming machines are distributed widely between large and small venues, between clubs and pubs and, of course, in casinos. It means that people in Cairns—residents as well as the many visitors who increase our population in the city on any given night—have easy access to gaming machines. It is the view of the many people in Cairns whom I have consulted over the past several years that enough is enough.

Another issue of concern in Cairns is the number of small clubs, particularly suburban clubs, that have gone broke or are in financial difficulty. Some of the recommendations in our report have addressed this issue. I know that, through the Department of State Development, various programs will be developed to assist these small clubs. Nonetheless, the bottom line for these clubs is that as long as they are competing with hotels that, through their size and through the financial backing of their owners or their sponsors have tremendous marketing and promotions capabilities—way in excess of the ability of a small, individual club in a regional centre—they will continue to face an uphill battle to survive. Many of those clubs have a quite modest number of gaming machines. They host very many fine functions for suburban areas. They certainly provide meals at a reasonable cost. They provide a social venue not only for members but also for community and other groups in the area who may wish to meet there. Many of those clubs have a connection with a particular sport and assist that sport,

particularly the sport's juniors. These are all fine community endeavours and ones that would be sorely missed were these small clubs to founder financially and close.

In the Cairns area, the several clubs that have fallen into serious financial difficulty are—and this is surely not coincidental—located in suburbs where they are sorely needed, because the income-earning capacity of the population of those suburbs may not be as high as it is in other suburbs. Often, for those families who face socioeconomic difficulties, the club is their place and the assistance that the club provides to their organisations and to their sporting activities is not just an extra help; it is indeed essential.

Therefore, when the Treasurer announced that the big pubs that are making a whacking profit out of gaming machines would contribute more to Queensland, particularly through major sporting facilities, it was recognised as an appropriate move in the circumstances. I admit that in Cairns some people made comments about looking forward in the fullness of time to sharing in those major facilities, particularly seeing that Cairns has the ambition of becoming a destination for sports tourism. We are doing well in that department already, and that is to a significant degree because of the sports and recreation funding that we have received, again as a consequence of the benefits that have accrued to Queenslanders through gaming taxes.

I would like to give recognition in particular to two significant sporting facilities in Cairns that in part have been funded by this government. One is the Cairns roller sports facility, which hosted the national championships several months ago and is in the running to host the international championships two years from now. Indeed, people from the big cities of Australia who attended those championships commented that the facilities were as good or better than those in the capital cities around this country.

Mr Mackenroth: They invited us to have a roll around, didn't they? We didn't mind.

Ms BOYLE: We all did roll around that facility. I am pleased to say that the Treasurer and Minister for Sport was there for the official opening, and so he should have been as he considered and approved, on the recommendation of his department, funding for that facility. Of course, I also give recognition to the members of the Cairns Roller Sports Association, who worked hard over many years to provide the other half of the funding for the facility.

More recently, we have received a commitment of nearly \$1.9 million from the Sports and Recreation Fund for the upgrade of Barlow Park to install a synthetic athletics track and associated facilities that will put Cairns on the international track—

Mr Mackenroth: If you listen to the Leader of the Opposition, you would think that I spend no money outside of Brisbane.

Ms BOYLE: Of course, Cairns cannot complain about the contribution that this government has made to sporting facilities and other facilities in Cairns. I must say that it is still commented that that was not so between 1996 and 1998. The Borbidge government, of which Mr Horan was a part, seemed to forget that we existed. So wherever they spent the money that the opposition leader now claims was so widely spent, it certainly was not spent in Cairns.

Of course, when this announcement was made some pubs were not keen and resented paying more, although this was barely a flurry. It is, in fact, an appropriate increase in taxation because in areas such as Cairns the number of gaming machines is getting away from us. Unfortunately, people involved in our Break Even programs say that too many people are getting themselves into financial difficulties as a consequence of their poor control over their ability to enjoy putting a few dollars into gaming machines. Consequently their families and sometimes their employment suffer.

As I have said, in Cairns the general view is that enough is enough. In fact, at this time there is before the Gaming Commission a last-minute application by a new development in Cairns for more gaming machines. It is already known in Cairns, as well as by the developers, that I am opposing that application on the basis of a lack of community need—in fact, quite the contrary. Of course, one of the recommendations that the Treasurer has chosen to forward from the gaming review is to give me as a member of parliament or as an individual, as well as others in the community, the opportunity to comment when an application is made to change the number of gaming machines, particularly on the basis of community need. In fact, this development is an example of the kind of roll-out of gaming machines that we as a government are determined to stop. Although I welcome the development of the Gilligan's Backpackers Hostel, it is my view that the associated hotel development appears to be an excuse for gaming machines to be located, as it were, at the backpacker's bedroom door, which is not appropriate. We will see over these next months whether I am alone in my view and what in the end is the determination of the gaming commission.

A particular point, however, that businesses in Cairns wish to make is that the impact of gaming has been considerable in terms of the amount of money people have had available to spend on other entertainment and retail activities. While it may be very difficult to prove the link between those who spend on gaming machines and those who spend in restaurants or other small businesses on

shopping and entertainment, nonetheless there are those in Cairns who are convinced that that link is there. Of course, they quite properly want the tourists to wander the streets of Cairns in the balmy evenings, having spent a magnificent day on the reef or in the rainforest, looking not only for an interesting restaurant but also for worthwhile gifts and mementoes for themselves or their families and friends.

Having gaming machines in backpacker hostels, positioned to be seen as one leaves one's bedroom and moves towards the door, is not at all appropriate. To approve such a venue having gaming machines would, of course, put other backpacker hostels in the invidious position of needing to compete. Before we know it, those kinds of venues would want gaming machines as well. Surely not only people in Cairns are of the view that it is time to call a halt and that it is essential that the profits made by pubs are reasonably limited. It is time that gaming machines are treated as the very special product that they are, and not as any other product that any retail or other kind of business can sell or use.

However, it is important that the benefits do come back to Queensland. Whether one refers to them as taxes or by any other name, it is appropriate that money that is spent so painlessly, as it were, accrues to communities like Cairns through the Reef Hotel Casino Community Benefit Fund or the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund and benefits sporting and other facilities. I remind honourable members of the sorts of worthy community organisations in Cairns that benefit from such funds. I am sure that similar organisations in members' own electorates also receive such benefits.

The Kick Arts Collective was recently funded with \$1,300 for a printer and fax machine. This fledgling arts collective organisation, which organises art exhibitions, is not run by professional artists and, because it does not yet have the necessary credentials, it does not receive major corporate sponsorship. Therefore, that little bit of help allows the organisation to become more professional, thus lifting its ability to pursue other funding and establish available arts functions. The Cairns Potters Club similarly benefited from the purchase of a digital camera.

The Cairns and District Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Women received \$5,000 for office equipment. That, indeed, is essential. That worthy organisation attends to issues for Aboriginal and islander women not just in Cairns but throughout Cape York. It deals with many issues as indigenous women elders are ready to take their place in their communities to provide leadership and comment on social and government issues as they arise.

At the other end of spectrum, the Cairns and District Child Care Development Association had premises in need of some help. The provision of \$5,000 to assist with refurbishment was well appreciated.

The Cairns Showband is made up of young people in high school and some who have recently left high school. It is not a rich organisation. Nonetheless, it is rich in musical skills. Cairns was proud indeed when a number of members of the Cairns Showband marched in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Sydney last year. The show band is planning a trip to Japan next year. Therefore, the several thousand dollars that have been contributed towards 50 music stands will make that goal a little easier.

The Cairns Touch Association received \$10,000 for upgrading playing fields. This was needed and has already paid off. Only last week the Peninsula Education Department hosted the statewide secondary schools touch championships. We had the pleasure of having young people from all over the state of Queensland, their parents, coaches and teachers in Cairns for those championships. The grant that was received through the community benefit fund was a significant means of making that possible.

Through the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund, Cairns has received its share over the years. In summary, since its inception \$3,585,344 has been given to organisations in the Cairns and Port Douglas area. In the year 1999-2000, the amount was \$867,818. That is right and appropriate. It is the kind of balance that the community expects. The community expects that there will be an opportunity for those who wish to engage in what can be harmless fun to do so. However, that activity should not take over a community and become excessive. It is not something that hotel chains should become preoccupied with or profit from to excess. Instead, the profits should be fairly shared with all Queenslanders.

That is what this amendment bill will seek to do. We recognise the tremendous community benefits provided by smaller venues such as the clubs and smaller pubs in Cairns, as well as those provided by the additional taxes paid by the larger pubs. We can all make sure that this money is returned to the people of Cairns and of Queensland via arts, sporting, cultural and community benefit organisations.
