



Speech by

**KAREN STRUTHERS**

**MEMBER FOR ALGESTER**

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Hansard 31 July 2001

**GAMING MACHINE AMENDMENT BILL**

**Ms STRUTHERS** (Algeria—ALP) (3.53 p.m.): As we have heard from other members this afternoon, gaming is pleasurable for many Queenslanders yet extremely painful for some. Since coming to office in 1998, the Beattie Labor government has taken responsible, swift action to strengthen responsible gaming practices in Queensland and to curb the proliferation of gaming machines. This bill is a further decisive step towards responsible gaming practice. I therefore support its introduction.

There is no doubt that the club and hotel industry in Queensland is a vibrant, invaluable industry—one that generates a lot of jobs and one that contributes significantly to the economy of Queensland. In fact, from a woman's perspective, one of the gains I have seen over the past 10 years is the way in which women are welcome into clubs these days. A decade ago, a woman on her own down at the Gold Coast or wherever would not have walked into a club on her own and certainly would not have walked into a hotel on her own. Now, a lot of these pubs and clubs are very much family venues. It has certainly been a great gain that the recreation offered through clubs has been opened to women.

As I said, our emphasis as a government has been on responsible gaming. We do not hear that phrase a lot from the opposition members. The member for Keppel talked a lot about opening the flood gates by not capping machine numbers. That is not what the community wants. That is not responsible gaming practice.

The actions of the previous Borbidge-Sheldon government contrast sharply with the steps taken from 1998 onwards when the Beattie Labor government came to power in Queensland. For instance, if we look at the namesake of this bill, the Gaming Machine Amendment Bill 1997, introduced by the then Treasurer, Joan Sheldon, we see a very different context and a very different promotion of gaming compared with the responsible gaming practices that are being fostered by this government.

For instance, in neither the bill nor the second reading speech of the then Treasurer is there any significant reference to social impact statements or to statements about responsible codes of conduct and those sorts of responsible practices. In fact, I will read some of the reasons given for the legislation in 1997 under the then Treasurer, Joan Sheldon. The explanatory notes to that bill state—

The introduction of this Bill will allow for the licensing of commercial gaming machine monitoring operators and approved financiers to provide flexibility and responsiveness to the gaming industry...

The focus is on the needs of the industry, not the needs of the Queensland public. The notes continue—

The legislation will also provide for the government to withdraw from the ownership of gaming machines...

That government was opening the floodgates to pubs owning significant numbers of machines and was stepping right back from a direct role. Certainly the then government sought to maintain a strong regulatory role. I accept that. The then Treasurer was not compromising in probity, but certainly there was no real emphasis on responsibility.

The then Treasurer talked about the changes in this 1997 legislation providing for a progressive taxation system based on metered win. The explanatory notes state—

This system will reduce the taxation burden on hotels and most clubs.

That is in stark contrast to what we as a Labor government have been trying to do and what this specific bill does; that is, tax those over a certain threshold who can afford to pay, particularly those category 1 hotels that are making a significant amount of money—in some cases, money from people who can least afford to pay. So the work we and the Treasurer are doing now is very commendable in terms of the responsible foundation we are providing for what is a very important industry in Queensland. I am not knocking the gaming industry. As I said, I value the jobs and the economic and recreational benefits the industry provides to Queenslanders—but it certainly has to be in balance. I think this bill is another step towards achieving that balance.

At the time of introducing that bill Mrs Sheldon spoke of the overwhelming acceptance of introducing gaming machines into Queensland. She did not at all acknowledge the overwhelming community concern about gaming machines. Not a lot has changed, so there is no excuse for not making reference to that in 1997. There has been more research into public attitudes, but certainly the concern has been around for a long time. It is this government that has been responding to those community concerns.

I think boasting about tax reductions, again, is irresponsible. We have to make sure that the revenue raised from those activities goes back into important community activities. The Major Facilities Fund that this legislation sets up—the contribution from the category 1 hotels—is essential in Queensland. We need a way of providing those facilities not only in the urban centres but also in the regional centres of Queensland.

I think this bill makes a very important contribution to the direction set through David Hamill's policy directions for gaming—that very important review that was conducted under him that I had the pleasure of being involved in. That was a significant step along the road to setting up more responsible practices and placing a greater emphasis on social impact statements on venues. All this is a further step in that right direction. I commend the bill to the House.

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