



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 13 September 2001

GAMING MACHINE AMENDMENT REGULATION (No. 1) 2001

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.56 a.m.): I move—

That the Gaming Machine Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2001 (Subordinate Legislation No. 126 of 2001) tabled in the parliament on 7 August 2001 be disallowed.

This regulation put into effect clause 11 of the Gaming Machine Amendment Bill. At the time that bill was debated, the opposition and other members on this side of the House opposed this particular clause. The principle remains the same. We therefore oppose this regulation, which puts that clause into effect.

I will set out the reasons we opposed this clause at that time. Clause 11 implemented the new pub tax introduced by the government, which had said during the election campaign that there would be no new taxes. It did not take long—just a couple of months—before the government introduced this new tax. This tax was levied in order to pay for something the government had made no financial provision for, that is, the construction of the new Lang Park. That displayed a total lack of planning, a total lack of financial management and a total disregard for the election promise that there would be no new taxes.

Clause 11 of that bill implemented this new tax, which is levied on category 1 publicans. Those publicans classified as category 1 pay this new tax on the proceeds of their poker machines while those in other categories of the liquor industry, hotels and the club industry do not. The tax is discriminatory in that it is levied only on a particular category of publicans and, more importantly, only on the hotel industry and not the club industry. This tax is being levied on only one particular category of one industry that operates poker machines.

We opposed the clause particularly because it was a new tax and particularly because any new tax has an effect. It is all very well to say that it may affect only a limited number of people within a community—that is, the category 1 publicans—but the effects of that flow on to the patrons, and it breaks the promise that was made by the government that it would not introduce any new taxes.

This is the government which, in this year's budget, demonstrated an \$820 million operating deficit for the past financial year. This is the government which, through its government agency SunWater, is endeavouring to charge irrigators an amount for water that is over and above the COAG agreements. This is the government which, overnight, has been able to find another \$12 million to add to the \$12 million original estimate of the cost of the footbridge over the Brisbane River. It has been able to find money for Lang Park even though no provision was made for those particular funds; they had to be found through this particular tax, which is going to be introduced to repay a \$235 million arrangement through the Lang Park Trust as part of the overall \$280 million cost of Lang Park. There will be a second loan for which the trust will be responsible—its own proceeds—through the operation of Lang Park. This particular tax will go towards the other part which the Lang Park Trust will be operating.

In addition, there is great concern in this state about the declining capital works. I am talking about financial matters now and the declining percentage of capital works in the last budget compared to the recurrent budget. The port authorities have been raided and their funds and debt equity levels have been adjusted so that the government can find additional funds for its budget purposes. All these examples demonstrate that this is a government that did not plan. It is a government that did not set aside funds for election promises. It then promised that there would be no new taxes. But when it

realised that it did not have the money to fund one of its promises, it had to implement a new system—a category 1 system—to take a new tax from that category of publicans.

When members debated the Gaming Machine Amendment Bill, much of the debate and the principles of the debate related to the proliferation of gaming. I think most members spoke about their concerns about increases in gaming and what this does for those people who are problem gamblers and how it shifts the spending capacity of people in a particular town, city or district from retail outlets—food, clothing, schooling, vehicles or whatever—to the entertainment sector and into poker machines. Part of that, of course, represents a profit for the government which enables it to undertake some of its budget responsibilities. This new tax provides nothing by way of additional support for those people who have a gambling problem. A very limited amount of money has been provided to help people with a gambling addiction. And none of the new tax which will be provided by this regulation will go to those people. From 1 July 1998 to 30 June 2000 there was a \$124 million increase in poker machine revenue—a huge 67 per cent increase in gambling revenue—to the government. And this new tax will add to that figure.

I am not going to talk about this issue at length, because I discussed it during the debate on the Gaming Machine Amendment Bill. But the principle still stands. Members on this side of the House opposed the new tax at that stage. We felt it was discriminatory. It broke a promise by the government, which said it would not introduce any new taxes. This regulation indicates quite clearly that the government had done no planning and had no funding available for the redevelopment of Lang Park, so it was forced to introduce this new tax, which we oppose.
