



Speech by

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GAMING MACHINE AMENDMENT BILL

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (6.10 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Treasurer's amendments to the Gaming Machine Act. There are two major aspects of the bill. The first is that it will place a levy on those publicans who are making a lot of money out of gaming machines. The second ends the growth of gaming machines in hotels. While I want to focus on the second aspect, I do want to touch on the first, only to say how astounded I am by the National Party's hypocrisy on this matter.

Most of us accept that Brisbane needs a major stadium. There are economic benefits that derive from having a stadium, and football is, simply, quite central to our culture. I find the hypocrisy of opposition members on the matter quite amazing. On one hand they want the stadium to be built elsewhere. They have talked about the exhibition grounds, and when they were in government they talked about building a stadium at Hamilton. Either of those options would cost at least \$90 million more than the Lang Park decision that the government has proceeded with. On the other hand, the National Party members oppose the Major Facilities Fund, which will pay for the development. No sensible person could argue for a more expensive option and then argue against any revenue raising measure. But, just as they did in the election campaign, National Party members want to have it all. They take no financial responsibility, and that is why they are not relevant.

I turn now to the growth in the number of gaming machines. Gaming machines have changed the nature of entertainment in regional centres such as Ipswich, and they have changed the character of our pubs. The introduction of gaming has brought significant benefits to the Ipswich community. The obvious winner has been the Brothers Leagues Club, which invested wisely in gaming machines in the beginning and has grown significantly as a result. Brothers is now a substantial facility with thousands of members—I think about 11,000. It has high-quality sports facilities and a club with a major function centre, bistro, gaming room and facilities for kids. Brothers supports a range of sports clubs, including the original Rugby League as well as netball and hockey. Brothers is a major supporter of my old hockey club, Hancock's, and it is making a major contribution to the community of Ipswich.

Along with Brothers, Ipswich has also benefited substantially from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. In the last short time alone, community groups such as Envirocare, which will employ someone to develop links between its environmental network and the local business community, has received a grant. The Ipswich Mountain Bike Club, of which I am a member, has received some money to teach mountain biking skills to young kids. The Ipswich Bowling Club has received some infrastructure funding, and so has the Ipswich Triathlon Club. These are just a few of the many clubs that have gained decent amounts of money with which they can do real community work in Ipswich, as a direct result of gaming machines being in our pubs and clubs.

There are now 1,223 gaming machines in the Ipswich City Council area. That figure of 140 machines per 10,000 people makes us pretty much average for a centre of our size. Ipswich is by no means a pokie capital. In the last five years the number of gaming machines has grown substantially, with the bulk of growth coming in pubs. This growth happened because the coalition government's white paper, which was put together primarily by the member for Moggill, drove substantial growth. As a result of the white paper, the number of pokies in Queensland exploded.

Since 1997 three-quarters of the total growth in gaming machines has been new machines in pubs. In 1997 there were 4,700 gaming machines in pubs. Now there are 15,700. This explosion came

directly as a result of the significant change of policy that came with the coalition government's white paper. It is no wonder that today, while they are talking about a lot of aspects of this bill, opposition members are not talking much about the growth that we are having in gaming.

This proliferation of gaming has opened up a hole for some people in the community to fall into. While the extent of the problems has sometimes been hysterically covered by the media, particularly following the 1999 Productivity Commission report, there is no doubt that for a small number of people in the community gaming is a big problem. The question I believe when it comes to regulation of gaming machines is: how much responsibility must government take to stop people hurting themselves? While some might want to debate this philosophical issue forever, I believe the answer is simple. Government must take substantial responsibility. Government should not do what the coalition government did with the growth of gaming: make way for a gaping and ever-growing hole for people to fall into.

I support this legislation because it stops the growth of gaming in pubs and, hence, seriously stems the tide of gaming in the broader community. I do not want to be a wowser about gaming. While I myself cannot see the fun in playing the pokies, I have no problem with there being some pokies available for people who want to play. But the growth has to stop. By stopping the growth and returning the focus of gaming to clubs, an area where there is community benefit, this bill improves the nature and focus of gaming in Queensland, and I fully support it.
