



Speech by

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GAMING MACHINE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CHRIS FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (8.55 p.m.): I refer to the Queensland Responsible Gambling Strategy which was put together by the Hon. Terry Mackenroth. Defining problem gambling is sometimes a contentious issue, but the Productivity Commission's report on Australian gambling industries in 1999 identified the impacts of gambling on a continuum ranging from adverse consequences to severe problem gambling. Severe problem gambling not only affects people who gamble but also extends to partners, families and the broader community. Some of the consequences of problem gambling can include guilt, depression, suicide, debt, poverty, divorce and also involvement in crime.

Some of the priority action areas identified by this particular paper are as follows: firstly, to enhance responsible gambling policies and programs through research; secondly, to increase community knowledge and awareness of the impacts of gambling; thirdly, to reduce the risk factors for problem gambling through early intervention; fourthly, to develop a statewide system of problem gambling treatment and support services; fifthly, to ensure that gambling environments are safer and more supportive for consumers; and, sixthly, to promote partnerships to address statewide and local gambling issues and concerns.

Gambling is an interesting phenomenon in our society and is certainly no new thing. In fact, Relationships Australia Queensland runs a program called Break Even which provides a face-to-face counselling service to people with a gambling problem or to the partners or relatives of people with a gambling problem. It provides assistance in overcoming a gambling problem like exploring the extent and the nature of the gambling behaviour and factors which trigger the behaviour or encourage its continuation. It also looks at strategies for controlling gambling behaviour through minimising the harm resulting from gambling and other strategies to avoid relapse into uncontrolled gambling behaviour. It also offers financial counselling to address debts, cope with creditors and reorganise financial affairs generally, provides counselling to address the underlying issues linked to gambling and the impact of gambling on relationships and family lives and provides steps to relieve that impact.

As we look a little closer to home in general, a gentleman called John Tully runs the Gambling and Family Care Counselling Service on the Gold Coast, which is just down the road from the Conrad Jupiters Casino. As he deals with problem gamblers on almost a daily basis and is not convinced that the industry and governments are doing enough to help, he reported recently that he has been working with people for 40 years and they are human beings and they suffer very deeply from things like gambling. He also asserts that they suffer because of the greed of those who want to profit from the industry and the governments that want taxes. He notes that Australia is a nation of gamblers. In fact, the latest research shows that between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of Australians gamble at some time in a year, whether that is a flutter on the Melbourne Cup or the lottery or a few coins in a pokie machine.

But, unfortunately, for there to be winners there must also be losers. One does not need a degree in rocket science or maths to work out that there must be more losers than winners if the gambling industry is to survive. Until recently little was known about the scale of problem gambling. A Productivity Commission study published in 1999 estimated that about 2.1 per cent of Australian adults were problem gamblers. That is about 290,000 adults—roughly the total population of Canberra. If we add to that the impact of problem gambling on family and friends, the figures begin to grow. In 1999-

2000 the Queensland government received \$609 million or some 13 per cent of taxation revenue from gambling taxes. Do the means justify the end?

Going back to my electorate of Maryborough, we have 17 gaming sites. Six of those are open at 8 o'clock on a Sunday morning, 10 at 10 a.m. and one at 9 a.m. I ask honourable members: why do people need to be gambling at 8 o'clock on a Sunday morning? In conclusion, I would like to see no transferability; simply, if a gambling site closes down, the gaming licence should be extinguished.