



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR ALGERIE

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GAMING MACHINE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Algerie—ALP) (8.37 p.m.): Many Queenslanders love to gamble, and for those with a comfortable income and standard of living the risk of loss will not adversely affect their lives. But my concern is with the small percentage of problem gamblers who cannot set limits. Many of us see these sorts of people in our electorate offices. They suffer, their families suffer and overall the state economy suffers from the burden of family breakdown and social support that is needed to help these people get back on track.

I commend the Treasurer and the staff of the Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation for maintaining and promoting a very strong regulatory framework for gambling in Queensland, and specifically I commend this bill. It maintains a cap on available machines whilst providing a system for the redistribution of available machines within that cap. It is very important to have the cap. In fact, there are probably four key elements that I consider to be very important in a responsible gaming system. Two of these are an effective and transparent regulatory framework, and an effective and widely implemented responsible gaming strategy in venues.

Again, it is worth commending the Hotels Association, Clubs Queensland and venue operators around the state because it is pleasing to see that, in the main, most—and I have been in many clubs and hotels throughout the length and breadth of Queensland—have taken their responsibilities in regard to responsible gaming practices very seriously.

The other two elements are an accessible and affordable system of support services for problem gamblers and stringent controls on the number of gaming machines. It is good to see that Queensland has directed a lot of effort to these four key areas. The cap came at a very important time because there had been a strong community call for a cap on machines. Back in 1999 the Productivity Commission report found that 75 per cent of people surveyed believed that gambling does more harm than good and 92 per cent did not want to see an increase in the number of gaming machines. So public opinion was well behind that policy decision to cap machine numbers at that time.

The bill will provide for a market in tradeable gaming machine authorities and enable the reallocation of gaming machines within the three geographic regions. That is very important so that there is not, as the Treasurer has noted, a drift of machines from the low-use country or regional areas, where there are not so many, to the high concentration areas. Around my electorate, in the Logan to Ipswich corridor, there is largely a high concentration of machines. It is important that the country areas continue to have viable clubs and that they do not end up concentrated in the low socioeconomic areas around Woodridge through to Goodna, Redbank and out to Ipswich.

I must admit to not being totally clear on how this market and the dispute resolution process may work in practice. My guess is that problems will arise when machine owners try it on the state government for compensation if policy changes occur in the future and they have a negative impact on their investment in machines. However, the Treasurer is a very capable Treasurer and I am sure that in delivering this legislation he has thought these issues through. There is a significant potential for disputes, and I know that the Treasurer has well recognised that in the work that he has done to bring this bill to the House. I wish to support the Treasurer in his ongoing efforts to rein in and maintain a well-regulated gaming industry in Queensland. It is estimated that Australians—and Queenslanders are high on this list—currently spend, or lose, about \$800 a year each on gambling, and more than half of that is spent on gaming machines.

I had the benefit of meeting with a delegation of Fijian MPs at this parliament a number of months ago. One of the issues they were asking me about was our system of gaming and gaming machines in Queensland. They were desperately wanting to find a way to fund Fiji Rugby Union and there was pressure on them to actually set up a gaming industry. I understand that currently they do not have gaming machines. I said that this model in Queensland is probably one of the world's best practice models in terms of its regulatory framework and that maybe it was best to send a specific delegation to have a good look at our model in Queensland. They seemed pleased with that advice. I certainly could recommend it as a very good, strong regulatory regime in terms of gaming. I encourage the Treasurer to remain vigilant in this regard. I commend the bill to the House.