



Speech by

Lesley Clark

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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GAMBLING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Dr LESLEY CLARK (12.56 p.m.): I rise with pleasure to support the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 because problem gambling is a significant issue in Cairns and it is something about which I am personally very concerned. I welcome any measures such as those contained in this bill to address the issue.

The member for Nudgee referred to a *Cairns Post* article that appeared in July this year and which referred to some \$4.5 million going into poker machines in just one month in the Cairns region. I think that is a very sobering statistic, because it translates into so much pain and distress for so many Cairns families.

Generally speaking, I understand the standards of statistics that are used whereby for every 100,000 people in the population there are considered to be some 1,000 problem gamblers. For Cairns, that statistic translates into some 2,800 problem gamblers, or people at risk of problem gambling. Of course, it is not just those individuals, either, who are affected; it is estimated that for every problem gambler or person with some at-risk behaviour, some five to 10 other people are also affected. So again, translating that into the situation in the Cairns area, we are looking at some 28,000 people who could be affected. I think by anyone's estimation that is a very significant problem.

In Cairns we have a gambling help service that is provided through Lifeline. I commend the work that that service does. It provides workshops on demand and three courses a year called Busting Bad Habits. Lifeline receives something like 120 new clients every year. But as has been pointed out, that is just a very small number of the people who are actually experiencing problem gambling. That is again a feature of this whole issue—that only a very small percentage of the people affected ever come for any support or assistance to address their problem.

I think that until the taboo and the stigma is lifted from this particular addiction we are not going to get large numbers of people coming forward. It has to almost get to the stage at which problem gambling is considered equivalent to the way in which society considers drink-driving and the amount of resources that we put into trying to address that issue. We need to embrace the issue of problem gambling on a similar scale so that it is talked about, so that people are able to recognise the problem in themselves and go for help without feeling that it is a stigma. Often, it is a hidden thing in the community.

As we know, problem gambling can lead to all sorts of problems. Every member would have examples in their own electorate of families who have been torn apart because of problem gambling—people who have stolen from their employers and gone to jail because their problems have not been addressed at the appropriate times.

This legislation, which allows for people to self-exclude when they know they have a problem and allows for the provider of the gambling service to exclude people, is a major step forward. I look forward to seeing these amendments come into force to address a very significant issue. I commend the bill to the House.