



Speech by

## John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard Tuesday, 12 February 2008

---

### GAMBLING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (9.12 pm): It is my pleasure to rise in support, as the shadow minister has mentioned, of the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. The bill amends seven gaming acts: the Casino Control Act 1982, the Charitable and Non-Profit Gaming Act 1999, the Gaming Machine Act 1991, the Interactive Gambling (Player Protection) Act 1998, the Keno Act 1996, the Lotteries Act 1997 and the Wagering Act 1998. I want to thank the Treasurer for the briefing that I attended along with the shadow Treasurer.

Before I turn to the rest of my contribution I want to refer to some of the comments of the member for Mansfield and the member for Mount Ommaney. I do not think that anybody on this side of the House is arguing for prohibition or for getting rid of poker machines completely. However, we have serious concerns about the social aspects—which aspects of society, which elements of society, which parts of our community are being affected by poker machine problems. Those concerns are shared by the members' federal leader, the new Prime Minister. I think he said that he wants to do something about it. I look forward to those opposite taking the contrary position to the new Prime Minister.

I note that here in Queensland the Treasurer is considering cutting back the hours that pubs and clubs are open. Why would he be considering cutting back the hours unless social concerns have been revealed throughout the community in relation to people who, for some reason, find poker machines a real problem? We know that traditionally Australians love to gamble. However, I know from personal experience that some people, for some reason, find poker machines mesmerising. They do not know why they get addicted to them from a very young age, but they do.

I also want to correct something that the member for Mansfield said. He said that the lowest percentage of problem gamblers in Australia is in Queensland. However, it is not; it is in Western Australia. Do honourable members know why? Because they only have poker machines in the casino; they do not have them everywhere.

**A government member** interjected.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** They might have them there, but they do not have them everywhere, which is what the member for Mansfield was advocating when he said, 'If we get rid of them, then they will just go somewhere else', as they clearly did up to 1989 when we had Twin Towns and Seagulls over the border in New South Wales. Sure, they were booming, but go and have a look at them now. The business was going over the border. I am not advocating a return to that time. I am saying that there was not the same amount of revenue that was able to go over to Twin Towns and Seagulls as is currently coming to the government in terms of the revenue that it now garners because of the expansion of the poker machine industry, as we have seen in the last couple of years with the numbers going up to over 20,000.

**Mr Reeves:** Tell us what you're referring to.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I am referring to the arguments put forward by the member for Mansfield. The member for Mount Ommaney also said that we are going to have a longitudinal study. I will give the House the results of a longitudinal study. If there are more machines we are going to end up with more problem gamblers. That is a longitudinal study. It is all very admirable to have a web site and the gambling resource

kit for problem gamblers but, seriously, we need to do something because poker machines affect people differently. Whilst we are not talking here about our policy—we are talking about a government bill—we on this side are saying that there are problems within this industry. They are problems that all of us on both sides of the House should be concerned about because of the community ramifications.

As I say, no-one is advocating prohibition, no-one is advocating getting rid of them, but when the government is receiving over \$500 million worth of revenue and returning \$9 million to problem gamblers in the form of programs, clearly there is an inequity. This is something that was evidenced in the last South Australian election a couple of years ago when Nick Xenophon received two quotas in its upper house. The second person on his one-issue ticket was elected to the South Australian upper house. Australians are concerned about this particular matter as evidenced by the fact that he is now going to the Australian Senate on this issue.

As I say, I share the concerns. I would think that most members of this House do not have problems with this particular issue. Many of us go into clubs and we enjoy the various aspects of the clubs, and most would say that the poker machine revenue that the club is receiving is not coming from those of us who go in there to enjoy the entertainment or a meal. It is a similar situation at the casino on the Gold Coast. Many of us who live there, thankfully, do not fall prey to the temptation of losing control over gambling. That is the difference. It is a big difference. I know there are problems with horse race betting. The member for Robina and I like to have a bet, but it is a matter of maintaining control. It seems to me to be very evident with poker machines—and I do not understand why it is; obviously studies need to be done—that there is a problem. It seems to be a temptation that leads to people falling prey in a much worse way than other forms of gambling.

I want to go back to the objectives of the bill which are to strengthen the government's stance against minors entering and gambling at casinos. It also provides for a review of agreements between third-party operators and eligible associations in the conduct of more significant art unions. The bill will introduce a licensing regime for those people who test gaming equipment and will implement certain recommendations arising from a review of the gaming machine operating authority reallocation scheme for hotels. There will be higher penalties and new offences relating to casino gambling by minors. I note that the penalty increases for a casino operator, employee or agent who allows a minor to enter or stay in a casino will be increased from \$1,500 to \$7,500 for the operator and \$3,000 for the employee or agent.

I support this initiative because I know people who love to tell stories about when they were very young and were first taken to the races by their father or whomever, and for some reason they had a lucky win. That could lead some people to believe that it is an easy way to make money and they end up losing a lot of money. Obviously, we need to enforce as much as possible the regulations involving minors entering casino or gambling establishments.

Other amendments relate to the enhancement of the accountability and conduct requirements of those involved in art unions, and obviously we support that. The legislation also allows for the adoption of a licensing regime for gambling equipment evaluators. I would be interested to know whether the revenue that is obtained from the heavier fines will be invested in gambling addiction programs.

In conclusion, the opposition does not want to get rid of poker machines *carte blanche*, but we definitely believe that there needs to be some restriction on the government's ability to say, 'We need this revenue and we will do whatever we can to get more of it.' This concern is shared by the new Prime Minister. I look forward to hearing what he has to say and seeing what he does about the issue. I wonder whether the government members will abide by what he recommends, given the mandate that he has been given and its claim for everything since he has been elected. I commend the bill.