



Speech by

Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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GAMBLING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (12.07 pm): I rise to speak briefly to this bill. I am pleased with the progress of the proposed legislation thus far which clearly recognises the potential harm from gambling in the community. I accept that gambling is a source of revenue and therefore encourages industry development. However, we must work towards a balance where, in an attempt to achieve something positive, we do not welcome something that has the ability to be detrimental to society. It is not worth the risk, especially when there are numerous opportunities to create revenue while at the same time create positive development of the individual, family and community as a whole.

I would like to present some brief information which supports this position. Macedon Ranges Shire Council has been quite public in its belief that pokies have an adverse social and economic impact on success in the community. In addition, it says that any benefits of the industry are likely to be outweighed by negative impacts. The Victorian Department of Justice comments that gambling taxation has a flow of income out of the local community which may have the effect of stifling consumer spending and economic activity in the regions affected. This, in turn, would act to reduce employment and increase unemployment in the area.

To take this a step further, where low-income populations and heavy gambler populations coincide in the same geographic area, the adverse social and economic impact of gambling will be heavily concentrated in particular localities. In short, the presence of machines may damage many local businesses by directing funds out of the community. I support the bill's objective of therefore imposing caps on all gambling and entitlements across the state, and applaud the moves to establish a reallocation scheme. I also note that the legislation recognises the harm gambling potentially causes to minors which is a brilliant move. Recognising where minors fit into the system will lead us on to the right path towards reducing the gambling problem.

The explanatory notes suggest that a consistent approach to the regulation of gambling offences related to minors is desirable and I agree. Furthermore, young people should not only be penalised in order to deter them from gambling but should be redirected towards more profitable avenues. I am a firm believer that people, and especially young people, will generally gravitate towards whatever is presented before them. To again cite the Victorian Department of Justice, gambling is simply too accessible. It questions whether it is the number of machines per venue that is causing harm or the convenience of where the machines are available.

As shown in a case study comparing Western Australia with Queensland it was found that Western Australia has restricted its availability of continuous forms of gambling. It does not permit pokies in hotels or clubs and restricts pokies to a single casino site. At the time of the study in 2002 the number of gaming machines in clubs, hotels and casinos in Western Australia was zero, zero and one respectively. This was in stark contrast to Queensland's numbers of 610, 748 and four. Is it therefore any surprise that Western Australia had the lowest rate of problem gambling in all of Australia?

At the end of the day, clubs in my electorate are proving they can be successful and profitable without the need for pokies. I think particularly of the Wamuran Sports Clubs. I hope more and more clubs make the socially responsible decision to avoid pokies and instead provide more positive interactions for the broader community. I commend the bill to the House.