




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

**LIQUOR AND GAMING (RED TAPE REDUCTION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (8.30 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Liquor and Gaming (Red Tape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2013. I would particularly like to address the issue of the abolition of the Community Investment Fund. The Community Investment Fund is established under the Gaming Machine Act 1991, and the minister is required to pay into the fund a percentage, which is set by regulation, of all gaming machine tax paid to the commissioner by all licensees. The moneys paid into this fund have been used for worthwhile purposes over the years, and I have proudly supported the initiatives of the government in the disbursement of moneys from this fund.

The act also establishes the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. Under the act, the minister is authorised to make payments from the Community Investment Fund for a number of things including gambling research and dealing with social issues arising from gambling, the gambling and casino community benefit funds, major public sporting facilities, major cultural facilities, infrastructure for those facilities and capital works for the racing industry.

One of the reasons this fund was established was to distribute a designated percentage of the revenue collected from specific gaming taxes to provide grants to community groups. This bill abolishes the Community Investment Fund and transfers any money in that fund to consolidated revenue. The section that allows the minister to make payments from the Community Investment Fund for the purposes that I mentioned earlier will be omitted by this bill. Instead, all payments received by way of gaming machine tax, health services levy, a penalty imposed under section 319 of the act, and other fees and charges under the act will now be paid directly into consolidated revenue. Also, even if the Treasurer or a minister has decided to pay funds to someone, such as a community group, out of that fund and it has not been paid before it is closed, there is no requirement that the Treasurer pay that money to the group. The bill says that the minister 'may' pay the amount to the group. The explanatory notes state—

Upon its abolition all existing CIF commitments will be funded from the Consolidated Fund, including: grant payments to the Racing Industry Capital Development Scheme; funding for the liquor and gaming regulatory and harm minimisation operations of the Office of Regulatory Policy (ORP) and the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation (OLGR); and grant payments to the gambling and casino community benefit funds.

Whilst it is reassuring to be told that, I would hate to think the Queensland people are being lulled into a false sense of security. There is nothing in this bill that requires any set percentage of the funds paid into consolidated revenue from the taxes, fees, levies and charges that were previously paid into the Community Investment Fund to be spent in the way it was previously. Without any statutory guarantee such as existed before, I am not prepared to trust this government. They have shown that they cannot be trusted to act impartially where the allocation of funding is concerned, and they cannot be trusted to continue the same allocation of funds. I am happy to be proven wrong.

I, for one, echo the concerns expressed by industry stakeholders during consultation on the bill by the committee. By abolishing the fund and making payments directly into consolidated revenue these payments will now be 'left to the vagaries of whole-of-government budgetary considerations'. Once money is absorbed into consolidated revenue there can be no guarantee that it can continue to be quarantined for the purposes intended. In fact, by its very nature the money becomes available to government for its general purposes, and community groups and the office of liquor and gaming must compete with all other claims on the public purse.

Yesterday morning the Auditor-General had tabled in the parliament his report titled *Community benefit funds: grant management*. That report identified that about \$50 million annually is distributed to community organisations through the gambling and casino community benefit funds. The Auditor-General commented on the undoubtedly positive impact on the community benefits and social capital. However, he also identified some concerns in relation to the administration of the funds. I wait with interest to see the government's response to this report; however, improvements to administration of the funds can be achieved without abolishing the Community Investment Fund. The concerns need to be addressed irrespective of where the moneys are held. In fact, the Auditor-General has made nine recommendations in his report, and abolishing the Community Investment Fund is not one of those recommendations.

As a regional member of parliament I particularly value the important contribution to community amenity that grants from the gambling and casino community benefit funds can provide. Sometimes this is in the absence of corporate sponsorship being available to some of our communities. For example, earlier this year Streets Movement boxing at Bentley Park received a grant of \$30,000 from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund to renovate their facility and to purchase equipment. In round 71 of the Gambling Community Benefit Fund distribution in 2012, groups in my electorate received over \$89,000 in grants. I want to ensure that regional community groups will still benefit to the same extent from these grants.

Locally, the committees have had representation from the local communities. The various casino community benefit funds and the Gambling Community Benefit Fund all have representatives from regional areas—people who know and have an understanding of the needs of local communities and how different matters pose different challenges for different localities or groups. The needs of every community group will never be the same, and the diversity of these committees is invaluable to their decision making. One of the other important features of the committees is that they are bipartisan. They allocate funds based on identifiable need and have no regard for electoral boundaries or the political persuasions of members of the community organisations. My real concern is that any attempt to remove decision making from these committees may mean that this fairness is lost.

The bill provides that an amount may be paid into the Gambling Community Benefit Fund from the Consolidated Fund. There is no designated percentage of receipts from the fees and levies that currently exists. Also, the minister may pay an amount from the fund to an entity for the benefit of the community. There is no reporting requirement on the part of the relevant minister to ensure that Queenslanders and this House are informed whether the same proportion of funds is going to these worthy causes under this bill. These types of guarantees and safeguards should be included in the legislation to quarantine these resources for the purposes for which Queenslanders were told they would be used. This is a sneaky, tricky government that is using purported 'red-tape reduction' to mask a blatant attempt to take funds from Queensland community organisations and to use funds that rightly belong to those groups for their own base political means.

I want to finish with some observations about the amendment foreshadowed by the Attorney-General that includes small regional shows in the community organisations that will be exempt from applying for licences. Because this amendment was introduced at such a late stage, I have not had the opportunity to ask my local show societies and associations how they feel about the amendment. I am not sure which shows in my electorate, if any, are likely to be covered. The definition of 'small regional show' really does not give us any guidance as to what is intended by this amendment. 'Small regional show' apparently means a show held at a rural place. The words 'rural' and 'regional' are not interchangeable, so we have no guidance as to which it refers to.

The amendment does not have a real definition. In fact, it provides that the definition will be prescribed by regulation. This is legislation by regulation and is a breach of fundamental legislative principles. This section sets out examples of criteria that may be prescribed under the regulation. This can include the maximum number of persons expected to attend the event, but there is no guidance as to the parameters for the maximum number. Will the Attorney-General perhaps give some round figure of what would be the maximum number of people he might anticipate would be prescribed by a regulation?

The maximum duration of the show is something else that can be considered but, again, there is no guidance as to the maximum number of days envisaged that might be so prescribed. Will the Attorney-General please indicate what he might envisage is the anticipated number of days that might be prescribed?

A government member interjected.

Mr PITT: I am asking questions about the bill and I hope they will be taken seriously by the Attorney-General. I am asking about the spirit of the legislation. I am sure he will respond in his summing-up.