




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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ADJOURNMENT

Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre, Expansion

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (7.00 pm): I was shocked and disappointed to read that the Palaszczuk Labor government had looked a gift horse in the mouth and rejected it by walking from a golden opportunity to expand the Gold Coast convention centre, create jobs for Gold Coasters and support the struggling Gold Coast tourism industry post the corona health crisis when we enter our serious economic crisis. The Star Casino offered a \$100 million expansion of the Gold Coast convention centre in return for a fixed period of single-operator status on the Gold Coast. The single-operator status was the same protection given to Jupiters Casino when it first opened, as was the Brisbane Treasury Casino when it first opened when Terry Mackenroth was in charge. Just recently, the Palaszczuk government has given Queen's Wharf Casino single-operator protection status and yet it has refused to do so for the Gold Coast Star Casino.

It is not as if there is a queue of potential investors lining up to put forward a proposal for the Labor government's phoney global tourism hub polly speak gobbledegook with no known location, no known proponent and no known concept plans. The Star's proposal for a concrete \$100 million investment in public infrastructure in return for a maybe 20-year exclusivity on the Gold Coast casino operation seemed like a rolled-gold no-brainer of a deal to me when the alternative from the Palaszczuk Labor government is nothing, diddly squat, crickets for the Gold Coast. The tourism industry has been the most savagely affected on the Gold Coast, and an opportunity to get a \$100 million injection from the private sector into tourism infrastructure such as the convention centre should not be ignored.

We on the Gold Coast want, need and deserve a clear and reasoned answer from the Palaszczuk Labor government as to why it walked away from what seems a legitimate and positive offer from a major respected tourism operator already on the Gold Coast. We are all aware how important the convention industry is for tourism on the Gold Coast, and the fact that it brings high-spending tourists into the Queensland economy is reason alone for the Palaszczuk Labor government to get on with the job of expanding our convention centre. The added bonus of not having to pay for it and blowing out the Labor government's debt for Queenslanders of \$100 billion even further should have been the motivation needed to grab that gift horse with both hands and ride it all the way to the finish line.

The economic fallout from the worldwide corona health crisis is really yet to be felt in Australia, with the Morrison federal government propping up businesses and employment through JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments—and that at some stage will have to stop. That is when tourism operators on the Gold Coast will really feel the pinch and projects like the extension of the Gold Coast convention centre will be an absolute necessity to help the tourism industry in unheard of dire financial times.