




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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CASINO CONTROL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (12.29 pm): I rise to address the debate on the Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Unlike other forms of entertainment, casinos hold a very unique and very privileged position in our society. Casino operators are similarly granted extraordinary privileges. These privileges are almost solely granted to the exclusion of others and this demands nothing but the highest standards of accountability, probity, governance and, importantly, oversight. As has been widely reported, investigated and found, these privileges have been grossly abused. This has occurred under the watch of the Palaszczuk state Labor government and the state Labor government stands condemned for its shameful delayed action and slow response to the significant and widespread integrity concerns and breaches of corporate governance, risk management and legislative compliance.

When this legislation was first introduced to the Queensland parliament in May of this year, it was nothing more than a pre-emptive attempt to avoid a full and proper investigation into the serious allegations that were raised. The Liberal National Party state opposition has called this initial action for what it was at the time: it was a missed opportunity and it was premature given the explosive revelations concerning casino operators in other state jurisdictions, including Victoria and New South Wales.

True to form, the Palaszczuk state Labor government repeatedly refused to act for months, despite ongoing revelations and allegations of money laundering, fraud and other serious unlawful behaviour. Despite what we have heard as part of this debate in relation to donations received by all political parties, it is this failure in relation to due oversight and the diligence and the discharging of the governance framework in relation to how casinos operate in Queensland that has led to the set of circumstances that we are in today. It was only after the media exposed the close and questionable ties between casino operators and senior Labor figures, including a Labor lobbyist who ran Queensland Labor's 2020 state election campaign, that the Premier finally and reluctantly announced an independent review in June of this year.

The Hon. Robert Gotterson AO, KC was appointed to conduct an external review of the Queensland operations of the Star Entertainment Group Ltd under the Casino Control Act 1982. I thank Mr Gotterson for his thorough examination, comprehensive assessment and important recommendations. These recommendations will, as Mr Gotterson says, enhance integrity, minimise the potential for harm, ensure probity and restore public confidence in casino operators. I do, however, join with my Liberal National Party colleagues in highlighting the shameful fact that the terms of reference set by the Palaszczuk state Labor government for this review were far too narrow.

As articulated by my esteemed and knowledgeable colleague, the Liberal National Party's shadow Attorney-General and member for Clayfield, the terms of reference for an independent review of this nature should have been expanded to include the questionable interactions between the casino, its board members, the Labor state government, unions, Labor lobbyists and the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation. Mr Gotterson could not thoroughly investigate the role of the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation, including what this office knew, did not know, what they did or did not choose to act on.

Further, Mr Gotterson was also not able to consider or examine whether any undue influence was exercised on a minister, given the publicly known close connections between Labor ministers, Labor lobbyists and specific members of the Star Entertainment Group. Ultimately, the refusal by Labor for these matters to be carefully examined by Mr Gotterson will forever cast an unfortunate dark shadow over the final report of the Star Entertainment Group external review.

Queensland is now paying the price for Labor's premature legislation as evidenced by the disgraceful lack of due process and the abandonment of appropriate legislative scrutiny through this Queensland parliament under the current Queensland state Labor government. It is outrageous that just half an hour before debate began on this legislation, Labor's Attorney-General and Minister for Justice provided an additional 21 pages of amendments. That is 21 pages of amendments that will not be referred to the appropriate parliamentary committee for scrutiny, nor will stakeholders or the community have any chance to consider and provide feedback on Labor's proposed changes. This is no way to conduct appropriate parliamentary business, particularly on such important matters of regulatory oversight and enforcement of casino operators in our state.

Notwithstanding the appallingly and, frankly, dysfunctional processes of this third-term state Labor government, there are worthy provisions and matters contained within the legislation which deserve support beyond those which strengthen the integrity of our casinos and modernise gambling legislation. I note that this legislation will introduce a cross-border recognition scheme for charitable fundraising given that a national commitment has been made to recognise registration with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission as an authority to conduct fundraising in Queensland. This scheme will reduce red tape for charities seeking to operate in Queensland, including those in an online capacity. As outlined in the first reading speech of this legislation, charities registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission will no longer be required to apply for a fundraising authorisation in Queensland and will need to only notify the Office of Fair Trading of their intention to fundraise in our state.

Finally, I join with the Liberal National Party shadow Attorney-General and other Liberal National Party colleagues and implore all members of the House to support the opposition's amendment that will clarify that the department will not be able to use section 14 as a reason not to disclose investigations into casinos. This is an important amendment and one that will further increase transparency and accountability of the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation and its associated actions concerning casino operations. I conclude by again thanking the Hon. Robert Gotterson AO, KC for his review and all members of the Queensland parliament's Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, including specifically the deputy chair, the member for Currumbin, as well as the member for Scenic Rim, for their examination of this legislation.

Debate, on motion of Dr Rowan, adjourned.