




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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CASINO CONTROL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (11.44 am): I rise to support the Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the additional amendments the Attorney-General will be introducing during consideration in detail. Like the member for Surfers Paradise, I have a large casino in my electorate in the inner city. McConnell covers the Brisbane CBD. Star is, without a doubt, a large employer. They have fundamentally changed the landscape of the Brisbane inner city with the development of the Queen's Wharf project. It is a significant employer, a significant business, and at the moment a significant developer in the CBD. We want to ensure—and I know that the Palaszczuk government is very committed to this—that in all of their operations the casinos are safe, responsible and adhere to the high standards of conduct expected of them by the community.

I do not think there is one member in this House who has not been concerned about what we have heard in the various investigations and commissions that have been unveiled in public right around Australia. Let's be very frank: these concerns are obviously about an industry that has not been acting in line with community expectations. We have to ensure that the message is sent to them to refocus, refresh and ensure they do not put profit ahead of good governance and good operations. The revelations we have seen in the public arena highlight the need to urgently enhance regulation around casino operators and increase security and scrutiny.

I join the member for Surfers Paradise in welcoming Robbie Cooke. I knew Robbie when he was head of Tatts Group. I welcome him to the job. It is going to be a job to instill community confidence in the manner in which they operate. When you read about some of the revelations about how they acted, they almost went out of their way to ensure that proper scrutiny could not be implemented by any government or regulator—no-one. When you are determined to fudge things, when you are determined to cover them up, that demonstrates what this bill is all about. This House needs to act quickly and support this bill in order to get it done.

The changes proposed in the bill enhance the regulatory environment. We have to send a clear message. I am sure that Robbie Cooke and the new board will get that message. A lot of these people have gone. They have paid the ultimate price for their lack of governance, failure to meet regulatory standards and, dare I say more importantly, community and government expectations. The regulatory environment will introduce large financial penalties so that a risk analysis is not about 'How much is the penalty, and can we bear that compared to what we are going to get in profits?' That is just not the way this should be looked at. This is obviously the way to go forward. It should not be seen as the ordinary cost of conducting business. If that is the way they are viewing it, then they have to pay that the penalty. The government must ensure that is not the case, so I support that.

Requiring casino operators to self-report breaches is important. If they breach, they have to self-report. If it is found that they have not and they had knowledge, then there are consequences for their actions. That is another clear message. We are not going to be in every part of every area of every casino every single day. You have to self-report, and if you do not and we find out, there are going to be penalties for you. They have to be aware of that.

The changes will also expand the information gathering power of the minister and the chief executive. The proposed changes have gone through the committee and I understand they are supported. We also had the findings of the Gotterson external review into the operations of the Star Entertainment Group. There were 12 recommendations that came out of that review, and this government has been responsive to those 12 recommendations for regulatory reform. The recommendations include imposing a supervision levy on a casino and providing for periodic reviews of a casino licence. The government and cabinet are going to further consider many of those recommendations. The Attorney-General has done an amazing job in filtering all of this, bringing those recommendations to cabinet and briefing us fully on where we need to go forward.

In relation to a number of those 12 recommendations, the government proposes to move priority amendments during consideration in detail. We have heard those opposite bemoaning the fact that those amendments are not going to a committee, but which one of these priority amendments do they not want to support? They cannot have it both ways in this House. One minute, the member for Burleigh or another opposition member criticises the parliamentary committee process by saying, 'The government has the numbers. The committees aren't working. They're broken. They're this, they're that.' We hear that all the time from them, but then in the next breath, when they do not like what is happening, we get someone like the member for Scenic Rim saying, 'The sky is going to fall in. These priority recommendations haven't been going to the committee. Isn't that disturbing? It's so bad. We can't have them coming in without the committee looking at them.' Members opposite cannot have it both ways. They cannot criticise the system on the one hand and say it is broken and that these recommendations need to go to the committee, but then, on the other hand, when they do not like the outcome of the committee, say, 'It's a broken system. It's stacked. Boohoo. We want to take our bat and ball and go home.' It does not work that way.

I support 100 per cent the amendments that are going to be proposed during consideration in detail, and those opposite should be saying exactly the same thing. They provide for the appointment of a special manager fully funded by the relevant casino entities to oversee the operations of a casino, whether or not the casino licence has been suspended or cancelled. If that is not an urgent priority in the circumstances we find ourselves in under the Gotterson review, I do not know what is. Those opposite want to delay it to have a look at it while we are in the middle of an issue that has been brought forward by an external review.

The next amendment will increase the maximum penalty. It is this whole risk analysis: do we actually implement the recommendation or is paying the fine cheaper? We are going from \$50 million to \$100 million. We are doubling the penalty. Which bit of that do they not like? What does the committee have to ask about that? That is a fundamental change we can do quickly to send a message that we are serious if breaches of regulation occur.

The amendments will also ensure that the state is not fettered in its ability to take regulatory actions in relation to casinos, by providing that no compensation is payable by the state because of regulatory action to regulate casinos. That is an eminently responsible recommendation and a priority amendment that we should be doing. I do not think the people of Queensland want to see a situation where regulations are changed in response to some of the actions of these casinos—not only in Brisbane or on the Gold Coast, but we have seen it in the media around Sydney and Melbourne—and then the states ask for some regulatory compensation because of the amendments we are putting in. They are eminently sensible priority issues, but those opposite generally have nothing and they have nothing when it comes to this.

I support safe cashless gaming. There are often swags of money being put across the table. I have to admit that I like going to a casino, and I have liked going from when I was young. I have supported the casino on the Gold Coast and in Brisbane. I do not have time to go as often as I did, but when I was young No. 17 was my lucky number on the roulette. Having a safe, cashless payment is one way that we can modify some of the behaviour that we see.

In all, I agree with the bill before the House and I agree with the amendments contained in the bill. I have a large casino in my electorate and I have a big interest. We all have a big interest to ensure that we instil public confidence, and we all have a big interest to ensure that we get the regulation right. I support the amendment. I commend the committee and I commend the Attorney-General for bringing these amendments to the House.