




Speech By  
**Jessica Pugh**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY**

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**CASINO CONTROL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (6.19 pm): I rise to speak on the Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I declare at the outset, as many members have done in their contributions, I am not really a gambler at all. I do not even like to have a flutter on Melbourne Cup day. It is just not something that I get enjoyment out of. My thrill in life is watching children's sport—which is a bit weird but I love it—or watching the State of Origin. This bill is really important because it provides rigour and regulation for the vast majority of people who do enjoy gambling or having a bet in whatever form that takes.

I will start by covering some of the areas that I am most passionate about, and that is the harm reduction aspects of the bill. At the outset I want to acknowledge the very serious problem that gambling is for a small minority of people in our community. We know that this small group can experience life-changing damage from their gambling losses. It is also common for their families to be impacted as well. It is rarely one individual who experiences this tragedy; it is experienced by everyone in that family and the people who surround them. The financial losses and the breach of trust are serious issues. I know that the committee really considered that when they were forming their recommendations.

That said, I also do agree—I cannot believe I am saying this—with the member for Clayfield and his comments earlier today that there is a significant cohort of the community who do enjoy gambling and can do so while safely managing their expenditure. I know that from my experience in high-end hospitality. Other restaurateurs would often say to me that casinos do form an important part of a varied tourism strategy. It is important that we make sure that while they exist they do have that rigour and regulation around them.

We as parliamentarians need to balance the considerable benefits to the economy with the significant issues it can cause for some members of the community. In my mind it is not dissimilar to the strategies we might employ in managing alcohol abuse. There is part of the population who struggle with their relationship with alcohol, which is also legal, just like gambling. Like alcohol, most people also believe that ultimately the benefits outweigh the harm. As the member for Caloundra so astutely observed though, this is an area that needs and deserves scrutiny.

The bill also seeks to modernise the gambling acts to provide regulatory agility, particularly around cashless payment methods, delivering on the government's election commitment to investigate safe cashless gambling by removing impediments to cash alternatives and providing a framework under which the use of cashless gaming technology and procedures can be regulated. One of the objectives of the bill is to transition to safe cashless gaming which was also a previous government commitment. However, as all gambling providers are impacted by the decline of cash usage—which we know has been exacerbated not just in this sector but in many sectors by COVID and the perception of hygiene around money—the measures in the bill potentially allow safe cashless gambling by all gambling providers including the hotel sector.

The bill represents the second action our government has taken in response to safe cashless gambling. In December 2021 the Governor in Council made a regulation that enabled clubs and hotels to make gaming machine payments by EFT, electronic funds transfer. The amendments will not automatically introduce widespread cashless gambling but they will remove impediments to non-cash payments and create frameworks for consideration, approval and regulation of cashless payments methods and technologies. Cashless methods we know are generally more traceable than cash payments. I note that this is not inconsistent with casino integrity reforms. I also note that, following the in principle support for the Gotterson report, further reforms in this space will be forthcoming in the future.

I also observe that, in addition to being more traceable for criminality issues, as we know that casinos can have issues such as money laundering, they may also have the added benefit of assisting gamblers, in my view, of keeping track of their spending and how much they might be expending in a particular venue. This is obviously really important because, if you are trying to manage your budget, it is really good for you to be able to see that expenditure and where your money is going. In the event that you share an account with somebody—when I say ‘account’ I mean a bank account—it gives a valuable intervention opportunity to family members to have additional oversight of that potentially problematic expenditure and start that conversation. When it comes to intervention and starting conversations with people who have addictions or problematic use, whether it is drugs, alcohol or gambling, starting these conversations can often be a very important first step in getting help.

I am now going to move to a clause that is close to my heart. It was put into the committee’s report but ultimately was considered outside the scope of the final piece of legislation, and that is reducing smoking. As I said, I note that the feedback was determined by the committee to sit outside the scope of the legislation, but the Cancer Council nonetheless took the opportunity to make an impassioned request that smoking be banned from premium gaming rooms by amending the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act.

I am actually old enough to remember when you could smoke in pubs and nightclubs. I even remember as a little girl somebody smoking inside a McDonald’s. To be fair, they might have been breaking the rules, so I am not sure whether that was allowed or not. It has been a huge effort to reduce the number of smokers in Australia to what I understand to be around 10 per cent. That has gone down significantly.

Many people, including some members of my own family, have said that quitting smoking is the hardest thing you will ever do. It is really great to be able to provide triggers to help people to make the decision to do so. This ban may be just that trigger for some smokers. Everyone’s triggers are different. For some smokers I acknowledge that this ban would probably have no impact. For my mum, who was a smoker back in the early nineties, her trigger was a huge price rise. I distinctly remember her telling me that cigarettes had hit \$3 a packet—\$3 a packet! She was absolutely incensed, so she and my aunt decided to quit because cigarettes had hit \$3 a packet. I do not think that is going to be the trigger for high-end gamblers to quit. However, the inconvenience of not being able to smoke in premium gaming rooms might be a trigger. Being allowed to smoke in those rooms is obviously not going to help them in any way.

I do recall that, when we introduced city-wide bans and people were inconvenienced as they could not smoke in specific areas, it had a deterrent effect and that assisted in lowering the overall smoking rate. I am all for any recommendations that help people to quit smoking. I appreciate the committee including those remarks about smoking in their report even though it sits outside the scope of this legislation. I thank the Cancer Council for raising it. I think it is fantastic. Even if something ultimately sits outside the scope of bill, it gives us an opportunity to start that conversation and maybe move that in the right direction.

In the time I have left I want to clarify a comment I made in my contribution on the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill last night. At the end of my contribution I noted that the testimonials part of the bill was being reviewed by the federal government. I should also have stated at the outset of that part of my contribution that the testimonials sections of the bill will not be included in the state government legislation because the federal government will be dealing with it. I am really excited to see the outcome of that federal review and have this issue resolved at a federal level. I commend the bill to the House.