




Speech By  
**Jonty Bush**

**MEMBER FOR COOPER**

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### **CASINO CONTROL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (4.39 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Its principal objective is to strengthen the integrity of casino operators in Queensland. As the Attorney-General has said, she will be moving amendments to the bill which will advance this objective further.

As part of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, our committee was responsible for reviewing this bill. In May we invited stakeholders and other interested people to make written submissions. We received eight submissions. We held a public hearing in July and received written departmental advice. The committee's report into this bill was published in July this year and is available, along with all other relevant documentation, on the Queensland parliament website.

The committee made two recommendations: firstly, that the bill be passed and, secondly, that the Queensland government engage with relevant stakeholders to review the legislative framework for charitable fundraising. I will speak to that later in my contribution. I do not think that there would be a person in Queensland, or in fact nationwide, who does not recognise the value in strengthening the integrity framework for casino operators at this time. I think it is really important to say at the outset that this bill is being debated in the context of some significant investigations and findings relating to casino integrity throughout the country.

Media reports on the practices of some operators which were unethical and in some cases unlawful—practices which include money laundering, criminal infiltration and associations with casinos particularly—have resulted in closer scrutiny of casino practices and operators and prompted several major inquiries into Crown Resorts Ltd and The Star Entertainment Group Ltd. These inquiries, as others have said, include the Finkelstein inquiry in Victoria, the Bergin inquiry in New South Wales, the Owen inquiry in Western Australia, the Bell inquiry in New South Wales and the Gotterson inquiry in Queensland—which for context commenced midway through our committee's inquiry into this bill and the Gotterson report was provided to the Queensland government 13 days ago today.

A number of findings have already been made from these inquiries specifically in relation to the casino operators, but generally these events, the inquiries and recommendations arising from them have highlighted that the wider casino sector should be subject to stronger regulatory integrity, transparency and accountability. I recognise the comments made in the statements of reservation that the government ought to have delayed this bill and instead deal with the entire suite of casino reforms that have now been recommended in the Gotterson inquiry. I do recognise that argument. Naturally, I have a different view.

**Mr Krause** interjected.

**Ms BUSH:** I know, surprising. When the government reaches the point where a reasonable person would suspect that there is a problem and that the problem is likely to impact significantly and negatively on Queenslanders—and it is within the government's authority to act—then the government should act.

If we reflect back to the period when the bill was introduced, two independent inquiry reports into Crown casino had been handed down which resulted in Crown subsidiaries being found unfit to hold casino licences in those states. The Bell inquiry into Star Sydney was underway and public hearings had already revealed concerning information. Given this and the shared governance and operational arrangements of Star Group entities more broadly, and information gleaned through Queensland's own casino regulator, I totally back the Attorney-General's decisive action in introducing this bill when she did.

I recognise that it does not deal with all of the issues contained in the Gotterson inquiry, but this bill was never designed to do that. It was designed to bring about some immediate and necessary reform to strengthen the integrity framework for casino operators. Queenslanders need to trust that casinos are operating ethically, lawfully and with transparency and accountability. I believe that this bill will absolutely advance that which is why I will be supporting it and will be supporting the amendments which the Attorney-General has foreshadowed she will move during consideration in detail.

The bill proposes to address matters raised during the inquiries by enhancing the Casino Control Act through introducing and increasing penalties for critical offences to create stronger consequences for breaches of the law; imposing a requirement on particular entities—that is, casino licensees, casino lessees, casino operators under casino management agreements and their associates—to report contraventions of the law and breaches of certain prescribed agreements to which they are a party and to comply with all reasonable requests made by the minister or regulator under the act and do everything necessary to ensure that the management and operations of the casino operator are conducted fairly and honestly; and expanding information-gathering powers and introducing other powers which are considered necessary to reflect the complexity of regulating casinos in current times.

The bill was generally supported by stakeholders. There were some issues raised including that the financial penalty that could be imposed on casinos be raised to \$100 million in line with other jurisdictions. The Attorney-General has spoken to this today and will be introducing amendments to that effect. The Attorney-General's amendments allow the Governor in Council to appoint a special manager who will oversee and monitor the casino's operations and ensure it is complying with approved remediation plans, similar to models introduced in New South Wales and Victoria.

Stakeholders raised issues relating to the harm minimisation aspects of the bill, with many industry submitters submitting that the current voluntary model of regulation was working. This bill is proposing stronger prescribed harm minimisation. The method to achieve that will be through subordinate legislation which should enable industry and the relevant minister to take a more responsive approach to individual pubs and clubs. I recognise industry feedback that the demands on our different pubs and clubs throughout the state do differ. Obviously the needs of a nightclub operating in Surfers Paradise are quite different to the needs and demands on the Nindigully pub, for example. I recognise that feedback.

Finally, the committee did make recommendations that the Queensland government engage with relevant stakeholders into the relevant framework for charitable fundraising. This recommendation was a reflection of the views and wishes of stakeholders who made submissions to the committee, notably the Queensland Law Society and Justice Connect. I want to thank them for sharing their valued observations and findings.

I note also that the Queensland government is an ongoing participant in national interjurisdictional efforts to harmonise fundraising legislation including the development of the cross-border recognition model introduced by this bill, removal of duplicated financial reporting requirements and ongoing work to harmonise fundraising conduct regulations. There has been reform already even in the past few months in this space including amendments to the Associations Incorporation Regulation and the Collections Regulation to reduce the reporting burden from some classes of charities.

Further, a consultation paper was published on the Office of Fair Trading website in August asking for feedback on whether changes are needed in relation to the revenue and assets threshold for reporting obligations for charities under the Associations Incorporation Regulation and the Collections Regulation. Feedback is closed and I look forward to the findings and recommendations which stem from that.

This is a good bill and it is an important bill. No-one in this room is debating that it will make improvements and enhance the integrity framework for casinos in Queensland. The Gotterson inquiry has made recommendations which the government has accepted in principle. We will see further reform in this space. This bill is an excellent step in that direction and I commend it to the House.