




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

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CASINO CONTROL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr McCALLUM** (Bundamba—ALP) (12.01 pm): I rise to contribute to the Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill under which Queensland's casino operators will be subject to tougher gambling laws that strengthen compliance requirements, increases penalties and provides for more gambling harm minimisation measures. The reforms in this bill will help to prevent criminal influence and exploitation in casinos. These reforms are considered to be examples of best practice casino regulation and they will ensure Queenslanders can have more confidence in the integrity of our casino laws. As a result of the changes contained in the bill, there will be a significant increase in pecuniary penalties as a disciplinary action. I will come to that in more detail later in my contribution. The bill also includes changes that help provide for a transition to a safer method of cashless gambling.

Moving towards more traceable electronic transactions was also a recommendation of the Finkelstein inquiry into the Crown Casino to prevent money laundering. During the pandemic, we saw the use of cash decline as industries move to non-cash options underscoring the need for timely reforms, such as the measures contained in this bill in that area. The bill will modernise Queensland's gambling legislation to allow new payment methods and systems to be considered for use, provided that they are safe and reliable. It also ensures that we can maintain our strong gambling harm minimisation measures. The amendments in the bill will not only provide the government with the flexibility to consider new and innovative approaches to gambling while ensuring that emergent technology can be subjected to appropriate controls in order to address any potential arising risks.

The reforms in this bill are also based on outcomes of inquiries in other states and jurisdictions. Inquiries and investigations have been undertaken into casinos operated by subsidiaries of Crown Resorts Ltd and the Star Entertainment Group Ltd in multiple jurisdictions. These include the Finkelstein inquiry in Victoria, which I just mentioned, the Bergin inquiry in New South Wales and the Owen inquiry in Western Australia, and all of these inquiries found that casinos do need stronger regulation.

Indeed, given the weight of the evidence that emerged regarding the operations of the Star Sydney and the shared governance and operational arrangements of the Star Group entities more broadly, the Palaszczuk government commissioned an independent expert review which was conducted by the Hon. Robert Gotterson. The finding of this review has been truly shocking, highlighting major failings and concerns that include a deliberate and concerted effort by Star to misrepresent China UnionPay transactions, as relating to hotels when the primary purpose of those transactions was actually for gambling, and that the Star actively encouraged individuals who had been excluded at the direction of the police in New South Wales and Victoria to gamble at their casinos in Queensland. There were also found to be serious deficiencies with the Star's anti-money laundering practices over a number of years, despite expert advice as to how those procedures should have been updated so that they could have been fit for purpose. The Star's responsible gambling program was under-resourced and the Star was not forthcoming or transparent in its dealings with its bankers or the Queensland regulator, and its actions were 'indicative of a one-eyed focus on profit and money'. Truly shocking.

The review made 12 recommendations to enhance the integrity, minimise the potential for harm, ensure probity and restore public confidence in the operation of Queensland casinos. The Queensland government supports the recommendations of the Gotterson review, and that is why the Attorney has brought forward amendments to give effect to them. These amendments include providing for the appointment of a special manager to increase supervision and integrity of operations, enabling the minister to recommend, and the Governor-in-Council to direct, the suspension of a casino lease or management agreement. In addition, through the amendments, we are seeking to raise the maximum penalty that can be imposed on a casino to \$100 million.

It would be nice to think that the LNP would not choose to play politics with this issue, but unfortunately it seems they just cannot help themselves. Their statement of reservation in the committee report for this bill labels the bill 'rushed'. They attempt to justify delaying this law being brought forward by stating in their statement of reservation—

In light of the independent external review being conducted by the Honourable Robert Gotterson AO QC ('the Gotterson Review') which is not due to report to the Government until 30 September 2022 this legislation is premature.

Indeed, many speakers from the LNP on this bill have repeated this concern. I would like to point out that the Attorney, via media release on 26 May, specifically stated—

Further changes to the legislation may be considered at the conclusion of current investigations into The Star Entertainment Group.

That is exactly what has occurred. The Gotterson review has been completed, received, accepted and acted upon through the amendments put forward by the Attorney-General. It would seem that it is clear that the LNP would rather have waited and allowed more time for illegal and unlawful behaviour from casinos to continue for longer despite the overwhelming evidence that has been presented across the nation and here in Queensland. Put simply, rather than act, they would have preferred to have done nothing. Putting this bill forward at the earliest opportunity to strengthen casino laws and regulations was the right thing to do.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr McCALLUM: I was interested to learn this morning that the LNP held a fundraiser at the Star casino while the Gotterson review was underway, after this bill had been introduced and after the bill had been referred to the committee. When did the report come down? It was July.

This bill and the reforms that are contained in it will help prevent criminal influence and exploitation in Queensland casinos. They are considered to be examples of best practice nationally when it comes to casino regulation and, most importantly, they will help ensure that Queenslanders can have confidence in the ongoing integrity, operation and regulation of our casinos. I commend this bill to the House. I look forward to the LNP supporting it.