




Speech By  
**Michael Berkman**

**MEMBER FOR MAIWAR**

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (12.11 pm): In beginning my contribution to the Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 I want to make clear that the Queensland Greens and I welcome any attempts to better regulate this state's casino and gambling industry—no less from the Queensland Labor Party, who are deep in the pockets of the likes of Star and Crown. This bill takes some small but positive steps to address the scourge of casino criminality and corruption in this state.

Any time now both this parliament and the executive officers at 1 William Street will be both metaphorically and literally in the shadow of Star's Queen's Wharf casino. Anyone walking along the river can see the symbolism. This is like a poetic reflection of the reality in Queensland. I very much doubt that the Premier, the Attorney-General and the rest of the Labor Party are not aware of that. The Labor Party's election war chest is regularly stuffed to the brim with donations from the gambling and casino companies that this bill purports to control and regulate.

As the ABC has reported recently, gambling related groups donated over \$2.3 million to Queensland Labor and the LNP in the five years to December 2020. That is more than \$2.3 million straight into the major parties' coffers.

**An honourable member:** Go and read your bank account.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hart): Order, members.

**Mr BERKMAN:** The interjections do suggest a kind of sensitivity around this, don't they? It is quite extraordinary.

**Mr Power** interjected.

**Mr BERKMAN:** They are clearly incapable of recognising the difference between an individual who has a value system and a concern that the Greens promote and taking donations directly from the companies that are legally bound to profit at the expense of Queensland.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Pause the clock. Members, I want to hear what the member for Maiwar says. It may be controversial, but I want to hear it. Please respect the member for Maiwar. Otherwise I will start warning members.

**Mr BERKMAN:** The histrionics tell us all we need to know about Labor's sensitivity on this issue.

During those five years the Australian Hotels Association donated more than \$89,000 to the Queensland Labor Party, ClubsNSW donated more than \$89,000 to the Queensland Labor Party, Tabcorp donated more than \$57,000 to the Queensland Labor Party and Star Entertainment Group—yes, the very Star Entertainment Group that the Gotterson inquiry just declared unfit to hold a casino licence in Queensland—donated more than \$43,000 to the Queensland Labor Party. The LNP took nearly \$80,000 from Star. I could go on, but I am mindful of the time. I am aware that if I started listing all of the donations that gambling corporations made to the opposition we would be here all day.

Star casino, whose misconduct has come into question across the country and who has been deemed unfit to hold a casino licence in Queensland, concealed \$55 million in gambling funds pumped through their Queensland venues by high rollers with triad connections. We are talking about dirty money laundered through a gambling corporation that donated directly to this Queensland Labor government. That is the backdrop for this reform bill. However, the way things have rolled out we might never know the full extent of the links between this government, casino corporations and organised crime because they did not dare to expand the scope of the Gotterson inquiry.

It is, in reality, a toothless inquiry that held only four public hearings and finished hearing submissions within a week, compared to our southern neighbour's inquiry into Star's Sydney casino, which had 36 hearings and 30 witness statements. Here we see yet another example of this Labor government's lip-service: going through the motions of another inquiry without any real power, without any real investigation and without even gathering evidence from the office that regulates gambling in this state. The government refused to expand the inquiry to look at allegations of illegality and criminality in casinos in Townsville and Cairns. The Attorney-General would clearly rather keep her head in the sand than commit to a genuine and thorough investigation of casino corruption across Queensland, whether in the city, on the Gold Coast or up north.

It seems to me there are most certainly things going on in casinos across Queensland that the Premier and the Attorney-General do not want to hear about and, I dare say, that they do not want the public in Queensland to know about. If this Labor Party genuinely cared about dodgy conduct in Queensland casinos, fighting corruption and transparency, they would have not only expanded the Gotterson inquiry but also released information about the casino being built only a few blocks from this place. They would tell the public how much the government sold this prime CBD land for—about 10 per cent of Brisbane's CBD sold off. They would release all of the relevant studies: the social impact study, the business case, the cost-benefit analysis and, perhaps most importantly, the terms of that 99-year lease that has been shrouded in secrecy under supposed commercial-in-confidence.

We heard from the Deputy Premier during estimates that commercial-in-confidence should not affect our right to get information in this place, but somehow it still does. We have no idea whether the terms of that lease might actually prevent the revocation of Star's casino licence. What are the terms that the government has bound itself to? If they cared about stopping corruption, they would not let a corrupt company keep its casino licence here in Queensland—this company that has been declared unfit to hold a licence in Queensland. Instead, we are going through this process of an appointment of a special manager. This is just a bureaucratic, dressed up, get-out-of-jail-free card. It is a way for Star to effectively get on with business as usual to carry on their insidious predatory business model in Queensland.

If they are unfit to hold a licence, why will the government not follow through and shut them down? If this government cared about the findings that Star deliberately misled the regulator and ruthlessly exploited patrons for profit, leaving a trail of destruction and harm in its wake, then they would go further. They would finally do something about this state's pokies problem, they would cap the number of pokies in casinos and get them out of pubs and clubs entirely. If they cared about fighting corruption and criminality, they would ban donations from all gambling corporations, including from corporations like Star. They would legislate a ban on cash-for-access meetings that taint everything this government does. There are just too many questions left unresolved from the Gotterson inquiry and the shady deals made by this government with Star.

There is no doubt Labor would like those questions to remain unresolved and for the truth about casino criminality in this state to stay in the shadows. We do not have to wonder long as to why the Premier and the Attorney-General would like these things to remain in the dark. Star, Crown, Tabcorp—these corporations do not donate to the Labor Party for fun; they make a calculated, self-interested, strategic business move to buy off politicians to silence the ministers who make laws and open inquiries. That is precisely what happened with the Gotterson inquiry and with this bill.

Here we see a toothless Attorney-General who has no desire to stand up to the gambling corporations and the casinos that line the Labor Party's coffers. Instead, this bill offers the same old tinkering around the edges that will not upset any big donors or rock the boat too much. The changes themselves are fine. The regulatory framework around online simulated events is needed. The higher penalties and increased reporting requirements for breaches by casinos as well as the requirement for honest and fair conduct and external reporting to government are all changes we support, but they are simply not enough because there is this thread that continues to link this Labor government, the casino companies and their donations to the cashed-up high rollers with mafia links that are coming into this state with their offers of Rolexes and luxurious nights out. There is a line linking everyday Queenslanders struggling with gambling addiction with organised crime, casinos and this Labor government.

There has not been so much talk in this debate about the harm reduction measures that are facilitated by this bill, but there has been so much hand-wringing and commentary from members about their distress at the harm this causes in their communities—members talking about how they themselves do not gamble, this kind of purity motif and the perpetuation of the stigmatisation and shame that attaches to gambling addiction. For Christ's sake! Coming in here and talking unprompted about they how individually do not waste their money—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hart): Member for Maiwar, I think you may have just used unparliamentary language. Would you withdraw that, please.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Certainly. I withdraw. To come in here and talk unprompted about how they do not waste their money on gambling is to deny just how insidious gambling addiction is and to turn a blind eye to how vulnerable gambling addicts are and how unwilling this government is to take the most basic steps to help minimise the harm to gambling addicts, like getting pokies out of pubs and clubs. The government is willing to perpetuate harm to these folks so it can continue to rake in gambling tax revenues, and it is simply too spineless to stand up to the gambling lobby and the clubs and hotels associations. Until we stop these donations and the cash-for-access meetings, the revolving door between government and industry, and the obsession the major parties have with boosting corporate profits—

*(Time expired)*