




Speech By
Michael Hart

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2022

CASINO CONTROL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (4.01 pm): I too rise to speak on the Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill which was introduced on 26 May this year. It takes some action to increase the regulatory scrutiny of casinos and ensure they operate with high standards of integrity—unlike this government. It drew on the recommendations of the Finkelstein inquiry in particular; however, it was premature given that at the time the Bell inquiry in New South Wales and the Gotterson review had not been completed. The government would have known there would be recommendations coming from those inquiries and that those recommendations should have been considered by the committee but it decided to move on anyway.

The bill proposes to implement a range of reforms to the regulation of liquor, gaming and fair trading in Queensland, including: amendments that are aimed to strengthen casino integrity and modernise gambling legislation; introducing a framework for wager or simulated events; extending New Year's Eve gaming hours; and introducing a cross-border recognition scheme for charitable fundraising.

As we have heard from other speakers, the Gotterson review had very limited terms of reference. They were far too narrow. The actions of the government regulator and links between Labor and lobbyists were not able to be reviewed. Labor lobbyists like Anacta, with former state secretary of the Queensland Labor Party Evan Moorhead, could not have their actions taken into account.

What is it that the Gotterson review discovered? They discovered the Queen's Wharf financial commitment agreement. This agreement contains regulatory restrictions and compensation clauses which were addressed by Mr Gotterson. He said that whilst it was unlikely that the recommendation of a supervision levy could result in a compensation claim by the casino licensee, he recommended that legislation expressly negate the operation of the triggers that would result in that compensation. We are unsure whether this will be added to the casino bill at this time. It may be changed at a later stage. Today's *Australian* states—

The Queensland government signed an extraordinary contract with Star Entertainment in 2016 promising to compensate the casino giant if it hiked taxes or cut pokies numbers without corporate consent—

The regulator could not make a decision without Star approving it. This is just bizarre—

or if the company's gaming earnings dropped by \$5m.

...

The Queen's Wharf Brisbane Financial and Commitment Agreement bans the state from taking certain regulatory steps without the written consent of Star—

They have to get written consent from the person they are regulating—

including introducing or increasing any "taxes, levies, licence fees" or other gaming-related fees and cutting the number of pokies or table games at the establishment. Star would also be compensated if its gaming earnings fell \$5m or more in a certain period, the agreement states.

It is extraordinary. This should never have been agreed to at the start. Strangely, it is only now, after Star has spent billions of dollars on constructing a number of buildings across the road, including a casino, that this government is realising the mistake they made. Star hosted a fundraiser at the Treasury Casino for the Attorney-General, who was negotiating this, right at the time the government was negotiating this agreement, right at the time they were twisting Star's arm to use them as a guinea pig for the best practice industrial conditions that started the ball rolling on all of the problems we have in this state. All of the cost blowouts on Light Rail Stage 3, all of the roads around the place and the Townsville stadium started with the Star casino employment contracts. This government—via union coercion, I would suggest—has talked Star into agreeing to this. In return, they have given them this financial agreement. You really just cannot write this stuff. This is something we should be watching on TV rather than living through in the Queensland parliament.

Apparently, you also cannot run a review to look at all of these things, because that is what the Labor Party does when they get in trouble: they fall back on the Labor Party playbook. You first of all deny there is any issue to start with; then you blame everybody else; and then you instigate some sort of rigged inquiry—in this case, it was limiting the inquiry the reviewer could in fact do—and then if you have an issue with that you shoot the messenger. This is the Labor Party playbook, and you can see this in practically everything this Labor Party does. If you do not have any success with any of that, then you have to come up with a scapegoat. We have seen that in just about every inquiry this government has had over the last couple of years. They have denied it ever existed; they have started an inquiry; and then they have shot the messenger—usually it is the LNP. They shoot the messenger and then they come up with a scapegoat and somebody gets fired along the way. Let's wait and see who gets fired out of all of this.

Now we have 27 pages of last-minute amendments that have not gone before the committee. I noted the Minister for Education's comments that the LNP could not have it both ways. We could not have a committee hearing to look at this when we are complaining about the committee system. I am complaining about the committee system because it just does not work. We could have it both ways if we had a committee system that works in a bipartisan way and is not controlled by an arrogant government and a chair that just completely rules everything—

Mr Power interjected.

Mr HART: I am not taking interjections from the member for Logan. I would say to the education minister that we can have it both ways. We just need a decent committee system, and we need this arrogant government to stop putting in last-minute amendments and send these to the committee where they should be thoroughly reviewed by a bipartisan—

Mr Power: They are, and by a bipartisan committee.

Mr HART: We had 27 pages of amendments dropped on this parliament 30 minutes before this bill started to be negotiated.

As I said, I do not agree that the Queen's Wharf financial commitment agreement should have ever been put in place. It should never have been put in place, but it is there and now we are seeing the government change the rules at the last minute on Star. I am not defending Star—do not get me wrong—but this is what is leading to sovereign risk in our state. They put contracts in place, they make agreements with somebody who is going to spend money and bring business to this state, and then they change it after the money has been spent. It is the same as what they did with coal royalties. They got companies which have in good faith built coalmines and then they changed the rules. That is exactly what they are doing here and they did exactly the same with land tax. People bought places based on what the land tax was and then they changed it.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr HART: Now apparently it is tax avoidance. If you follow the tax rules, apparently it is tax avoidance. That is what the member for Logan would have us believe: that it is tax avoidance if you follow the rules. My point is that people will stop coming to this state and stop investing in this state if they have to work with a government that tells them one thing, gets them to invest and then changes the rules at the end of it. What is that called? It is called sovereign risk, and the Labor Party in Queensland are an expert at it. We need to support the amendments of the shadow minister.