




Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2022

CASINO CONTROL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (6.41 pm): I rise today to speak on the Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The bill proposes a range of reforms to liquor and gambling legislation in Queensland including: a modernisation and strengthening of gambling legislation; the introduction of a framework for gambling on simulated events; an extension to gaming hours on New Year's Eve; and the introduction of a cross-border recognition scheme for charitable fundraising. These proposed changes are primarily drawn from recommendations of the Finkelstein inquiry and, disappointingly, the bill was drafted and tabled before the completion of the Gotterson review and the New South Wales Bell inquiry.

Members on this side of the House will support the bill. We will support any measures to reduce the harm that is caused by gambling to our communities. It is an issue that I and many of my colleagues have long been passionate about. In the context of the Gold Coast, there has been a push for the establishment of a global tourism hub which would include a second casino for the city. Given my electorate of Southport is in the relative centre of the city, most proposals have included locations that are either in my electorate or in close proximity.

In 2019 a report was released that listed public land at Carey Park in Southport as one of the 15 sites where a second casino could be built. I joined with local residents to call on the government to rule out Carey Park as a potential site—to rule out handing over public land for a casino. I want to put on the record in this House my thanks to those in the community who took up that fight with me to protect our public land—people like Paula Lipton, Desley and Dick Martin, and other residents of Huntington and the Southport CBD.

I have consistently opposed awarding a second casino licence for the Gold Coast on public land, and my community agrees. Throughout numerous surveys since I was elected in 2012, the public have consistently told me they do not want a second Gold Coast casino in our patch. Just shy of 90 per cent have said repeatedly that they are opposed to a second casino for the Gold Coast. Public land should be reserved for the amenity of our community and to be used by local communities. We should not be eyeballing public land for the development of major facilities, least of all another casino on the Gold Coast given the many challenges associated with problem gambling. That goes without saying.

Circling back, it would be remiss of me not to mention the premature nature of this bill being drafted and tabled before the Gotterson review was handed down last week. The government has accepted in principle all of Gotterson's recommendations. However, its terms of reference were too narrow. The actions of the government and the regulator and the links between Labor and lobbyists were not able to be part of the review. It is almost as if the government does not want to submit itself to that level of scrutiny and look on its own role in the misconduct of Queensland's casinos and had to be dragged kicking and screaming to set up a review in Queensland.

We know that the New South Wales government announced their review of Star Entertainment Group in late 2021. Despite months of serious allegations of misconduct and lawyers for the New South Wales inquiry stating that Star was not suitable to hold a casino licence, it took until mid-June this year

for the Labor government to act. Even then, Gotterson's hands were tied with the narrow terms of reference. He was not able to investigate fully the role of the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation and what they knew, did not know or did not act on. He was also unable to consider undue influence on the minister. Given the close connections publicly reported between the Labor Party and Star Entertainment Group, we can understand why.

We need casino operators to operate with the utmost integrity. For that, we need a regulator that is proactive and effective in their role. Unfortunately, there are still questions remaining as to the role of the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation. We will be introducing an amendment to clarify that the department cannot use section 14 as a reason to not disclose investigations into casinos. We have had feedback that this has happened previously, so we will be introducing an amendment to increase the transparency of the regulator's actions around casino operations. Despite the narrowness of the scope and the capacity for the government to have drafted a bill with greater protections and harm reductions, the LNP will always support measures to reduce gambling harm and therefore we support the measures of the bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Like many others who have risen in the House today and shared a bit about some of their gambling habits or lack of gambling habits, I too am someone who has always been particularly cautious in that regard. I may visit a casino on one or two occasions, but I can assure the House that I can find better things to do than waste my money on gambling.

Mr Boothman: It's distressing.

Mr MOLHOEK: I take that interjection; it is very distressing if one goes to a casino and loses significant amounts of money. I have had very direct and personal experience with helping others who have been sadly influenced by and addicted to gambling. As I stand in the House now, I have a friend who has his weekly pay deposited into an account that he cannot access and I have been helping him for some months to manage that money and pay off some of his past debts. It is heartbreaking, it is confronting and it is awkward to have those weekly conversations with an old mate who has had to come and ask for assistance.

There is so much more that we as a parliament should be doing to regulate and support people with gambling addictions. I think I have mentioned in the House on a previous occasion that the casino in Singapore actually restricts local residents from visiting it, and I think that would be a good thing. Tourists with an international passport are very welcome to go and spend as much money as they want, but there are significant restrictions in place on locals. They actually monitor and control the frequency of visits by locals, or whether they can visit at all or the reasons for their visit. I am not sure we want to become a nanny state to quite that extent, but I believe there is some value in putting stronger controls in place around casino operations.

I want to add to the comments of the member for Clayfield, who I think quite succinctly summed up some of the challenges, issues and frustrations that we on this side of the House feel in respect of the late amendments that have been tabled for this legislation. It seems incredible that, on something as important as this, we are left to consider so many late amendments in an environment where, like so many other bills before this House, the debate will be truncated. We will not have an opportunity to debate each of the amendments either in groups or individually. I find that incredibly frustrating and I am not really sure we will achieve the best outcome as a result of that.