




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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CASINO CONTROL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (4.34 pm): It is crucial for the Queensland government to regulate and oversight the gambling industry on behalf of the Queensland community for, while gambling is enjoyed responsibly by many, we must continually guard against the twin issues of problem gambling and corruption. We have had several major interstate inquiries—which we have heard about earlier—into corruption in casino operations and now the external review of the Queensland operations of the Star Entertainment Group which has reached some concerning conclusions on the operations of casinos in Queensland.

The Casino Control and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 seeks to strengthen casino integrity and regulation by imposing increased obligations on casino operators. These include a duty to cooperate with the government and a duty to ensure that casino operations are conducted honestly and fairly. During the committee inquiry there were no submissions opposing these changes in this bill.

Whilst supporting the intent of the bill, there are two main areas of concern that I outlined in my statement of reservation. Firstly, the bill proposes to remove barriers to cashless payments and cashless gaming, yet it does not propose any additional harm minimisation mechanisms to go with these changes. Although the bill provides a regulation-making power to prescribe harm minimisation measures at some point in the future, there has not been any indication during the scrutiny of the bill as to what these will be.

Cashless payments and gaming have the potential to reduce the effectiveness of current harm minimisation. For example, it would reduce interactions with cashiers and staff such that self and venue excluded gamblers may be less likely to be identified. It would have been possible during the development of this bill to craft these harm minimisation measures and I really cannot understand why it was not done. However, I acknowledge the minister's reassurances that the cashless technology will only be installed in appropriate environments.

Secondly, the bill also provides for amendments to the Wagering Act to allow Tabcorp to conduct wagering on simulated sports and racing events. In this case, a simulated event is one where the outcome is randomly determined. While this product is intended to be a replacement for the existing Keno Racing, it is actually an expansion as it allows for not only simulated racing but also sports events.

The Cancer Council in its submission urged that the historical anomaly where premium gaming rooms are the only public enclosed spaces that are not subject to smoke-free laws should be removed. Subsequently, Star casino wrote to the committee stating that it has committed to its casinos becoming smoke-free indoor environments by the end of 2022.

The bill also proposes to amend the Collections Act to streamline the registering of charitable fundraisers. This will be done by providing for the deeming of registration under the Collections Act in Queensland for entities registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. These amendments will be helpful in removing the red tape for charities and in particular for those that operate cross-border. Both the Queensland Law Society and Justice Connect supported these changes;

however, they also pushed for a much more extensive review and harmonisation of fundraising legislation, which I understand has been a long-term goal of the not-for-profit sector for many years. There is a real opportunity here for the states and territories to come together and harmonise fundraising requirements across the country.

The striking aspect of this bill—and we have heard about this earlier—is the question why it needed to come before parliament at this time. We have now had an independent inquiry which has made extensive recommendations for legislative change around limits on the use of electronic gaming machines, play and break time controls, data collection, a code of conduct and general updating of the act. Waiting until this report was delivered would have allowed more work to be done on the issues that were raised during the inquiry including whether any recommendations should flow on to other gaming environments.

The minister has outlined amendments in response. However, receiving these at the last moment makes it impossible to scrutinise fully and appropriately. Waiting would have also provided an opportunity to address the issues raised by various gaming entities, both Queensland and Northern Territory licensed operators, regarding the taxation, regulation and responsible gambling requirements in Queensland.

In closing, I would like to thank our chair, secretariat, fellow committee members, submitters, attendees to the public hearing and public briefing and the department for their work. Even though originally fully in support of the bill, I believe it is difficult to do so until being able to understand what the amendments do to the bill that the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee originally scrutinised.