




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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GAMING MACHINE AMENDMENT REGULATION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.00 pm): I move—

That the Gaming Machine Amendment Regulation 2025, subordinate legislation No. 62 of 2025, tabled in the House on 26 August 2025, be disallowed.

I want to say at the outset that this is an extraordinarily short and simple piece of subordinate legislation. The proposal to disallow it is eminently justified and very simple, and it is one that every person in this House should get behind. Any person here who is concerned about both the current cost-of-living crisis and the toll that pokies continue to take in our communities across Queensland should support this disallowance motion.

I will briefly explain what the amendment regulation does. In broad terms, it cuts the tax on pokies operators—the tax they pay when they transfer an authority—by more than 50 per cent. It cuts it from 33 per cent of the transfer value of the authority to 15 per cent. In Queensland, there is a special authorised sale process for when any of the 19,500 pokies licences are transferred between licensees in Queensland. This process for the transfer of authorities and for the taxation under this regulation is facilitated by the Public Trustee.

The regulation sets a percentage of the sale price that is to be paid into the Consolidated Fund. This percentage is set at part 10B of the regulation and is set generally at 33 per cent. What we have seen in recent years, though, is a supposedly temporary change to this percentage. As of June 2022, Labor reduced it from 33 per cent to 15 per cent, and the proposal at that time was supposed to expire after 12 months. What we have seen since that point is that it has been twice extended.

We are now three years into this tax cut for pokies licence holders, and what is proposed in this regulation is an extension of the tax break for a further three years. The justification is that this extension could trial the effects on the authority transfer market by adjusting particular parameters over these three years. If we do not have a clear sense of what is going on with this tax cut for pokies licensees after three years, what are we going to learn through a further three years? This is quite clearly just a case of offering up a loophole and giving this tax cut to pokies owners.

The explanatory notes for this amendment regulation say that the impacts on revenue will be low. I do not know exactly how 'low' is gauged, but by the standard that I think most Queenslanders who are struggling with the cost of living and the cost of housing would accept this is not a small amount of money. At the last tender in May 2025, the sale of licences resulted in \$3.1 million being paid into the Consolidated Fund. At the base level, at the standard taxation rate that should have been about \$6.9 million.

We have a current example that we can contemplate too, because as it happens there is another tender that is currently open that will close tomorrow. Within that tender process there are conflicting figures on the OLGA website, but it adds up to 200 authorities that are for sale across the state. There

is a minimum acceptable price for these licence transfers, and that is not to say that they will not sell for significantly more than that. Even if these 200 authorities sell for only the minimum acceptable price, Queenslanders will be short-changed by more than \$11 million.

Mrs Frecklington: Rubbish.

Mr BERKMAN: I hear the Attorney-General say 'rubbish'. This is not complex maths. There are 200 licences and the minimum acceptable price is set out on her own website, so you just do the multiplications and add it up. It is \$11 million that would be lost. If we were to keep that 33 per cent in place and this disallowance motion were passed by the House this evening, this transfer tomorrow would provide \$11 million more into Queensland's general revenue if all of those were to sell.

I understand that the revenue into the Consolidated Fund has increased since the change was first implemented in June 2022. It is important for the House to note, though, that the average sale price for authorities has quite dramatically increased over that time. That is not to suggest that we are getting a better deal because of the tax cut that the Labor government offered and the LNP is proposing to extend for a further three years. It is in fact just the case that the value of these licences and the transfers has gone up. What that means is that in the intervening three years we have missed out on more revenue for the things that Queenslanders need.

It is really important that every member of this House and every member of the general public in Queensland notes that apparently the only consultation undertaken on this regulation was with the Queensland Hotels Association and hotel licensees—the very people who we know will benefit from the continuation of this more than 50 per cent tax break. Another bit of context that might be useful is that just this year—back in April 2025—the LNP also increased the individual caps on the number of pokies that club operators with multiple venues can hold onto.

This is not a government that is operating with any concern for the wellbeing of people who are struggling with gambling addiction. It is not a government that has any interest in doing the right thing by regular people who are doing it tough—the families of people who are struggling with gambling addiction. The government has this kind of farcical pretence behind all of these positions that says, 'Struggling pubs and clubs need these pokies because they can't stay open otherwise.' How about this for a suggestion? How about they get creative and find other ways to support small businesses? How about they consider things like payroll tax for small and medium enterprises? There are plenty of ways you could go about helping these pubs and clubs if they are struggling, but allowing them to just keep pumping into our communities more and more pokies that we know are harming people is not the way to go about it.

I will say that it is a shame that this motion on the disallowance of the amendment regulation does not allow us to touch on casinos, but at the very least it is a start. It is an important start for a country like Australia that as I understand it, as has been reported recently, is home to 18 per cent of the world's pokies. We routinely hear about what a tiny proportion of the global population we are—about one per cent of the population—yet our communities host 18 per cent of the pokies that exist around the planet. That is why we are seeing such extraordinary levels of gambling harm. That is why people are struggling with addiction at levels that we should not have to tolerate in our community.

I do not know if this is the case for anyone else in this chamber, but I know people who have lost their life through gambling addiction. I have a dear friend who lost her father through gambling addiction and, as it happens, I think this is someone who you yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker, knew in your former professional life. These are very real consequences for our communities. This is not a suggestion that should be taken lightly and it is one that both sides of the House should follow through with. If we zoom out just a little bit, we see that the scale of gambling losses in Queensland is extraordinary. When the Queensland Audit Office interrogated the 2022-23 financial year it reported back that \$6.1 billion of gambling losses came from Queenslanders during that year. That is an increase of 36 per cent from the 2018-19 financial year. It is a huge amount of money that is lost to gambling.

The QAO also made the observation that while the government receives taxes and levies from gambling activities, a disproportionately small amount is returned back to the department to fund the delivery of harm minimisation services. That amount is less than a per cent; 0.62 per cent of the gambling tax revenue that the government takes goes back into harm reduction efforts. Moreover, QAO reported that the existing programs—what can be funded through that 0.62 per cent—are not doing the job; they are not suitable for the services that are required, particularly in terms of culturally sensitive supports for First Nations and culturally diverse communities. It is clear that we are not doing the right thing by these communities. It is clear that whenever there is a contest in this place between ordinary taxpayers and the criminal casinos and political donors who both sides of the House, both Labor and the LNP, are tied up with—whenever there is a contest between our community and those gambling donors, the gambling donors win.

The amount of \$3.53 billion was spent on pokies alone, excluding casinos as I understand the data, in 2024. Think about where this extra revenue just from this amendment regulation could be spent. It could be spent on mental health care. It could be spent on those addiction support services that folks in the community so desperately need, but it is not. Again, we need to be clear-eyed about the fact that it is not going back into the community. We are not taxing the gambling industry appropriately because both major parties are receiving massive amounts in donations and cash-for-access meetings from the gambling industry. There was close to \$150,000 in reported donations to the two major parties from the Queensland Hotels Association. In 2023-24 in the lead-up to the federal election, alcohol and gambling companies donated \$2.474 million to the political parties to fill their advertising coffers so that irrespective of who got in, no matter who was in government, their bidding would be done. This is a classic case of state capture. When a harmful industry like the gambling industry or the fossil fuel industry can buy both sides, both alternative governments, they will get the outcomes they want and regular people lose. Who benefits from those political donations? It is the criminals running—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. I ask that you bring the member back to the debate that is before the House, which is a disallowance motion.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McDonald): I will take some advice. Member, if you can demonstrate to the House how what you are talking about now is relevant to the disallowance motion then I am happy for you to continue.

Mr BERKMAN: Certainly, Mr Deputy Speaker. The disallowance motion, as I said, is very straightforward. It is a disallowance motion on a regulation that gives a greater than 50 per cent tax cut on the transfer of pokies authorities between the existing and the future licensee. This is the kind of tax break, this is the kind of favourable treatment, that those in the gambling industry get because the gambling lobby buys its way into the offices of the relevant ministers and attorneys-general, whether it is a Labor or LNP government that is running the show here. It is that same access, that same political access, that is bought and sold by the gambling lobby that leads to outcomes like the criminals Chow Tai Fook Enterprises who are about to take over the Star casino. It goes to the fact that a project like that can even get up in the first place. They have fallen into financial difficulty almost immediately—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member himself has said the disallowance motion does not extend to casinos. The member is now talking about the development of a casino.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is a relevant point of order. Member for Maiwar, could you confine your contents to the aspects of this disallowance motion, please.

Mr BERKMAN: Certainly, Mr Deputy Speaker. As I said, it is a shame that within this disallowance motion we do not have the opportunity to take on the reality of the extraordinary number of pokies that sit in the Queen's Wharf casino and will soon be run by Chow Tai Fook, who have been found to have falsely and repeatedly claimed they have cut business ties with criminal syndicates. Obviously I cannot go any further down that line, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Janetzki: I think you've gone a fair way, Michael.

Mr BERKMAN: I will take the interjection. Those opposite know that these are companies that have been found to be unsuitable to hold a casino licence. They know the criminal ties. They know of the allegations against the Star casino.

Dr ROWAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. My point of order relates to relevance to the disallowance motion. I would ask for guidance to be given.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Maiwar, if you do not stick to this motion and you continue to refer to casinos, I will sit you down.

Mr BERKMAN: Certainly. Thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker.

To put it flatly, giving a tax break for the transfer of pokies licences while ordinary Queenslanders are struggling to keep food on their table and a roof over their head is frankly sickening. It reflects—and this is the point I was going to—the corrupting influence of political donations from the gambling lobby to both of the major parties. The LNP might want to quietly extend Labor's 50 per cent tax breaks, but the Greens are here today to say that enough is enough. While every ordinary Queenslander sucks it up and pays their tax, political donors like the Hotels Association and corrupt casino operators get a discount, and that is sickening. We clearly need more than this. We need betting limits, the phasing out of pokies from pubs and clubs altogether and the banning of political donations from the gambling lobby. Instead of extending tax handouts for pokies operators, the government should make them pay a fair share and focus on supporting Queenslanders who need health care, housing and schools.