



Speech by

**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

Hansard Thursday, 8 October 2009

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## **GAMBLING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (12.26 pm): I rise to address the Gambling and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. The focus of my contribution to the debate will be in relation to the gambling amendments in terms of caps on gaming machines, the mandatory responsible service of gambling and the effects on our society. As members have already heard from my colleague and shadow minister the honourable member for Mermaid Beach, the opposition will be supporting these amendments. These amendments rectify several deficiencies in amendments made in 2003 and 2007—namely, in 2003 a cap on the number of gaming machines in hotels was legislated. However, as is so often the case with this incompetent Labor government, the legislation was incomplete as there was no cap on clubs. In 2007 the government legislated offence provisions for minors in casinos yet did not implement the same offence for minors who participate in lotteries or wagering activities. In 2007 the chief executive's access to the Queensland Police Service crime reporting database was removed and these amendments before us now, two years later, see it rectified.

It would appear that most of these amendments are required now due to the half-hearted effort the government adopts when amending legislation. Instead of taking the time to think things through or consult widely, the government rushes in and makes a bare minimum of change—just tweaking around the edges. Being mindful of time, as this debate has been truncated significantly by the Leader of the House, I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Johnstone): Has the member shown the speech to the Speaker and sought his approval?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** The Speaker has reviewed and agreed to my speech being incorporated.

Leave granted.

While the Bligh Government continues to milk the gaming industry for all its worth in an attempt to offset its countless deficiencies in other sectors, let us stop and take a moment to examine the social cost of Queensland's gambling addiction.

The Queensland Household Gambling Survey 2006/07 found that many gamblers had experienced adverse effects on their day to day lives as a result of their gambling habit.

- 38% reported that their gambling affected their work performance
- 34% thought they had not enough time to look after their family
- 58% would gamble if something painful happened
- 58% had someone in their immediate family who had a drug or alcohol problem
- 51% had someone in their immediate family who had a gambling problem
- 72% felt seriously depressed in the past 12 months
- 39% had been under a Doctors care for stress in the past 12 months
- 48% had wanted to get help, yet only 28% actually did

There is no doubt that gambling puts an added strain on families, many of whom are well and truly juggling to make ends meet. The addictive lure of gambling sees Queenslanders throwing away hundreds of millions of dollars that could be far better spent on

providing the necessities of life for their families. Gambling is not only a concern in itself, but is also a significant scourge of societies in many developed countries, one that contributes to many other issues, including child safety.

Mind you various forms of gambling take place in undeveloped countries and remote communities as well, where in many cases uneducated people throw away their money without realising its worth.

However the issue of child safety is of paramount concern and raises the following questions: How many children are being left unsupervised for long periods in high risk situations while their parents spend hours feeding their gambling addiction at the local hotel? How many children are forced to go to school without adequate nutrition because the family's food budget has been gambled away? How many children witness violence and disputes when the weekly budget of money goes into a slot machine never to return?

The Bligh Government continues to peddle the line 'gamble responsibly' in their advertising campaigns. But I query, as I did in legislation in February 2008: how can these two ideas be associated together? Such an oxymoron is hardly a rational attitude towards the problem of gambling. All advertising of gambling should be banned except inside over 18 venues, and it should be treated the same as the advertising of cigarettes. Honesty about the odds of winning could also be printed on such materials.

Promoting 'gamble responsibly' as a proactive message to inform our children about its dangers is deceitful and misleading. Children are the ones most at risk of developing addictive patterns of behaviour. Trivialising gambling by constantly being fed a steady diet 'it's cool to gamble' is perpetuating a cycle of generational gambling addiction.

I agree gambling occasionally is fun and I have had a bet on several occasions over the years although I have to say pokies hold no interest for me. Living in an electorate that abuts the Qld and NSW border I am well aware of the role clubs have played for decades and the enormous social benefits that the safety and friendliness of clubs offer to our aged pensioners, many of whom are starved of company.

In Queensland it is currently not mandatory for employees working in gaming areas to have any form of training. Presently a gaming venue only needs one Gaming Nominee Licence, which is a two day course, and 2 gaming employee licences, which requires no course. These amendments now make it mandatory for employees to have Responsible Service of Gaming certificates (RSG).

This mandatory training is long overdue but I am surprised the current courses on offer are only 4 hours. What input from industry stakeholders has the Government sought to ensure that the course is adequate, and what evaluation measures have been put in place to ensure it is effective? I recognise this is an impost on employers, however the social costs are significant and therefore recognition of previous training and experience should be considered.

As of 28 February 2006 there were a total of 40,171 poker machines. This figure did not include the number of gaming machines in the state's four casinos. It appears that every time the Government talks about gaming machines they deliberately omit those in our Casinos. It would appear from the individual Casinos websites that there are around 4000 gaming machines in the states four casinos.

In 2003 the Government capped the number of gaming machines in hotels at 19,310 and now in 2009 they are capping them in Clubs at 24,705. Why this was not done in 2003 along with hotels is astounding and why the four Casinos still do not have a cap is bewildering. Therefore the total cap for hotels and clubs is set at 44,015. According to research by St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland, this is the highest per capita in not only all of Australia but all of the world. (letter from President St Vincent De Paul Society, April 2008)

Considerable public outrage ensued when the Bligh Government back-flipped over the \$20 note limit for pokie machines. The Queensland Council of Social Service believes this is a major reversal on a proven, successful harm minimisation strategy and there are concerns that it signals a return to the old revenue raising approach to gambling. (QCOSS News 13 July 2009).

This policy reversal comes at the same time as the Government considered applications to extend the gambling hours of 80 hotels in Queensland and gives the green light to a new club in Logan allowing for 200 machines.

Logan already has a heavy concentration of both poker machines and problem gambling. Logan's pokies consumed an average of \$5803 during the month of August 2009, which is almost higher than the statewide average. Collectively the poker machines in Logan pulled in some \$11million last month. Logan is considered to be a low-socio economic area with a high rate of unemployment and this, mixed with easy access to gambling, is a recipe for disaster. (Courier Mail 21 September 2009)

The newest attempt to supposedly limit people's ability to gamble is the introduction of card based gaming. This allows people to set daily limits, to set how much money to be set to the credit meter from your account each time they insert their card, and sends a reminder to the screen as to how long they have been playing. While there seems to be support for this new card system as part of a harm minimisation strategy, I am concerned as to how it is being advertised to the public.

An example of this is Simplay's brochure, which focuses purely on making gambling easier and not drawing people's attention to the benefits of budgeting how much to spend and sticking to it. Their slogan is 'using a Card Based Gaming system can enhance your gaming experience. It's so Easy'. It is designed purely to attract more people to gambling.

It could be fairly safely said that problem gamblers are not the best at budgeting so this measure may not reach those it is intended to assist.

The fact that people can gather a number of these cards to enable them to play at various venues is also of concern. In my electorate there are a number of surf clubs with pokies that they need for their survival, and whilst I acknowledge the lifeline the profits bring to these clubs I also recognise the downfalls. The new card system will not prevent people from getting cards from each venue and the system cannot track problem gamblers across different facilities.

It would also appear that the self-regulation of excluding problem gamblers from Casinos and clubs is failing. Errors by gaming operator Tabcorp meant that gambling addicts were able to continue their habit, and even remain on a company's rewards scheme, after they had tried to deal with their problem by excluding themselves from casinos. (Courier Mail 14 July 2009). It is time to consider a mandatory system which restricts problem gamblers from all aspects of gambling.

Another major consequence is how gambling affects children. Most clubs and hotels have crèches which allow the parents to have their child babysat while the parents are gambling away their weekly food or rent money. The State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland would like to see removal of these facilities. Perhaps stricter limits of time spent in the these crèches would have a positive effect. (Courier Mail 25 April 2009)

In the Minister for Fair Trading and Tourism's second reading speech he praises the contribution clubs make to our community as a way of justifying the need for gambling, however, according to the Queensland Council of Social Service, the Gambling Benefit Fund for 2008/9 is \$36.7 million, 1.18% of the total amount that Queenslanders spend on gambling. Given the massive revenues from gambling to the industry and the fact that it is damaging to some individuals and families a 1.18% return to the community at large is hardly a fair compensation.

It is no wonder that this Government is keen to rake as many dollars out of the industry as possible. Bligh and her cronies had bled the state dry and put Queensland into enormous debt before the world economic crisis.

A number of deserving groups in my community have benefited from the Government's Gambling Fund and they are most grateful for their successful bids for a share of this revenue.

They are—Currumbin State School P&C, Ozcare—Majella House,

Retired Online, Tugun Surf Life Saving Club, Centacare—Southern Star Community, Currumbin District Horse Club, Tallebudgera State School P&C

And Palm Beach Currumbin Cricket Club

All gambling is not evil and most clubs and hotels do ensure that responsible gambling takes place in their venues and that problem gambling is identified and addressed. A prime example of this is the Currumbin RSL which is situated in my electorate and is known as 'the best little club in the world' as a result of its string of awards. Currumbin RSL is committed to providing Responsible Gambling Services. This is achieved through the implementation of Queensland Responsible Gambling Code of Practice which provides a proactive whole-of-industry approach to the promotion of responsible gambling practices. It also encourages the creation of gambling environments that minimise harm to individuals and to the broader community.

I do believe though that the Code of Practice should be a mandatory code with penalties for the clubs who do not act responsibly.

One way that the Currumbin RSL is helping to minimise problem gambling is by having a Customer Liaison Officer who is available for patrons to talk to if they think they have a problem. The patron will then be referred onto a specialised agency for financial or gambling counselling.

Last ANZAC Day the Club restricted access to the popular Two-Up afternoon to members only, even though they knew they would not raise as much money for Legacy without the large crowds of young people. But thankfully they realised there are higher ideals at stake than the amount of money that would be generated.

The Currumbin RSL also holds training courses in bar and gaming procedures and responsibilities, to ensure their staff are well trained. These courses are also open to the public. Their Bar and Gaming Operations course is 38 hours in duration and covers both Responsible Service of Alcohol and Responsible Service of Gaming and Gambling.

The monies raised through their gaming services contributes to the \$140,000.00 in cash and donations made to schools, youth sports and community groups in the region each year via its own Community Benefit Fund. The Fund also sponsors numerous community events like D'Alliance and Christmas by the Creek.

In summary, this bill purports to introduce a raft of harm minimisation strategies and to a small degree it will achieve this. But the fact remains that problem gambling is on the rise and this Government's general focus on harm minimisation allows for a 'soft' somewhat piece-meal approach that does little to reduce the problem. It is almost an admission that the problem will continue to grow and the Government are not really interested in arresting it.

Gambling is best described as an emotional illness which requires rehabilitation, counselling and lots of support. Problem gamblers will steal, beg and borrow to support their habit and their families. Children and loved ones are all innocent victims. Much more needs to be done by the Bligh Government which raked in almost \$1 Billion to decrease the problem of gambling as each year the number of people gambling is dramatically increasing. I do not see an earnest effort on behalf of this Labor Government to supply the necessary support services that are required in an accessible and non-discriminating manner.

The Government, Clubs, Hotels and Casinos all have an obligation to spend more of the estimated \$3 Billion generated from gambling each year on solving this problem. In February this year people in our community lost from the pokies in Queensland's clubs and pubs \$133 million, and in March a staggering \$150 million. (Courier mail 25 April 2009)

That is a lot of hungry mouths that have not been fed and a lot of people facing homelessness and loss of self-esteem.