

STATUTES AMENDMENT (GAMBLING REGULATION) BILL

Wednesday, 6 June 2007

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I rise on behalf of Family First to indicate our strong support for this bill, which seeks to amend the Casino Act 1997 and the Gaming Machines Act 1992 and to implement various reforms proposed by the Hon. Mr Xenophon. I will endeavour to go through his reforms sequentially, although not exhaustively, as they appear in the bill. The first category is the Casino Act reforms themselves, and I will look at specific aspects of the bill. I think that it is entirely appropriate that it be mandatory that surveillance tapes are retained for one month and available for request, as required by the Hon. Mr Xenophon's legislation. I would be surprised if such a thing was not already happening for the casino's sake in the event that someone was suspected of swindling money from the casino using some technology or some clever scheme.

Mr Xenophon says that currently they keep them for only two weeks. We would certainly support that aspect of it. It is surprising that they are required to keep the tapes for only two weeks, and we would certainly support that aspect.

The poker machine playing hours reform for the casino goes further than the reform in the bill I put up last week, because my bill left the casino alone. By contrast, the Hon. Mr Xenophon says that these machines should not be able to be played before midday. In principle this is a worthy idea and, whilst the legislation I proposed did not specifically go that far, the Hon. Mr Xenophon certainly has a point and we will support that aspect of the bill as well.

Amendments to section 42A of the bill would retire the present provision limiting the amount a person can withdraw from an on-site automatic teller machine to \$200 or such other amount required by regulation. The Hon. Mr Xenophon says that on the retirement date no ATM should be available on premises and any EFTPOS facility must not be used for cash withdrawals. Family First agrees with this sensible approach. A constituent has described to me how in the heat of the moment it seems like a good idea to get a bit more cash out of the

machine and keep playing a little longer, and the cycle repeats itself. This is the exact behaviour the Hon. Mr Xenophon is targeting with this legislation.

It is possibly true that gaming machine operators would like to shirk this responsibility and avoid this whole issue, but surely there is a moral argument against profiting from someone else's misery, as is happening. Family First has never been comfortable with family savings being accessible at the site of a gaming venue, and we have considerable sympathy for this reform. Family First is also favourably disposed to the concept in proposed new section 42AC of removing coin exchange machines. This move is obviously targeted at poker machines, and members know that we are strongly opposed to poker machines in this state. This reform is sensible because it then requires forward planning by the poker machine player, that is, that he or she must get coins together before entering the casino and have to make a decision before getting involved in gambling as to what is a reasonable amount to put through the machines at that time. We certainly support that initiative.

We have also heard stories of VIP treatment that some problem gamblers have received which simply encourages them to take a higher risk, gamble more and put their family's livelihood in greater jeopardy. We have little sympathy for the loyalty schemes targeted by the Hon. Mr Xenophon's proposed new clause 42AE of this bill, and we support the Hon. Mr Xenophon's initiative. He also proposes that no promotional material should be sent to a person who has been barred from the casino. This makes sense and I was surprised to hear of occasions when this has not occurred—another sensible reform Family First would support.

Looking at the Gaming Machine Act reforms specifically, I will address the first reform of this legislation as it is tied to the last reform regarding opening hours for poker machines outside the casino. The Hon. Mr Xenophon and I are seeking to achieve the same thing—a happy coincidence. I do not necessarily mind what legislation gets through; I just want to see it changed, and I know that the Hon. Mr Xenophon feels the same way. We certainly support that reform as it mirrors aspects of my bill that I introduced last week. It is a sensible

reform and alone will make a significant difference, so we wholeheartedly support it.

I will briefly discuss the comments of the Hon. Mr Xenophon in respect of the Independent Gaming Authority's disdain for suggestions by some that you need poker machines open in the early hours for shift workers and the like. I commend the IGA for taking such a stance as it is sensible. Surely gaming machine operators wink, wink at each other using this sort of argument. It is a weak argument in our view, and the IGA and the Hon. Mr Xenophon are quite right in rejecting it. I hope we will not lose Mr Stephen Howells, as is presently rumoured: he has done a great job in his current position and, if he does go, I hope we get somebody equally as tenacious and sensible as he has been in respect of this whole issue.

There you go. I will speak briefly on this section of reforms to the Gaming Machines Act because the Hon. Mr Xenophon said in his second reading contribution that they mirror the Casino Act reforms. On the whole, Family First is satisfied with the merit of all these reforms, having looked at them closely, and that is limiting the availability of ATMs, EFTPOS and coin machines on gaming machine premises and scaling back the inducements associated with this activity.

We also consider favourably banning the sending of promotional material to banned persons. Some of these people have banned themselves, so it is remarkable that venues would then send them material to encourage them to come back when they have said to the management, 'I do not want to come back; please stop me coming back.' We would wholeheartedly support that reform. I will pick up on another point made by the Hon. Mr Xenophon in his second reading speech where he said, 'It seems that the only measure that will definitely see a reduction in poker machine losses in this state, as has occurred in other states, is a ban on smoking in pokies rooms as of 31 October this year.' Family First is optimistic that we can introduce many more measures in addition to this.

With respect to the bigger picture, we will see tomorrow in the budget that the long-term forecast for 2009 to 2010 for gaming machine revenue is expected to pick up some 6 per cent again after the 15 per cent reduction from 31 October 2007. So, I think there is merit in rolling out the next measure of reforms, such as this one, to keep the reform agenda going.

I would like to finish with an explanation from a Finnish study—excuse the pun—a study done in Finland, published in the *Psychological Medicine* journal in May this year. The study was of some 9 000 Finnish twins and it showed that chronic smoking predicts the development of depressive symptoms. To be more precise, it led the author, Dr Korhonen, to say to Reuters on 2 June, that is, last Saturday:

Although nicotine in cigarettes has some mood-elevating properties, in the long-run chronic exposure to cigarette smoke may have a more important role in the etiology of depressive symptoms.

I therefore commend the government in getting smoking out of pokie machine venues and the reforms that have already been adopted by the government, because if this Finnish study is correct it is not a healthy mix to put problem gambling and chronic smoking together because, according to this study at least, the consequences can be dire. In short, we support this bill wholeheartedly. They are very good reforms and I certainly hope that the government sees fit to support them as well.