

GAMBLING — AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS

389. Mr P. ABETZ to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

I understand that recent national gambling statistics show that Western Australia continues to excel in responsible gambling in comparison with the rest of the nation. Can the minister please update the house on where our state stands compared with the other Australian states and territories?

Several members interjected.

Mr T.K. WALDRON replied:

I thank the member, because I think everyone knows that he has a very keen and real interest in this area.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr T.K. WALDRON: He does.

I have previously spoken in the house on this issue. I think it is important that I provide the latest update. The Queensland Office of Economic and Statistical Research has recently released the latest Australian gambling statistics. I am very pleased to report that Western Australia has come last by a long way in per capita gambling expenditure—that is, how much each of us spends on gambling in a year. That is a good thing to come last in.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: No, it is not ridiculous.

Mr M.P. Murray: It is when you haven't got pokies in the pubs!

Mr T.K. WALDRON: It is not ridiculous when members consider what is happening at a federal level, which I will explain in a moment. This is actually quite important.

The latest gambling statistics show that the average gambling spend of an adult Western Australian is \$693 a year, which is by far the lowest of all the states and territories. If members look at the statistics for the other states and territories, the highest per capita spend is in the Northern Territory, with \$3 131 per head.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I would have thought these would be pretty interesting statistics.

The Northern Territory has the highest spend per adult, with \$3 131; that is probably an inflated figure because the corporate bookmakers do their business up there. For New South Wales it is \$1 318 per head, and for Victoria it is \$1 229 per head. The national average is \$1 145 per head. In percentage terms, Western Australia contributes only 6.1 per cent of all gambling expenditure in Australia, although we have 10.1 per cent of the nation's adult population, so it is a good result. That result is due to the longstanding policy of successive state governments to resist the establishment of poker machines in pubs and clubs. While I am on my feet I will reaffirm and stress that this government is extremely strongly committed to not having pokies in clubs and pubs. I will say again that whenever I go to a gaming ministers meeting, 90 per cent of the time is spent talking about the issues with poker machines in clubs and pubs. The state government could earn around \$400 million a year from gaming machines if it allowed them, but I think the human cost is far too great to even consider doing that, particularly given the social problems they create.

I think the federal Labor government's move to introduce mandatory pre-commitment for all gaming machines in Australia is important, but I think we all know that that is really aimed at staying in government rather than addressing problem gambling. WA's situation is unique, as the member for Collie–Preston has said, in that unlike other states and territories we do not have poker machines outside our casino. Even the gaming machines in the casino are not true poker machines. So that people understand, the spin rate of the machines at Burswood is five seconds; the spin rate for true poker machines is up to twice as fast. Also, Burswood Casino machines have no auto-play features and fewer bet options, and Burswood already has voluntary pre-commitment. Those statistics are good, and we think we have our gambling policy right in WA. As I said at the last gaming ministers conference, if the rest of Australia had the same gambling regime as WA, there would not be a need to even consider mandatory pre-commitment as a way of tackling gambling issues.