

GAMBLING STATISTICS

411. Mr I.M. BRITZA to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

I was very concerned to read the national gambling statistics that showed Western Australians lost \$1 billion through gambling on sports, racing and gaming. Can the minister inform the house of the situation in Western Australia compared with other states?

Mr T.K. WALDRON replied:

I thank the member for the question. Gambling is an issue in our community. It is part of our lifestyle. The headline on page one of today's *The West Australian* states, "Punters lose \$1 billion in WA splurge." From reading that one can be excused for thinking there is a gambling crisis in Western Australia, because \$1 billion is a lot of money. However, in reality the assessment that it is a crisis could not be further from the truth. The latest gambling statistics for 2006-07 show that on average Western Australian adults spent \$630 on gambling. Although that sum may appear high, spending in Western Australia is by far the lowest of all states and territories. The highest gambling spending occurred in the Northern Territory with \$2 559 per adult, and the national average is \$1 131 per adult. Western Australians therefore contributed only 2.9 per cent of all gambling turnover in Australia. I believe that result is due directly to the policies of successive state governments to resist the establishment of poker machines in pubs and clubs in Western Australia. The Western Australian government is forgoing potential poker machine tax revenue in excess of \$300 million by keeping poker machines out of our communities. Given the misery that poker machines have caused in other states, I believe it is money that the government is happy to forgo. Because of the strong stance of government against poker machines, the incidence of problem gambling in Western Australia is the lowest in the nation. I want to make that point clear. That does not mean, however, that the state does not have gambling problems. Western Australia is not immune from them. The state government and Western Australian gambling operators fund extremely competent gambling support services, which achieve high levels of success for those who decide that they need help. When one looks at the conduct of gambling, the position of Western Australia becomes even better in comparison with other states. Western Australia has maintained the ownership of Lotterywest and WATAB in government hands. This means that profits amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars each year that are derived from these operations are returned to the community, by way of grants in the case of Lotterywest, and to the racing industry in the form of wages to workers and so on. In comparison, other states return far less to their communities. If it means that we are out of kilter with the rest of Australia, I think we should stay that way.

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: My point of order relates to standing orders relating to reading answers to questions. I note that the member for Morley was able to ask a question without reading it, yet both the Deputy Leader of the National Party and the Leader of the National Party are reading their answers these days. Mr Speaker, I would ask for your ruling on whether it is appropriate, in the context of standing orders, and whether reading is now allowed in this house.

The SPEAKER: I would advise all members in this place that obviously the best practice, if it were possible in an ideal Parliament, would be for all questions and all answers to be given without any reference to documentation at all. However, I think in the circumstances that prevail, I would certainly give latitude to those being asked a question to provide particular pieces of information. If it is necessary for them to refer to a document or a piece of paper, that is acceptable from my point of view. I would also give the opportunity to the member asking the question, if a document mentioned in an answer was germane to the question being asked, for the particular document to be made available to the member or tabled.