

“AUSTRALIA’S GAMBLING INDUSTRY”

193. Mr R.F. JOHNSON to the Minister for Community Development, Women’s Interests, Seniors and Youth:

I refer the minister to the Productivity Commission report entitled “Australia’s Gambling Industry” released in December 1999, which states that the prevalence of problem gambling is related to the degree of accessibility of gambling, particularly gaming machines. The report also found that the effects of problem gambling can lead to depression and anxiety, relationship breakdowns, financial hardship and pressure on community services.

Mr N.R. Marlborough interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: This is a very serious issue. I ask -

- (1) Does the minister support her Government’s decision to increase the number of gaming machines at Burswood International Resort Casino by 200 machines?
- (2) Has the Government undertaken any studies on the social impact of this significant increase in the number of gaming machines in Western Australia?
- (3) Does the minister anticipate any increase in pressure on community services as a result of her Government’s decision; and, if so, what plans does she have to increase counselling and other services for problem gamblers?

Ms S.M. McHALE replied:

- (1)-(3) I thank the member for his question. This matter was canvassed extensively yesterday, but I will make some general remarks. Western Australia does have a very good track record when it comes to poker machines and gambling. Unlike the other States, we do not suffer the same incidence of social issues and problems that are caused by gambling; that is a credit to the State, and it is a position we are proud of and wish to maintain. Yesterday the Acting Premier indicated, in answer to a question from the Leader of the Opposition, that this element of the agreement between the Government and Burswood casino was subject to a decision by the Gaming Commission of Western Australia. My understanding is that this is not an automatic increase in the number of poker machines. The Acting Premier made it clear that this increase is subject to a decision by the Gaming Commission and is subject to the measures and standards -

Mr R.F. Johnson: What about the people who will suffer?

Ms S.M. McHALE: I am answering the member’s question. We have a very good track record on gambling and we will maintain that.