

GAMBLING — PER CAPITA EXPENDITURE

**315. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:**

I was pleased to see that the national gambling statistics show that Western Australia has the lowest per capita gambling losses across the nation. I ask the minister to explain to the house the implications of those figures for Western Australia.

**Mr T.K. WALDRON replied:**

I thank the member for Scarborough for her question. I am aware of the statistics that show that Western Australia has the lowest per capita gambling spend across the nation. That is good news. Western Australia has a thriving casino complex that is bursting at the seams and struggling to cope with the demand for entertainment options. It provides wonderful facilities for tourists and the people of Western Australia and it employs almost 5 000 Western Australians. Western Australia also has the fantastic Lotterywest, which is owned by the state. It continues to generate money for communities across Western Australia. We also have a strong state-owned Totalisator Agency Board. Every year since its inception some 50 years ago, the TAB has supported our racing industry and the thousands of Western Australians who work in that industry. Does all that lead us to concerns that we are spending too much on gambling? That question will always be asked.

The latest statistics have been released and I am pleased to report that they show that in terms of our annual per capita gambling expenditure—that is, how much each of us spend on gambling each year—Western Australia has come last by a long way. Sometimes it is good to come last! The latest gambling statistics show that the Western Australian adult spend on gambling is an average of \$657 each year. It is by far the lowest figure of all the states and territories. The highest per capita gambling expenditure occurred in the Northern Territory. As opposed to our average of \$657 per adult, the average adult spend in the Northern Territory is \$2 855. The average adult spend in New South Wales is \$1 284 and the average adult spend in Victoria is \$1 189. The national average spend is \$1 112, so we are doing pretty well. In percentage terms, we contribute about 5.9 per cent of all gambling expenditure in Australia. That result is due to the long-standing policy of successive governments to resist the temptation to put poker machines in pubs and clubs. In financial terms, the state could be earning another \$300 million a year if it were to do that, not to mention the profits that would go to the operators. But the simple fact is that the human cost in doing that would be far too great, especially given the social problems that community-based poker machines have caused in other states. This government is happy to forgo that funding. When I attend gaming minister conferences, I have often heard about the issues that have arisen in other states because of poker machines in pubs and clubs.

A lot of the money spent on gambling in WA finds its way back to the community in some form. Our lotteries are the only lotteries that return all net profits back to the community. That is a wonderful thing. I am sure all members have had an opportunity to see the benefits of the lotteries returned to their community. It is the same with the TAB. It provides heaps of jobs for Western Australians and supports the racing industry. The casino is not state owned, but it employs 5 000 Western Australians, supports local businesses and provides about \$100 million in taxes to the state government. In essence, we have the policy settings right. The state government is happy to support Burswood Casino, Lotterywest and the TAB, but under no circumstances will it allow poker machines in Western Australian pubs and clubs.