



# Betting is on Cairns

**Kelmeny Fraser**  
fraserk@qnp.newsltd.com.au

CAIRNS would become Australia's answer to Las Vegas under a controversial scheme to transform it into the national centre for poker machines.

The proposal is to be aired tomorrow in Brisbane at one of the tourism industry's key annual conventions, Tourism Futures, to be attended by international tourism heavyweights and politicians, including Federal Tourism Minister Martin Ferguson and Queensland Premier Anna Bligh.

It is being put forward by breakaway Liberal National Party MP Aidan McLindon, who has spent years rallying against the spread of poker machines.

But Mr McLindon, who quit the party in May to form the Queensland Party, is now pushing for debate on a scheme that would create a Vegas-style gambling strip in Cairns by relocating poker machines from existing pubs and clubs across Queensland to a new "Aus Vegas" to be built in the region.

The Beaudesert MP first outlined his vision for a Vegas-style pokies hub to reduce gambling in April last year in his maiden speech to State Parliament.

It would copy the US model, where Nevada is the only state to have no significant restric-

tions on gaming machines. Under the "Aus Vegas" proposal, clubs would have their poker machine licences back to the Government, relocate their pokies to the new enterprise. The four major casinos would become shareholders in the new enterprise. The four major casinos would be exempt.

The plan would be supported by a shake-up of the distribution of gambling revenue collected by the State Government, with poker machine revenue instead being poured into recreational sports through a scheme that would hand clubs a cash grant for each they put on the sports field.

"The location is ideal for the Cairns region is some of the highest unemployment levels and the tourism industry is plummeting," McLindon said.

"It already has the international airport there, which is under-utilised," he said.

"Ideally, you want to have gaming machines all in one place so people can go away, have a holiday, blow their money and come home."

But welfare groups fear the plan could turn Cairns into "Sin City", making residents the sacrificial lambs of the nation's gambling problem.

**What do you think? Send an email to yournews@sundaymail.com.au or write to us at GPO Box 130, Brisbane, 4001.**

**SIN CITY:** Cairns is being eyed as Australia's national centre for poker machines.

**Relationships Australia**  
**Anne Hollonds**



"If Cairns were to become a gambling capital of Australia I would be very worried about that region. I wouldn't like to see tourism built on gambling

**Cairns Mayor**  
**Val Schier**



"Cairns wants to be known for our identity of our spectacular natural environment and we don't want to become a Las Vegas tinsel town."

**State MP**  
**Aidan McLindon**



"Ideally you want them all in one place so people can go away, have a holiday, blow their money and come home."

**Clubs Queensland chief executive officer**  
**Doug Flockhart**



"It just won't get up. It is a Footscray Paradise. There has been too much hard work done in the area of responsibility to even consider this as having any m-