

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO GAMBLING

Western Suburbs Leagues Club Ashfield, trading as Wests Ashfield Leagues, formally submits this document for the consideration of the Productivity Commission inquiry into gambling in Australia.

Regarding Wests Ashfield Leagues:

Wests Ashfield Leagues commenced operation from humble beginnings in 1954. The reason for the formation of the Club was to create a not-for-profit establishment to promote sporting endeavours, rugby league in particular.

In 1956, gaming machines (poker machines) were introduced to the NSW Club industry. Wests Ashfield Leagues purchased a few machines and the Club, sport and community flourished. In 2002, a new Club was built to move into the new millennium and Wests Ashfield Leagues is arguably the premier licensed venue in the inner west of Sydney.

The Club offers four dining outlets including two leading restaurants, free entertainment to members and guests, a gymnasium, meeting rooms, function rooms, a merchandising shop, remedial/rehabilitation massage facilities, training facilities for the education and development of employees, free rental to charities for meetings and functions, members' travel group bus and train excursions, Keno, TAB, poker machine facilities and much more!

Over the years the Club has become an integral part of the local community, providing a safe, secure and comfortable environment for members and their guests to enjoy the many and varied facilities on offer at the Club. Wests Ashfield Leagues provides the vast majority of Community Development and Support Expenditure (CDSE) in its local government area as well as a significant amount of financial and in-kind support, far in excess of the CDSE Scheme. We have a particularly close relationship with the local schools, the Exodus Foundation, The Ella Centre and the Ashfield Municipal Council.

In 2008, Wests Ashfield Leagues provided \$1,382,736 in community support of which \$1,119,340 is directly attributed to the funding of sporting organisations. This is approximately \$950,000 over and above the commitment required by legislation, all the while meeting our commitments to our creditors.

Also in 2008, Wests Ashfield Leagues paid \$20,200,000 to its 390 suppliers, \$9,141,000 to its 170 employees, \$7,968,809 in poker machine tax and \$23,000 in income tax. This is a total of \$37,000,000 that has been injected back into the Local, State and Federal economies, this coupled with the \$1,382,736 paid in community donations stands to show that Wests Ashfield Leagues is an integral part of Local, State and Federal economies and we are only one of many clubs.

The Directors of Wests Ashfield Leagues are all active participants in the Club Directors Institute and regularly participate in corporate and business governance education as well as all mandated hospitality courses namely Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) and the Responsible Conduct of Gaming (RCG).

The management and staff undergo all facets of training from the mandatory RSA and RCG as well as personal development and educational training.

Submission:

West's Ashfield Leagues is in total agreement with the submission from Clubs Australia:

We believe a nationalised standard of measurement is required that reflects the genuine data available to measure problem gambling.

Currently, the most efficient and internationally recognised method of measurement is the Canadian Problem Gambling Index. This method is accepted worldwide. Why waste time and resources developing another that at best will only match able to mirror the Canadian model.

- Regardless of the data amassed and the percentages indicated, it is inevitable that there will be some problem gamblers in our community.
- One problem gambler is one too many and it should be addressed however there will always be alcoholics, drug addicts, kleptomaniacs, compulsive shoppers, etc.

Therefore we believe there needs to be a focus of resources on the study and treatment of compulsive behaviour, so that we can identify early warning signs and triggers, enabling family, friends, teachers, work colleagues, hospitality staff and the like to identify and intervene as early as possible.

Study and treatment should be preceded by education within the family group and schools to imbue the checks and balances required to function as a responsible member of a family and indeed the community.

Compulsive behaviour is a phenomenon that is either receiving great media coverage or is genuinely on the increase and maybe a sign of the times. Either way more research is required to bring about a methodology that will provide effective treatment.

By adopting a "Prohibitionist" slant we will achieve:

- Little in the way of effective treatment for problem gamblers.
- More problem gamblers utilising the internet where credit betting is encouraged, access to gaming by minors is relatively unrestricted and no genuine counselling services exist.
- Creation of another tier of bureaucracy that will significantly impact the economic viability of many businesses with red tape.

- The call for the Commission to support the banning or restriction/limitations on Automatic Teller Machines (ATM's) in licensed premises is a prime example of the vocal minority offering a so called solution with little or no research and/or care for the ramifications on the wider community.

Should any such legislation be introduced, the criminal element in our society will willingly step into the breach and provide funds to problem gamblers to feed their habit.

Money lending or "Loan Sharking" will provide a channel for money laundering to become established and provide huge profits for criminal organisations and individuals.

Pre-commitment cards are equally useless with little or no result, only a minor inconvenience to problem gamblers as they will devise a way around this (in record time I would imagine), while the regular hospitality patron is treated like an untrustworthy adolescent not capable of rational thought and must be guided through their leisure time by "social engineers" hell bent on controlling everyone's lives!

Introduction of Pre-commitment Cards and ATM bans are models devised and suggested by groups of like-minded individuals within our community, that gather and come up with plans with little research and forethought to the possible detrimental outcomes that lead to massive unemployment etc. I am certain they would then develop a new cause condemning the governments of the day for neglecting business.

The only true way to introduce the use of Pre-commitment cards and have them work in a true and compliant way, would be by introducing a national ID card that would be linked to these Pre-commitment cards, stopping the use of these cards by persons whom they don't belong to. Does the government want to put a National ID card back on the agenda?

Negative prohibitionist legislation only ever hurts honest people. Until a problem gambler and/or person suffering an addiction faces up to their problem, no amount of legislation will stop them going about whatever it takes to feed their habit.

We are yet to hear one positive suggestion from the leaders of this prohibitionist push, only negative and unconstructive bile. Their suggestions to-date are the equivalent to saying,"if we ban the sale of rum, there will be no more alcoholics", it is rubbish and a costly and time consuming charade.

Who will police all this? Who will pay? The hospitality industry I suspect and once again another huge impost will push one more nail into the coffin.

Harm-minimisation is on the right track, with the NSW Club industry leading the way. This template should be enhanced and introduced nationwide to bring some uniformity to the matter.

Counselling services should be maintained and a genuine appraisal of the 'cost v result' may indicate that a counselling service overseen by a federal government

vehicle may be more effective, as many of these services seem focused on revenue inwards and not results.

A peak body to deal with these matters, as indicated in the Clubs Australia submission, would be a great step in the right direction.

The Australian people, from whatever cultural background they come, are a resilient, resourceful and reliable race. We cherish our individual freedoms and our right to choose our own path and this latest push by the social engineers, the vocal minority, is another attempt to erode our freedoms and right to choose. We deserve to be treated a little bit better than untrustworthy adolescents not capable of rational thought.

The Board of Directors, Management, Staff and members of Wests Ashfield Leagues, wish you the all the very best in your deliberations and arrival at an outcome that is beneficial and sustainable long into the future.

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Peter Hardgrove
Chairman
Wests Ashfield Leagues

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Andy Timbs
CEO
Wests Ashfield Leagues