

We support the aim of the initiative announced by the Queensland government on 17th April 2008, namely to “bring together a range of measures that aim to minimise the potential harmful impacts of gambling and combat the state’s growth in gaming.”

Specifically we support:

- A state-wide cap on electronic gaming machines (EGMs) in clubs alongside a moratorium on the release of government operating authorities for hotel EGMs (until 30 April 2010).
- Mandatory training for venue employees on the Responsible Service of Gambling (RSG).
- Prohibition of machine gaming before 10am.
- Wider investigations into pre-commitment card-based gaming including a venue trial.
- Reinforcing a zero tolerance approach to venues allowing excluded persons known to the venue.
- An examination of withdrawal limits for ATMs at venues.
- A review of spin rates.

Note: All of the above are state government recommendations.

However, because of the seriousness of the issue, the harm problem gambling causes many families, we believe the initiatives mentioned above, which we support, do not go far enough. It is estimated that up to 120,000 Queenslanders are affected by problem gambling (Sunday Mail article 30/3/08).

Our research informs us that:

- The lowest 20% of earners spend 11% of their pre-tax income on gambling, whereas the top 20% spend around 1.65% of their pre-tax income on gambling (Dr Alan Moran: Research Bulletin No 5/’97 p7)
- Since national gaming taxes have surged beyond \$4B – about 12% of annual state taxes, [Herald Sun 13/3/08] we believe that governments are caught in a conflict of interest situation. Gambling taxes are substantial and replacement funds would need to be found. Thus governments may need very persuasive arguments to come down firmly on such a lucrative money spinner. It is estimated that gambling provides 1.6% of state government revenue (in Qld) but that statistic does not include donations from the industry [Sunday Mail 15-16 April]. With 48% of total gaming revenue sourced from problem gamblers [Noel Condie, Gambling Help Manager, Relationships Australia] and 14% of the population affected by the 2.1% who are problem gamblers, stronger measures are needed for the good of all.
- According to QCOSS the Gambling Community Benefit Fund for 2008/9 is \$36.7 million, 1.18% of the total amount that Queenslanders spend on gambling (\$3.12 billion from all sources). Given the massive revenues from gambling to the industry and the fact that it is damaging to some individuals and families, a 1.18% return to the community at large is hardly fair recompense especially when the revenues are not directed to those who most need assistance.
- Since accessibility is identified by the QRGAs as a big factor in problem gambling we think hours should be reduced at all gambling venues and ATMs removed. We also think that TAB facilities should be removed from hotels because of the obvious link between problem gambling and alcohol consumption.]
- Queensland has around 42,000 poker machines with Australia having - per capita – the highest number of Vegas style poker machines in the world [Noel Condie, Gambling Help Manager of Relationships Australia].
- As the economy tightened late ‘08 pokie takings reached record levels (Sun. Mail 18/21/09).

- There is a state-wide cap of 20,000 in pubs and recently (November 2008) a ‘permanent’ cap was put on the number of poker machines in clubs which can operate no more than 280 machines (which seems an inordinate number). It should be noted that Premier Bligh later qualified this published statement (Courier Mail Nov 15th 2008) about a ‘permanent cap’ by stating that a rise in population (which is inevitable) could bring about a review of this decision.
- Since it has been found that non-smoking in gambling venues has reduced the amount of gambling we believe that smoking bans should also be in place at all gambling venues. This will have the added benefit of enhancing the health of devotees.
- While gambling generally offers temptations to problem gamblers, the research indicates that 80% of those seeking assistance because of their gambling addiction are patrons of poker machines. Thus we believe poker machine should be the main focus in harm minimisation [Noel Condie, Gambling Help Manager of Relationships Australia].
- It is estimated that the average problem gambler loses about \$13,000 a year because of his/her addiction [Mark Henley, Uniting Care].

So to the government’s own list of recommendations for harm minimisation we would add:

- Reduction of drinking hours in hotels.
- Non-smoking in all gambling venues.
- A state-wide cap taking in *all types* of gambling establishments.
- Removal of crèches: The Gambling legislation amendment Bill 2007, to be enacted in 2007/8 aimed to further limit the involvement of minors in casinos. However, it seems that free child-care on site is available at many venues. We believe that casinos and other gambling venues are not suitable places for children.
- The removal of ATMs from all venues and from locations close to venues so that excessive gambling will be discouraged.
- Removal of TAB facilities from all hotels and drinking establishments.
- Slow the speed on poker machines between games.
- Training of employees of gaming venues in the identification of distressed and problem gamblers; the introduction of such people into harm minimisation programs.
- Reduction of hours regarding access to gaming machines with breaks organised during the day – in order to help break up the patterns established by problem gamblers.
- We would support pre-commitment card based gambling and any other machine control that would minimise harm to the problem gambler.
- Technological advances allowing gambling to occur outside of clubs and hotels (digital television and the internet) may require governments to take on a regulatory role with regard to these newer forms of gambling.
- In an effort to reduce the proliferation of EGMs the government should have stricter controls over licensing so that they can’t be sold or transferred.
- There should be a review of licensing arrangements for clubs, hotels and casinos to ensure that a reasonable proportion of gambling profits are returned to the community with a significant proportion of that money devoted to dealing with the issue of problem gambling. The current 1.18% return from all gambling sources is not good enough considering the damage done to the poorer communities who, sad to say, see gambling as a way out of their misery.

Yours sincerely

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