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Poker Machine Harm

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gambling Impact Society (NSW) ("GIS") is a self help organisation run on a not for profit basis by volunteers and professionals working in the field of problem gambling. GIS gives a voice to members of the community who are directly affected by problem gambling. GIS is a community consultative body which views itself as the peak body on problem gambling in New South Wales due to its membership of all problem gambling counselling services in New South Wales.

GIS has no avenue for government funding for its work because there are no state government allocated funds for prevention, early intervention community development or community education, only counselling treatment. GIS is primarily concerned with prevention rather than treatment. As such, GIS has a direct interest in The Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008. The Bills proposed tax will set up a fund where GIS could seek grants and allow us to expand our activities as the peak problem gambling organisation in New South Wales.

10 per cent of the world's poker machines are in New South Wales (7:30 report, 1999). It has been estimated that 330,000 Australians are severe or moderate problem gamblers and for about 70 per cent of problem gamblers their major activity is poker machines (7:30 report, 1999). New South Wales has the highest per capita number of poker machines in Australia – more than seven times the capita rate of the USA (Get on board the anti-gambling bus, 2008). Most significantly, poker machines contribute 42 per cent of all money lost by problem gamblers (Get on board the anti-gambling bus, 2008). It is estimated that over 160,000 people in our state have a moderate-to-high risk of being problem gamblers (Get on board the anti-gambling bus, 2008). Research shows that at least one in 20 Australians have a problem gambler in their immediate family (Get on board the anti-gambling bus, 2008).

Alarming, New South Wales has over half the nation's poker machines, a staggering 97,364 machines (Roberts 2008, citing Industry statistics, OLGR, July, 2007). 80 per cent of gamblers in problem gambling treatment are gambling on poker machines (Roberts, 2008). Over 300,000 Australians have a problem with gambling and about half live in New South Wales (Roberts 2008, citing Productivity Commission, 1999). On average a person with a gambling problem loses about \$12,000 per annum compared with other gamblers who each lose \$600 per year (Roberts, 2008). A figure which should cause grave concern for the government and the community is the Productivity Commission Inquiry's estimation that up to 400 people commit suicide each year because of the disastrous consequences of their gambling (Roberts, 2008).

The problem gambling issue in Australia will be helped significantly if the Federal Government begins to become involved as proposed by The Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008. The State Government has a clear conflict of interests in relation to gambling policy when they rely so heavily on gambling revenue.

The Gambling Impact Society (NSW) recommends that the Senate pass the Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008 to eradicate poker machines from pubs and clubs in New South Wales.

Introduction

The Gambling Impact Society (NSW) ("GIS") is a self help organisation run on a not for profit basis by volunteers and professionals working in the field of problem gambling. GIS gives a voice to members of the community who are directly affected by problem gambling. GIS is a community consultative body which views itself as the peak body on problem gambling in New South Wales due to its membership of all problem gambling counselling services in New South Wales.

GIS has no avenue for government funding for its work because there are no state government allocated funds for prevention, early intervention, community development or community education, only counselling treatment. GIS is primarily concerned with prevention rather than treatment. As such, GIS has a direct interest in The Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008. The Bills proposed tax will set up a fund where GIS could seek grants and allow us to expand our activities as the peak problem gambling organisation in New South Wales.

In addition, if the Bill was passed the proposed tax and the resulting fund would allow us to support the development of similar branches in other states and territories. The funds created by the proposed federal tax on poker machines in pubs and clubs would give the GIS the capacity to build a public health approach to problem gambling as recommended in the Productivity Commission Report (1999), recommendations which still haven't been comprehensively implemented some nine years later. It is crucial that the federal government become involved in addressing the problem gambling issue in New South Wales as proposed by The Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008.

This submission will outline the huge dependency of the New South Wales state government on gambling revenue derived from poker machines and the enormous need for federal intervention in order to develop a public health approach to the issue of problem gambling.

Reasons why the Senate should pass the Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008

Australians lose more per capita to poker machines than any other people in the western world (Insight, 2008). Australia's 200,000 poker machines deliver billions of dollars each year to clubs, pubs and state governments (Insight, 2008). More than a third of it comes from problem gamblers and those who can least afford to lose money (Insight, 2008). Each year Australians sink \$10 billion into pokies, making it a thriving industry. State governments do very nicely out of poker machines too, reaping more than \$4 billion from them in taxes (Insight, 2008). But windfalls are few and far between for the actual poker machine player (Insight, 2008).

Each year some \$5 billion is poured into New South Wales machines with \$1 billion of that going straight to the state government (Insight, 2008). At big clubs like the Mount Pritchard Mounties in South – Western

Sydney, the pokies last year delivered a \$9 million profit (Insight, 2008). It has been established that 40 per cent of Australians are regular gamblers, 82 per cent play sometime during the year and of that about 15 per cent of regular gamblers can be classified as problem gamblers (7:30 report, 1999).

10 per cent of the world's poker machines are in New South Wales (7:30 report, 1999). It has been estimated that 330,000 Australians are severe or moderate problem gamblers and for about 70 per cent of problem gamblers their major activity is poker machines (7:30 report, 1999). That's not to say that problem gambling doesn't exist with wagering or TAB betting or even to a very small extent, in lotteries, but the real issue here is poker machines (7:30 report, 1999). For every one problem gambler, there are at least five and up to 10 people that are affected (7:30 report, 1999). In other words if there's 330,000 problem gamblers, there's at least another \$1.5 million people (7:30 report, 1999). These are staggering figures (7:30 report, 1999).

For one in four problem gamblers their marriage ends or their relationship ends because of gambling (7:30 report, 1999). Many others have very depressive personalities by the time the gambling has taken hold (7:30 report, 1999). People attempt suicide and so on, so the social costs are very high (7:30 report, 1999). The numbers of those that are affected, close family members, employers through lost productivity, are very substantial (7:30 report, 1999).

The rivers of gold that flow from poker machine to pubs, clubs and state governments are colossal (Canberra Times, 2008). As is the power of those vested interests in ensuring nothing interrupts the flow of money from gambler's pockets, irrespective of whether some gamblers might be gambling beyond their means and possibly harming their families (Canberra Times, 2008).

Kevin Rudd has identified that the main barrier to protecting problem gamblers is the dependence of state and territory governments on gaming machine taxes (Canberra Times, 2008). A 1999 report estimated that 2 per cent of adult Australians had a moderate to severe gambling problems. The sheer numbers and ease of use and accessibility of poker machines suggest they are the principal cause of gambling problems (Canberra Times, 2008). The state government's addiction to gambling revenues and the connection between political parties and the Hospitality and Gaming Industry suggests there is little incentive or imperative for cuts in overall poker machine numbers (Canberra Times, 2008).

A review was conducted last year of the New South Wales Gaming Machines Act which recommended new controls on pubs and clubs in the areas where there is a high number of poker machines. The review recommended maintaining the existing caps on machines for hotels and clubs, while reducing the overall numbers of poker machines across New South Wales (ABC news, 2008). New South Wales has a phenomenal 51.7 per cent of Australia's poker machines (IPAA National Conference, 2005). The next closest state is Queensland with 20 percent (IPAA National Conference, 2005).

New South Wales has the highest per capita number of poker machines in Australia – more than seven times the capita rate of the USA (Get on board the anti-gambling bus, 2008). Most significantly, poker machines contribute 42 per cent of all money lost by problem gamblers (Get on board the anti-gambling bus, 2008). It is estimated that over 160,000 people in our state have a moderate-to-high risk of being problem gamblers (Get on board the anti-gambling bus, 2008). Research shows that at least one in 20 Australians have a problem gambler in their immediate family (Get on board the anti-gambling bus, 2008).

The chairwoman of the governments gambling research panel, Professor Linda Hancock said Australia had an estimated 1 in 5 of the worlds gaming machines and 300,000 Australians had gambling problems (The

Age, 2004). Independent research has also indicated that problem gamblers provided 42 per cent of all gambling revenue (The Age, 2004). A recent study on gambling addiction and poker machines in particular, found that Australians are spending about \$10 billion a year, \$500 for every man, woman and child on poker machines (Liberal party of Australia, 2008). Much of the money that is going through poker machines comes out of pension cheques and the pay packets of hard working battlers (Liberal party of Australia, 2008). Poker machines are destroying families and the lives of far too many Australians (Liberal party of Australia, 2008).

Table

Distribution of gaming machines by state and territory venue type

Venue	VIC	NSW	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
clubs	13 691	72 429	17 544	1 446	Na	221	4 865	456	110 652
Hotels	13 613	23 961	9 783	10 386	Na	1 095	60	132	59 030
Casinos	2 500	1 500	3 121	716	1 125	1 041	Na	607	10 610
Total	29 804	97 890	30 448	12 548	1 125	2 399	4 925	1 195	180 334

Source: Australian Institute for Gambling Research, *Australian Gambling: Comparative History and Analysis*. Project Report, Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority, Melbourne, 1999, p 190.

Gaming Machine Expenditure in 2001-02

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	ACT	NT
Total (\$Million)	4,306.997	2,562.876	1,129.402	606.814	-	98.821	174.402	36.870
Per Capita (\$)	863.04	692.64	412.21	522.98	-	279.94	728.11	268.01

Source: Tasmanian Gambling Commission, Australian Gambling Statistics 1976-77 to 2001-02, 2003.

New South Wales has the greater number of gaming machines, over 3 times the number for the second largest jurisdiction, Queensland (gambling policy and regulation, 2001). 20 per cent of comparable machines in the world, and half of Australian machines, are found in New South Wales (gambling policy and regulation, 2001). Adults in New South Wales spend more on poker machines each year than adults in any other Australian jurisdiction providing more than \$725 million in revenue for the New South Wales government in 2001 – 02 (gambling policy and regulation, 2001).

Almost half the \$10 billion lost on poker machines nationally is spent by New South Wales gamblers (Sydney Morning Herald, 2008). A study has found that some states take about half their total gambling revenue from people with an addiction, or risk of one (Sydney Morning Herald, 2008). South Australian senator Nick Xenophon has stated that governments have become hopelessly compromised because of

their collective reliance on about \$4 billion in poker machine revenue. "We desperately need regulation at a national level, where the commonwealth is at arms length from the gambling industry," Xenophon said. (Sydney Morning Herald, 2008).

The board of inquiry into poker machines found that there is a significant criminal activity associated with poker machines (Gambling in Australia, 1990). The inquiry heard evidence which revealed the existence of loan organisations in Sydney which customarily made loans to gamblers at rates of interest well above 100 per cent (Gambling in Australia, 1990). It also revealed that serious problems existed among some clubs with respect to tax invasion, player cheating, theft by management or staff and possible kick backs or illegal commissions paid by poker machine manufacturers for placement of their machines (Gambling in Australia, 1990).

According to the official data compiled by the Tasmanian Gaming Commission, in 1998 – 1999 people playing the 94280 machines in New South Wales lost about \$3.5 billion (Livingstone, 2001). In Victoria with 27, 560 pokies, losses were just under \$ 2 billion (Livingstone, 2001). Nationally loses on the pokies represented more than 55 per cent of all gambling loses in Australia in 1998-99 (Livingstone, 2001). Compare this to casinos where a comparatively paltry \$2.2 billion was lost nationally, 17.7 per cent of nationally gambling expenditure (Livingstone, 2001). Clearly, the rivers of gold that flow into state treasuries are from the punters playing the pokies at the local club or pub (Livingstone, 2001).

Table Gambler Losses 1998/99 (Livingstone, 2001).

POKIES	POKIES	CASINOS
\$3.5 billion NSW	\$2 billion Victoria	\$2.2 billion National

Problem gamblers are estimated to contribute about 42 per cent of the losses on poker machines (Livingstone, 2001). In 2005 Australia had 185,000 poker machines which on a per capita basis, was five times more than the USA (Bostock, 2005). In Australia an estimated 1 per cent of the adult population (130,000 people) are believed to have severe gambling problems, with another 1.1 per cent (163,000 people) experiencing moderate problems (Bostock, 2005). The problem gamblers contributed an estimated one third of total gambling expenditure that is about \$3.6 billion annually, an average of 12,200 per gambler, causing harm to an estimated 250,000 adults (Bostock, 2005).

The estimated annual cost to Australia of gambling related depression and suicide is estimated to be between \$502 million and \$1, 230 million with a total adverse impact (including bankruptcy, loss of productivity, separation and divorce, policing and justice) of between \$1.2 billion and \$4.3 billion (Bostock, 2005). In Australia, states and territories raised 12 per cent of all revenues from gambling (Bostock, 2005). The total figure of \$3.5 billion is made up of \$1.7 billion derived from poker machines (Bostock,2005).

10-14 per cent of regular poker machine players have problems (Australian institute for gambling research). 2.1 percent of gamblers generate 33 per cent of total gambling revenue (Australian institute for gambling research). In New South Wales there are 104,000 poker machines in clubs and hotels and there is a 2.55 per cent rate of problem gambling which is the highest national prevalence of problem gambling (

Australian institute for gambling research). In Western Australia there are no poker machines outside Perth casino and there is a 0.70 per cent rate of problem gambling, which is the lowest national prevalence of problem gambling (Australian institute for gambling research). It has been found that every week in Victoria people using poker machines lose about \$50 million (Livingstone, 2008). Only 5.7 per cent of poker machines are located in casinos, in contrast with 58.9 per cent in clubs and 35.4 per cent in hotels (Livingstone & Woolley, 2007). Accessibility to poker machines is directly related to rates of poker machine participation, expenditure and to rates of problem gambling (Livingstone & Woolley, 2007).

Poker machine gambling is favoured by around 85 per cent of problem gamblers (Livingstone & Woolley, 2007). Gamblers using Australia's 188,000 poker machines in hotels and clubs spent \$9.55 billion in 2003-04, 59 per cent of net gambling expenditure (Livingstone & Woolley, 2007).

Bostock (2005) cited the 1999 Australian Productivity Commission as evidence that the states and territories raise 12 per cent of all revenues from gambling. The 1999 Productivity Commission Report recommended that policy approaches for the gambling industries needed to be "directed at reducing the cost of problem gambling through harm minimisation and prevention measures while retaining the benefits to recreational gamblers as possible" (Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, 1999). Some nine years later after the Productivity Commission Report we are still awaiting comprehensive implementation of its recommendations.

Roberts (2008) cites the Tasmanian Gaming Commission 2001 as evidence that 57 per cent of the expenditure on gambling activity over the 1999-2000 financial year can be attributed to poker machines outside casinos. The next highest figure was 18 per cent in casinos followed by racing at 13 per cent (Roberts, 2008). Roberts (2008) cites the Productivity Commission of 1999 as stating that there are approximately 180,000 poker machines in Australia.

Alarmingly, New South Wales has over half the nation's poker machines, a staggering 97,364 machines (Roberts 2008, citing Industry statistics, OLGR, July, 2007). 80 per cent of gamblers in problem gambling treatment are gambling on poker machines (Roberts, 2008). Over 300,000 Australians have a problem with gambling and about half live in New South Wales (Roberts 2008, citing Productivity Commission, 1999). On average a person with a gambling problem loses about \$12,000 per annum compared with other gamblers who each lose \$600 per year (Roberts, 2008). A figure which should cause grave concern for the government and the community is the Productivity Commission Inquiry's estimation that up to 400 people commit suicide each year because of the disastrous consequences of their gambling (Roberts, 2008). Furthermore, the Productivity Commission Inquiry found that over 33 per cent of gambling industry profits are generated from those who gamble problematically (Roberts, 2008).

Roberts (2008) suggests an epidemiological framework for problem gambling which requires a change in approach from an individual treatment/ behavioural focus to a more inter-sectoral community response to problem gambling at an individual, social, political, environmental and cultural level.

Problem gambling has an extremely detrimental impact on Australian families. Every problem gambler affects between 10 – 17 individuals including family members and co-workers (Roberts 2008 citing Lesieur, 1984, Australian Productivity Commission, 1999).

Roberts (2008) contends that there are numerous problems caused by problem gambling suffered by Australian families including "loss of household and personal money, arguments, anger and violence, lies and deception, neglect of family, negatively affected relationships, poor communications, confusion in

relation to family roles and responsibilities and development of problem gambling or other addictions within the family”.

Roberts (2008, citing Lorenz and Yaffee, 1998 and Lorenz and Shuttleworth, 1983) contends that there are some extremely worrying statistics in relation to the health of spouses of problem gamblers including “ 84 per cent of spouses of problem gamblers consider themselves emotionally ill, 47 per cent had depression, 14 per cent had suicidal thoughts, 27 per cent experience confusion, 44 per cent were subjected to isolation and loneliness, 30 per cent suffered guilt, 74 per cent had feelings of anger and resentment, 5 per cent felt helplessness and hopelessness and 13 per cent displayed ineffective parenting”.

Equally distressing is the devastating impacts upon the children of problem gamblers. Roberts (2008, citing Lorenz & Yaffee, 1998) asserts that many children of problem gamblers suffer stress related conditions such as asthma, allergies, headaches, insomnia and stomach problems. Furthermore, Kalischuk (2006 cited in Roberts, 2008) states that many children of problem gamblers suffer negative feelings such as abandonment, rejection, neglect, emotional deprivation, anger, hurt, sadness, confusion, isolation, loneliness, guilt, helplessness, anxiousness and depressive feelings. Alarming, 25 per cent of children in a study conducted by Lorenz and Shuttleworth (cited in Roberts, 2008) had significant behavioural or adjustment problems such as running away from home, committing a crime and engaging in drugs or alcohol or gambling related activities.

The problem gambling issue in Australia will be helped significantly if the Federal Government begins to become involved as proposed by The Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008. The State Government has a clear conflict of interests in relation to gambling policy when they rely so heavily on gambling revenue. Marshall (2004) states that, “The Federal Government is clearly in the best position to act as a co-ordinator for such a strategy. It alone is in a position to put in place a framework that incorporates public health ideals, consumer protection and social and corporate responsibility from which a strategic national approach can be developed.”

Marshall (2004) also contends that the Commonwealth government should tackle the problem gambling issue as the state governments have an obvious conflict of interest as they have a clear financial incentive to maintain or grow current levels of gambling revenue. Marshall (2004) states that although the federal government does have financial interests in gambling revenues, it is less dependent on such income and the relationship is an indirect one. As such the federal government is in a better position to address the public health costs of gambling more objectively and to introduce measures to tackle them (Marshall, 2004).

Marshall (2004) warns that state government dependency on gambling tax revenues must be addressed if public health objectives are to be achieved. The Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008 will effectively withdraw the state government’s reliance on gambling and allow the federal government to approach problem gambling from a public health perspective.

The Gambling Impact Society (NSW) believe that there should be a levy on all forms of gambling, as in New Zealand where a levy formula is worked out based on the levels of harm each form of gambling contributes to the community. For example, under this proposal all forms of gambling would have a levy placed on them based on their harm to the community. For instance, lotteries, racing and keno would all have levy’s placed on them based on their level of harm to the community.

Conclusion

This submission illustrates the potential harm of poker machines and the damage they inflict on Australians. It is essential that poker machines be eradicated from pubs and clubs across New South Wales and placed in venues such as casinos and race courses that predominantly have a gambling atmosphere and focus. Banning poker machines in pubs and clubs across New South Wales will provide a barrier to prevent and help problem gamblers. Poker machines destroy families and the lives of far too many Australians.

The success of this bill will reduce criminal activity, relationship problems, suicide and family crisis. The bill will have a tremendous effect on those punters who play regularly at their local pubs and clubs and be beneficial in assisting them in beating their gambling problem. We must look at this proposed bill as a move in the right direction to securing a better future for New South Wales. The elimination of accessibility to poker machines will eventually be extremely beneficial.

It is clearly evident from the statistics and data displayed in this submission that poker machines have a heavy toll on Australians particularly those in New South Wales and that we should do everything in our power to eliminate any dangers and concerns associated with poker machines. The statistics and data proved to be alarming. The introduction of the bill is a significant measure that must be taken to improve our society and beat this epidemic. Many Australians have a problem with gambling or are at risk of becoming a problem gambler. The removal of poker machines from all pubs and clubs across New South Wales will rapidly decrease the horrific statistics concerning poker machines and problem gambling.

State governments are addicted to poker machine revenue, however Australians are blowing their pay cheques on poker machines and the money comes from the pockets of hard working battlers that can ill afford their losses. The Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008 is a very effective form of reducing gambling harm in New South Wales. I applaud this proposal and recommend the senate pass the bill as this is a highly significant issue for all Australians.

Recommendation

- That the Senate pass the Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008 to eradicate poker machines from pubs and clubs in New South Wales.

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