

**Gambling Impact Society (NSW) Inc.**  
**Opening Address to the Senate Inquiry Committee**

*On 12<sup>th</sup> September, Kate Roberts and Dorothy Webb represented the GIs at the Senate Inquiry into three harm reduction Bills proposed by Nick Xenophon and Steve Fielding, senate committee is due to report its findings on November 10th.*

The following is a copy of Kate's opening address to the committee:  
This is Kate's opening address to the committee: Thank you for inviting myself and Dorothy here today. We feel privileged to be consulted on this important public health issue and are conscious of trying to raise a voice for the many hidden and silent families negatively affected by electronic gaming machines in our State and Country. We are aware that because of stigma and shame many people who are suffering do not come forward to these sorts of public inquiries nor do they feel empowered to contribute written submissions. The Gambling Impact Society has tried over several years to provide a community voice for those who are the biggest contributors of tax revenue and profits from gambling yet the least considered group when it comes to policy and legislative reform. We have great hope that this is about to change.

As you have seen from our submissions with regards these three proposed Bills we support the majority of the key recommendations within the Bills and are happy to discuss the details in question time. However we wish to also make it abundantly clear that we believe that this needs to be considered as a starting point for the development of a new National Framework on Gambling. A framework which goes beyond its current research and educational focus and is committed to a Population Health Approach to the issue of gambling harm similar to that we already have for Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco.

In summary we consider Electronic Gaming Machines sophisticated gambling products provided en masse to the community whose operational risks are well beyond the ability of the average human being to fully comprehend whilst actually operating the device. It is a product which is clearly wreaking community harm not only upon those who develop an addictive behaviour and the 5-10 others they each impact, but also the impoverished communities who have become major contributors to their own social/community services through this regressive form of taxation. Whilst we continue to focus our policies on pathologizing the problem and trying to change the individual gambler through responsible gambling education, there have been minimal attempts to make the product safer. In the words of Livingstone and Woolley (2007) it's "business as usual" for industry and governments (the major financial beneficiaries) whilst maintaining an ethical blindness as they strive to develop more sophisticated "gaming products" to fill their coffers.

This is unknown in any other area of product development and indeed warrants major consideration of our notion of Fair Trade. To use a Kiwi analogy "If you had a machine in a factory cutting off people's arms you wouldn't be standing around asking them why they put their arm in the machine, examining their family of origin or mental health issues. You'd be looking at safeguards, technical changes, and safe practices along with numerous risk assessments and OH&S training".

The gambling industry and Electronic Gaming Machine manufacturers provide a legal product within existing technological parameters. They operate a legal business

supported by often more favourable government conditions than many other industries. State governments obtain 12% of their Tax revenue from gambling products. There is little incentive for either State governments or the industry itself to bring about the kinds of change to truly address consumer protection and gambling harm. We welcome Federal legislative intervention in this important area of public health and social justice.

Kate Roberts  
Chairperson