



Wattle Range
COUNCIL

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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Your Reference
Date 31st March 2009
Contact Officer Karen Lock

Gambling Inquiry
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Productivity Commission Inquiry into Gambling

Wattle Range Council is mindful that the gaming industry brings benefits to our communities in employment, major events, entertainment and increased productivity however the industry also has significant adverse impacts on communities and individuals devastated by problem gambling. With the announcement of the Commission's inquiry Council wrote to stakeholders, local charities, health professionals, hotel proprietors and business community leaders within our communities to make comment on the gaming industry and its effect on our community.

Feedback obtained from this process was encouraging that some of the harm minimisation strategies put in place might be working. St Vincent de Paul noted that request for support from people who may have a gambling problem had lessened in recent times. With the introduction of gaming machines there had been huge issues with many unpaid accounts, some homes lost, failed relationships etc but that St Vincent de Paul were now noticing that people playing the poker machines seemed much more likely to be planning the amount of money they had available to lose. This observation corresponds to official gaming statistics showing that losses here in the Wattle Range Council area had reduced and were somewhat lower than for other similar communities by population size, rural location and number of venues.

While this report is encouraging, however the devastation brought about by problem gambling is too great to become complacent. Harm minimisation strategies must continue to be put in place and the gaming industry monitored and strongly regulated. In speaking to local gambling counsellors they have seen little change in the number of problem gamblers being identified. They did report that the field worker for the Limestone Coast, employed by the Hotels Association, has been proactive at visiting all the venues and providing them with training and resources and provides a good link between the counsellors and venue staff.

Previously Council has made submission on the gaming industry to the Independent Gambling Authority for their Review 2006 Regulatory Functions and their review of gaming machine numbers in 2003. The Wattle Range Council remain of the view that

1. The density of Electronic Gaming Machines (EGM's) installed would be the most effective and appropriate measure for managing the number of Gaming Machines. Council believes that 10 EGM's per 1000 head of Adult population should be the maximum allowable density, based on data provided in the Independent Gambling Authority's 2003 discussion paper.
2. Gaming Machine licences should be issued on an Annual basis, with renewal contingent on demonstrated ongoing implementation and improvement of harm minimisation measures by individual licence holders. (Refer 5.1.4 of the Independent Gambling Authority's 2003 discussion paper).
3. Consideration should be given to the provision of "Seasonal Licences" to provide for a larger density of EGM's during the more economically active tourist season, whilst reducing the density of EGM's during the non-tourist season.
4. Automated coin dispensing and automatic teller machines could encourage and facilitate problem gambling. Council's view is that coin dispensing machines should not be used. If they are to be used, they should only be in an area clearly visible to gaming staff. Of even more concern is the location of ATM machines in licensed premises that host gaming venues. In almost all local venues, ATM machines whilst placed outside the gaming room are often only feet from the electronic gaming machines. There is no screening from sight and sounds of the gaming machines while the gambler withdraws money from their account. This can undermine people who intend only to spend a set amount on gambling to compound their losses. Of the small survey undertaken (4 venues) none of the venues with ATM machines, were more than 100 metres from a bank equipped with an ATM. Patrons who are forced to leave the premises to access more money would have a greater opportunity to review whether they wished to continue gambling or not.

Wattle Range Council acknowledges and appreciates the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

If you wish to discuss this matter further please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Yours sincerely

Mark Braes

Mayor