

The Boat Club

16 November 2009

Gambling Inquiry – Draft report
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2 Collins Street
East Melbourne VIC 8003

Dear Sir,

Re: Club Response to the Draft Report on Gambling

I have been asked by the Management Committee of my Community Club to convey the serious concerns of our Club and its Members on your Draft Report on Gambling.

Our 2 community owned Clubs are situated in Hervey Bay. The principal purpose of our existence, as stated in our Constitution, is the provision of sporting and boating facilities. We currently own marina and our 2 licensed clubs the largest is situated next to the marina.

Across our members facilities we currently employ 126 casual, 15 part time and 55 full time employees. We also use the services of at least 6 volunteers any given day.

We have a total of 21,600 members; 226 junior members. Our club has fostered many national champions in the sports of Outrigging, Sailing/Yachting and Canoeing. Our members visit the club for a range of services and facilities. Apart from gaming, these mainly include socialisation, dining and entertainment. Our gaming facilities include 246 poker machines and Keno & TAB outlets.

It is in our absolute interest to ensure that our gaming services are conducted in a responsible manner. We subscribe to the Queensland Responsible Gambling Code of Practice and are very much aware of our obligations and responsibilities to people who may have a gambling problem.

While we welcome the gambling inquiry, as it was long overdue, we are very concerned about the negative impact the draft findings and recommendations would have on the financial viability of our club. This would most likely include loss of jobs, curtailment of services we currently provide to our members and, most importantly, a reduction in our community contributions.

In the last financial year, we returned a total of \$315,000 in cash and in-kind support. This went towards a rang of projects and countless hours of volunteer services for junior sports coaching. These and other projects were all largely funding through community gaming in our club.

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There is no way we can sustain this level of community support if adverse measures such as those contained in the Draft Report are placed on community gaming. The harsh reality for our club would be to simply cease to provide the aforementioned leaving our members and the local community without the much need services and facilities that is made possible through community gaming.

We urge the Productivity Commission to seriously consider the practical reality of their recommendations. In particular, we urge the Productivity Commission to consider the following when finalising its Final Report:

- The rate of problem gambling has declined across Australia because of the extensive measures that have been implemented since 1999. In Queensland, this now stands at 0.47% of the adult population – measured through one of the largest surveys of its kind in the world.
- We need firm data, not estimates, to build effective policy. Therefore, nationally consistent research is needed if there can be a ‘true’ understanding of the gambling sector. A ‘one size fits all’ approach is not possible because each State is different, with different regulations, tax rates, maturity of market, ownership model & splits between private and community ownership of gaming.
- Gaming serves different purposes in different venues. For Clubs which are no-for-profit entities, gaming is a community initiative, which supports a range of community services and facilities. It is critical that there is a strong demarcation between community gaming and non-for-profit or entrepreneurial gaming.
- While technological innovations open many possibilities for harm minimization, it is critical that any technology is evaluated first and then, based on solid evidence, accepted or rejected. Queensland in this regard is far ahead with its card-based gaming trials. The same also applies to any policy change (i.e. modeling to determine impact and effectiveness of the policy change before accepting or rejecting the policy platform).

Finally, our view is that the Productivity Commission should strive to achieve a balance in the Final Report between the needs of gaming venues and their patrons (of whom only a very small number have a gambling problem). There should also be an acknowledgment of the extensive responsible gambling measures that are already in place (many of which have produced spectacular positive outcomes). Some attention should be given to the concept of personal responsibility as there is a limit to which controls can be placed on gambling venues.

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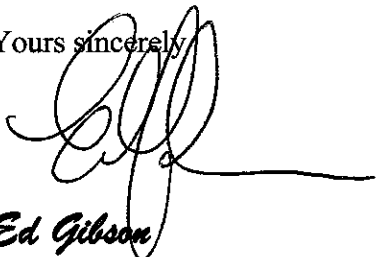
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Should the draft recommendations remain unchanged, the Productivity Commission may like to consider how sport and the considerable support for welfare, charities and the like will be funded, as it is highly likely that community clubs will not be in a position to provide their current level of support. In fact, we would expect the demise of a significant number of community clubs should all the recommendations be taken up by respective Governments throughout Australia.

I hope the above is of some assistance to you in understanding the nature and importance gaming in community clubs and the impact the draft recommendations may have on community gaming.

Yours sincerely



Ed Gibson

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