

To whom it may concern,

I read with dismay the Courier Mail report yesterday (December 15) on the submission by Clubs Queensland chief executive, Doug Flockhart. I have a son who has a problem with gambling (e.g. spending money he can't afford on gambling, including money that does not belong to him).

I would like to raise the following issues:

- 1) poker machines are sophisticated machines, incorporating psychological principles to maximise the likelihood that a person will keep playing. By psychological principles, I refer to flashing lights and other features to increase the "excitement" of playing the machine, while small, irregular payments are consistent with principles of behaviour modification and conditioning (e.g. the experiments of Pavlov found that when being given food became associated with a bell ringing, dogs would salivate when the bell was rung in the absence of food).
- 2) Who are the "recreational pokie players" – what distinguishes a recreational from a problem pokie player? Guidelines have been established for problem drinking. Data on what is considered normative or non-problem gambling, would help delineate this issue. I suspect the gambling industry requires problem gamblers to prosper.
- 3) One night in the early hours of the morning I extracted my son from a gaming venue. I did not see happy recreational gamblers – desperate, lonely people was the norm. A conversation I overheard went like this:
"Do you have a girlfriend?"
"No, do you think I would be here if I did".
- 4) The loss of funds described by Clubs suggests that massive profits are being made. The question has to be asked, at whose expense?
- 5) Similar to the losses associated with economic crises, the estimated losses suggest a sector that has over-expanded with excess. The large sums paid to footballers are hardly commensurate with skill or contribution to society. Can massive profits be expected forever?
- 6) In a time when the harms associated with alcohol, are being given more prominence, especially alcohol related violence, the question has to be asked, whether clubs that combine alcohol and gaming, produce greater costs (direct and indirect) than what is provided to community groups.
- 7) Laws and rules to protect the profits of venues appear to be acceptable, but laws to protect vulnerable people (all gamblers are in effect vulnerable because the odds are not in their favour) have been caricatured as evidence of a "nanny-state". Such attitudes would appear to reflect a willingness to profit at the expense of others, without concern for the welfare of those playing the machines. The value of a "recreational" activity that espoused such a philosophy is questionable.

I would submit, that if gambling is simply an innocent, recreational activity, then bets should be smaller, cash withdrawal machines not be located proximate to gambling venues, opening hours restricted to reflect a "recreational activity" and like parking meters, a machine can only be paid for a specified time. Alcohol (a disinhibiting substance which impairs judgment) should not be able to be consumed in a gaming venue.