

18/12/09

Dear Commissioners,

I have read the preliminary report on problem gaming and wish to comment. I am potentially in a unique position as I have been affected by problem gaming by my friend and former flatmate. I have been witness to what this addiction can do to good people. My flatmate went deep into debt, lied, had our phone and electricity turned off and tried to get into his trust for more money to feed his addiction. I also saw first hand the swings in his emotions over wins and losses. I believe my position is unique because he introduced me to the gaming business and for the last 16 years I have worked in the gaming industry in the United States, United Kingdom and now in Australia. Additionally, I have worked in several jurisdictions throughout the United States including Las Vegas. Consequently, I believe I have a very balanced position and deep understanding of both sides of the issue.

As stated in your report I believe problem gaming affects the minority of the adult population. Similar studies in the US (1999) and UK (2005) found the incidence of problem gaming to be around 2%, higher than the less than 1% in your report. However, for this percentage of the population it is devastating. Recent studies have shown that the problem gamer's brain acts very much like an alcoholic's or a drug addict's. I believe that the best way to assist these people is to get them help. I believe we do not do enough to let them know that they are not alone and it is not shameful to ask for help. In Brisbane the advertising for problem gaming is, in my opinion awful. There was only small text on the billboard using the get help tagline. They should be as bold as the advertisements for erectile dysfunction. "Gambling Problem. You are not alone. Call xxxx-xxxx for help". Once a problem gamer has raised their hand the industry must help by not allowing them back into gaming venues regardless of them being a pub, club, hotel or casino. The best way to help is to not allow them access to the addictive product. The government can assist by having a national registry that each venue could link to with a picture to assist the surveillance teams. Additionally, as technology continues to improve this could include facial recognition and other profiling systems, but at a minimum the venues should scrub their databases against this list to ensure no marketing materials are sent to these people. Finally, training of the staff on reading the cues and signs of problem gamers is also a key in intervention and prevention. The person who spends \$100 could be a problem gamer as much as the one who spends thousands.

Pre-commitment is a great idea however I do not believe it will work for the problem gamer, but it will work for those at short term risk. Meaning, people who temporarily overspend on gaming to a degree that it causes them to, for a short period of time, need to cut back somewhere else, make a late bill payment, or go into debt. However to do this effectively a person would have to not be able to play a machine unless a card registered to them was in. Otherwise, they would easily be able to just remove their card and continue to play. For the problem gamer even if this was done, they would find other cards to use, get friends to sign up for cards, or just not set a limit or raise their limit based on the proposal. (Real examples) Additionally, loss limits have been set in other countries and their problem gaming rates are similar. For instance Missouri, in the United States has a \$500 loss limit. In January, 2009 it was

reported by the Kansas City Star that 43.9% of the adult population had gambled and the problem gaming rate was 0.76 percent. I do hope that pre-commitment is used by the operators as again I believe it to be a useful tool for those who could be at short term risk. It is however not going to deter the problem gamer.

The \$1 limit is a concern as in your report you have stated that 85 – 90% of poker machine users use them responsibly as a form of entertainment. There are many that bet well over this amount who can afford to. When legislation is passed that begins to effect how 85 – 90% of the population uses something responsibly that is when illegal gaming could increase, particularly in some communities. Additionally, to me this is like telling an alcoholic that you can have one drink every 20 minutes. They will still get drunk as an addicted doesn't care about time.

Finally, I have read recent reports on the Australia Clubs comments about how they should not be lumped in with all other forms of gaming. This is laughable. They offer the same types of machines as everyone else and that is the issue, the potential addictive nature of the product for a minority of the population. In terms of their donations they must have forgotten the larger donations by the public companies to the bushfire victims alone, not to mention so much else that they do within the community that is not highly publicized. They also neglected to mention that they hold more than the casinos so the return to player is less. This is about the product and assisting the people who are at risk of or are addicted and assisting them with their addiction.

Again, this addiction is horrible for those who have it, but this is the minority of the population. Unfortunately, those addicted make for great news stories as when they are at their lowest points it is not like an alcoholic or a drug user who wastes away out of public eye, they blow up in epic ways of theft, embezzlement, and debt. To me it is about a strong campaign to let them know there is help out there, that they are not alone and training for the staff of the operators. Then once they have raised their hand it is about not allowing them back in. We would not tell an alcoholic it is OK to have one drink as we know where that leads.

Thank you for reading and considering my input. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.