

Alligator Creek Bowls & Recreation Club Inc

10 Parkland Road, Alligator Creek, Via Townsville 4816

14th December 2009

Gambling Inquiry – Draft Report

Productivity Commission

Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East, Melbourne VIC 8003

Re: Industry Response to the Productivity Commission's Draft Report on Gambling

Dear Sir,

I've 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 club is a small Community Club situated in a rural area 30kms south of Townsville N.Q. The bar supports our normal day-to-day running costs, and we have 10 gaming machines which pay for larger expenses, repairs and maintenance, donations, and capital expenditure if there's any money left after the bills are paid. The insurance alone, which includes public liability, is \$14,000. Current membership is 425, many of whom are members so they can buy take-away alcohol if they need to. The number of regular weekly attending members would be closer to 150, other regulars attend less regularly.

Having had suicides and attempted suicides in our area, we are poignantly aware of the effects of isolation and the lack of public transport in rural areas. So, as well as promoting sporting activities, we also provide the infrastructure to assist other groups that provide socialization and lift community spirits. We now have many varied interests in our area, and actively promote lawn bowls, polocrosse, dressage, pony club, trail riding, the local newspaper, art groups, craft clubs, yoga, neighbourhood watch, mah-jong, the fishing club, and for many years, playgroup, although it is now temporarily closed. Over the years there have been many other groups, such as progress association, fruit and vege growers, mahogany growers, tennis club, youth group, twai-kon-do, aussie rules and assorted politically motivated groups. We liaise with Townsville City Council, State and Federal Members, and assist them to work on behalf of our community. We also fulfil other necessary roles such as the emergency evacuation centre.

We don't financially support all of these groups, but we do provide practical help and infrastructure so they can keep going - the building, chairs, tables, storage space, lighting (including floodlights), electricity, help with filling out official forms, membership drives and fund raising if they require it. And, we do pay the Bowls & Rec Club staff to keep the club open (often when we have no customers) so they can have meetings, organize activities and do what they do.

Over the years, we've made substantial donations for their various projects, and when they've needed help to keep going. The Pony Club, which is primarily for children in the area, is thriving and now has its own small clubhouse and grounds. Their committee meetings are still held on our premises, mostly because of the facilities we provide. As the big brother, the umbrella club, we like to help these smaller groups, as we consider they are an asset to our community. We also consider we are an asset to our community.

Sometimes we're called about snakes or accidents, or to hold the fort until emergency vehicles turn up. Sometimes we act as an unofficial version of meals on wheels if people are sick and in need of a meal or visitors. When we know of families in dire straights (such as when one of our rural fire fighters with four kids was seriously injured fighting fires and off work for many months) we work with our community to do what we can to provide practical and financial aid. His is not the only family we've helped. As well as helping our own community, we actively raise funds for others outside our community – Camp Quality, Legacy, children's ward

at Townsville General Hospital, Clubs Queensland's Smile for a Child, Angel Flight, PCYC, and Shave for a Cure to name just a few. Like all small *Community Clubs*, we are not in it for the money. And, like other small clubs, we're not just a club – we're a community who care about each other – something money can't buy!

No one pays us for these services, and we don't want to be paid. We do it because we care – about our community and the people in our community. We have been a *Community Club* since our inception, way before the term was used as a Liquor Licensing classification. Little clubs like us are the hands-on hub of little communities. We're true community clubs, run by volunteers, and employing a few staff as we can afford to. We don't have the huge turnovers of larger organizations, we don't have money to waste - so must be very frugal in all of our operations. Since all the 'upgrades' (and this term is very questionable) that Industrial Relations, Liquor Licensing and Gaming Regulations have undertaken over the last few years, the state government has placed huge burdens on the great many small clubs like ours. Because of these onerous burdens, many other clubs like us have had to close their doors. They are a loss to their communities – a loss which cannot be fully appreciated by those who do not live in the community.

You may wish to debate this point, but prior to these many so called accountability 'upgrades', clubs like ours could employ a Secretary Manager to act as the committee's day-to-day person to take care of administration and ensure our compliance responsibilities were met. We'd fulfil our obligations, pass our inspections, and the Secretary Manager would still have approximately 15 - 20 hours left to work behind the bar! Since the upgrades, that situation has changed. Now, not only are the 20 hours fully occupied keeping up with administration (primarily attempting to keep up with the demands and extra work already generated from 'upgrades'), additional office staff have had to be hired as well.

And, on top of all this, the state government finds other ways to charge extra fees. As if the fee for having a radio on during the day, and a TV in the evening if not many people are around wasn't enough - now we must also pay an annual fee for our Liquor License. This is just the tip of the iceberg. As you'd already be aware, we have a much higher buying price than larger clubs and organizations with volume sales discounts, but the market won't allow for much difference in retail price - so, we have less mark-up percentage & less volume to work with. We simply cannot afford to continue having to wear the ever increasing, ongoing onerous burdens placed on us! I can only speak for small clubs, not larger clubs, as I don't know much about their operations.

Small clubs who don't have gaming machines just can't afford many of these fees as well as their compulsory insurance. Our little *Community Club* has already been severely penalized by government attempts to clean up the rubbish that goes on in larger organizations, notably nightclubs and casinos. Admittedly, some of the larger clubs do have enough gaming machines to be classed as a small casino! I'm not saying small clubs don't want to be accountable – we do. There certainly is a considerable amount of pride involved in getting a good report card after audits or Liquor Licensing, Gaming or Wages inspections. We want to be responsible, we want to be accountable – but, in these times it's hard enough to stay in business – we certainly don't need to deal with even more fallout from a government trying to deal with nightclubs, big pubs and casinos. As you're doing another review, perhaps you may look at reducing or removing some of these burdens. **Please don't add more!**

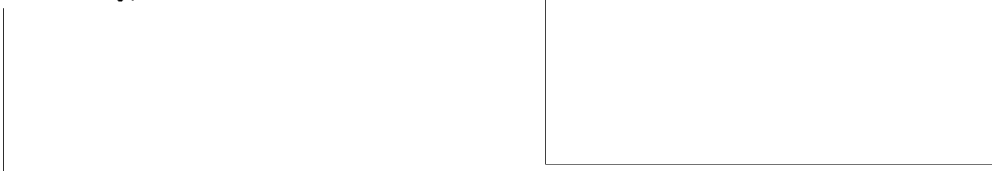
Small community clubs like ours normally don't open until midday or later, and are closed by 8pm most nights. We don't have the same sort of problems you're trying to deal with. I understand problem gamblers (and this definition keeps changing) are the driving force behind the Productivity Commission's Draft Report. Most people who play our pokies come down on a Friday night to have a meal, to socialize and have a flutter with a friend. Others put a few dollars in the machines when they have a beer on their way home from work. And the grumpy old men, they throw a dollar in the hat and take turns pressing buttons. Problem gamblers who live here don't want others gossiping about them, so they mostly go somewhere they're just a number, where their habit can be hidden, and chase the jackpots and other on-line payouts small clubs like ours just don't have. Sometimes we get visitors who are willing to make the drive from Townsville to play the machines, not many come back when they find out we don't have on-line jackpots etc.

We're certainly not in the business of creating problem gamblers. Small communities already have in-built self-regulatory systems that big places don't have, like gossip and people to distract players from the machines with idle chit-chat. We provide gaming machines as a form of recreation, take our obligations to the community we live in seriously, and provide assistance to anyone who may look like they have a problem.

Government, more specifically the Department of Liquor Licensing & Gaming Regulation need to address the problem gamblers and problem drinkers where most are. The problem won't be solved by making more rules to comply with. I would suggest to the Productivity Commission, common sense dictates that changing opening and closing hours of some venues to more reasonable hours, so machines are less available would be a better solution than all the regulations already introduced. After all, there have been pubs, clubs and casinos for a long time, but society didn't have the problems to the same degree until after opening and closing hours were extended to pursue the almighty dollar. This has enabled the problem you're trying to fix! And, you can't solve it by more commissions and even more onerous regulations. With all your advisors, perhaps you're already well aware of the solution. But, perhaps the powers that be would rather continue keeping the money and dancing around the problem, than to solve it. It's much easier to continue justifying not fixing the problem by pointing to the revenue produced and grants like Community Gambling Benefits Fund.

I don't expect supplying feedback will do any good, it's all been said before, many times. But I believe you do need to be aware of the impact decisions made have on *Community Clubs* like ours. You see the statistics, and may forget that these statistics have a personal side - are made up from real people. I hope I've shown you this personal side, the reason why *Community Clubs* exist. I hope the above has been helpful to your understanding of the impact your decisions will have on small communities such as ours.

Yours Faithfully,



Lynn Hamilton

Voluntary Treasurer, Alligator Creek Bowls & Recreation Club Inc.