

anglicare - riverina

THE SOCIAL WELFARE ARM OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF RIVERINA

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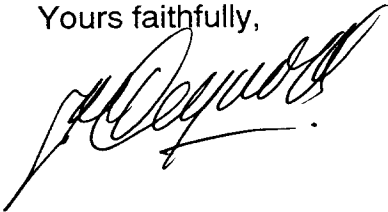
20th September, 1999.

The Secretary,
Gambling Inquiry,
Productivity Commission,
P.O. Box 80,
BELCONNEN A.C.T. 2616.

Dear Sir/Madam,

In response to your request for submissions to the Productivity Commission's draft report on gambling, I attach a submission from the Social Responsibilities Committee of the Anglican Diocese of Riverina for the consideration of the Commission in preparing its final report.

Yours faithfully,



THE VERY REVD. GRAHAM REYNOLDS,

Chairman.

RESPONSE TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT ON GAMBLING

The Social Responsibilities Committee of the Anglican Diocese of Riverina is a committee established by the Bishop of the diocese. The committee represents Anglicans from one third of the state of New South Wales. The Diocese of Riverina covers an area from just west of Wagga Wagga and Albury, west to the South Australian border and north to the Queensland border. Except in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (around Griffith and Leeton) and Broken Hill, where most State and Federal social service agencies are represented, it is to churches that people in trouble turn in the first instance. The clergy of the diocese, especially, are well aware of the personal crises in rural and regional communities which arise from excessive gambling. This committee is well placed to comment on the effects of gambling in regional and remote New South Wales. It is from this foundation that we respond to the Draft Report.

In 1998 the SRC made a report to the annual meeting of the Synod of the diocese on gambling and its effects in the communities represented. The significant concern was the growing dependency of State governments upon revenues raised from gambling activities. That report demonstrated that there is a fundamental conflict of interest for a government that develops such a dependency. In order for the government to maximise its income it needs to foster gambling in the community and down play the negative effects it produces.

The S.R.C. and the Synod of the Diocese did not condemn gambling, but endorsed the principles of 'moderation'. However, the Synod was very much concerned at the way in which gambling was being promoted, the rapid expansion of the industry over the last few years, and the growth of and extent of Problem Gambling.

AREAS OF CONCERN:

1. ADVERTISING

We have a great concern at the lack of truth in the advertising of gambling products, particularly scratchies, lotto, and lotteries. Advertising entices people to gamble by promoting a 'get rich quick and easy' mentality.

Advertising for gambling products seems to be deliberately misleading, as it is the exceptional win that is portrayed as the outcome rather than the almost inevitable loss. No statistics are provided for the various games of chance that enable the player to make an informed decision on their chances of winning. Gambling in clubs and casinos is also promoted as being a 'social' activity, which often includes free drinks and 'happy hours', to entice participation.

The S.R.C. report recommended:

- (1) that advertising of gambling should be limited to times and mediums which minimize exposure of children;
- (2) that advertising be balanced and portray accurately the most common results of participating in the particular gambling activity;
- (3) that similar standards as those for the advertising of alcohol be applied to advertising of gambling, such as restrictions upon suggestions that the activity will bring you personal, sexual, financial or social success.

We continue to stand by those recommendations.

2. THE EXPANSION OF CASINO AND GAMING MACHINE GAMBLING

Through the eighties and into the nineties the Churches (usually as a united ecumenical group) have expressed serious concerns about the expansion of gambling activities in Australia - to the Connor Royal Commission in Victoria, and to several inquiries in the Australian Capital Territory including a select committee of the A.C.T. House of Assembly, to inquire into the establishment of a casino in Canberra. In 1991 the Victorian Council of Churches expressed its concern about the expansion of this form of gambling in the following way:

'The casino, poker machine and tabaret methods use pressure gambling, because they create an environment which stimulates gambling behaviour beyond tolerable limits; they use mechanisms that make the play so unbroken that patrons scarcely have time to reflect upon how much they are losing; and they foster dangerous addiction by providing more frequent and regular opportunities for play than the older gambling media. The social costs to families and the community are enormous, though frequently not obvious on the surface.'

The Productivity Commission's draft report validates this concern.

'This S.R.C. believes that there ought to be a moratorium on the introduction of any more gaming machines and that there needs to be an extensive advertising and education program put in place, that helps people make wise decisions about the way they can use these machines as a form of entertainment.'

2b. INTERNET GAMBLING

The advent of Internet gambling has opened up a whole new range of concerns. For problem gamblers it has the potential to isolate them from their community, and from others who can warn of a potential problem.

We agree with the Commission's view that (without harm minimisation measures and appropriate regulation) on-line gambling will pose significant new risks for problem gambling.

Overall we found Chapter 17 of the Draft Report very helpful.

3. CONTROL AND REGULATION

The S.R.C. strongly endorses the Productivity Commission finding that 'the key regulatory control body in each State should have statutory independence and a central role in providing information and policy advice, as well as in administering gambling legislation. It should cover all gambling forms and its principal operating criteria should be consumer protection and the public interest'.

4. GOVERNMENT REVENUE

It is of grave concern that government policy in this area is so obviously driven by its need for increased revenue. Mixed public attitudes to gambling have enabled governments to use taxation of gambling with little adverse response. Such a climate tends to lead to poor policy making decisions whilst encouraging many governments to 'milk this cow'.

5. PRO-ACTIVE PREVENTION

The S.R.C. believes that the following preventative measures should be considered:

1. Removal of any credit facilities from gaming areas, and their use restricted to non gambling activities at gambling places;
2. Placement of debit machines outside gaming areas.
3. The use of tokens (including 'smart cards' instead of cash) thus creating a greater consciousness of the amount of money being wagered, and creating 'cooling off' periods when cards are taken to the cashier;
4. The obvious display of the odds of the particular types of gambling available in a facility;
5. The display of the amount a gambler has wagered in a particular machine; and
6. The availability of Exclusion facilities.

6. 'WARNING' OF DANGERS

Some members of the S.R.C. felt that 'warning signs' on gaming machines would be of benefit in assisting people with a potential problem.

HELP AVAILABLE FOR PROBLEM GAMBLERS

SERVICES PROVIDED BY CLUBS: In N.S.W. Registered Clubs, through their association, are developing a voluntary code of practice for Responsible Gambling. On visiting a variety of Clubs, this committee found a wide variance in the availability, or lack thereof, of information for problem gamblers. Some Clubs had signs and information readily available, displaying it freely in their gaming lounges, whilst others had little or no information at all.

This Committee believes that regulations need to be introduced to make the clear display of information of assistance for problem gamblers readily available.

The Committee also found that there was a lack of services available in regional areas. All residential programmes were only available on the Sydney side of the Great Divide.

PROBLEM GAMBLING: AN ISSUE OF GREAT CONCERN

Problem Gambling should be seen as an issue requiring far more research into its causes, behaviour patterns etc.

There needs to be a much wider general advertising of the assistance that is available to problem gamblers and their families.