

3 November, 1998

SUBMISSION TO:

The Gambling Inquiry
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
BELCONNEN, A.C.T. 2616

Recently I forwarded a submission which included some unsupported statements. To-day the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* published information supportive of my previous assertions. Most importantly, however, the names of professional persons familiar with the problems associated with gambling are included, and I suggest that your group give consideration to seeking evidence from people such as these.

V. A. Wigzell

(Mrs) V.A. Wigzell
17 Royal St
ALEXANDRA HILLS Q 4161

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PLAYING with dough



GAMBLING could be taking over from alcohol and drugs as a means of escaping the pressures of everyday life, experts warn.

Gambling is more socially acceptable and actively promoted by governments but the consequences can be just as dire, they say.

"Twenty years ago blokes might have gone to the pub three or four times a week," Sydney psychologist Simon Milton said.

"But since the dangers of excessive drinking and drink-driving have been highlighted, people have veered away from alcohol.

"Now many are turning to gambling to escape their troubles.

"In 10 to 15 years it could be a major problem."

Australians lost \$10 billion to gambling in 1996-97.

Per capita expenditure has increased three or four times in 25 years.

At least 1 percent of adults — 120,000 people — already are problem gamblers, experts estimate.

Ninety thousand of them suffer depression.

Twenty-five thousand of them contemplate or attempt suicide.

Seventy-five thousand resort to crime to fund their habit.

The number of compulsive gamblers is now equivalent to the number of hard drug users, says clinical psychologist Alex Blaszczynski of the University of New South Wales.

Many attribute the increase to the proliferation of gambling outlets and encouragement from governments dependent on gambling revenue.

"There is keen competition between each gaming sector," Professor Blaszczynski said.

"Some of the advertising is misleading in that it gives a message that everyone is a winner at gambling.

"You are a winner if you're only going there for entertainment and you're prepared to lose your money.

"If you are there to try to win

money, then the evidence quite clearly indicates you're going to lose. The responsible gambler gambles for the excitement, hopes to win but expects to lose.

"Problem gamblers, on the other hand, try to win back money lost, dig themselves into a hole and create significant problems for themselves and their families.

"Unlike alcohol or drug addiction, you can't see the physical effects.

"You can't see the people in the hospital wards or the carnage on the roads.

"Gamblers can be secretive and extremely good at hiding loss of income from spouses and others.

"The cravings and drive to gamble are often as strong as those of alcohol or drug addicts."

Gambling is perceived as a reasonable, even glamorous, behaviour.

"Some gamblers have the distorted belief that not only will gambling help them forget their problems, it may even solve their problems if they win," Mr Milton said.

"But poker machines are set up to guarantee that people lose their money.

"And while people are playing the machines, their problems aren't getting solved.

"They're usually becoming much worse."

He discounts the theory that gambling is part of the Australian ethos and the national psyche.

"We're the world's biggest gamblers only because we're given the opportunity by governments," he said.

Money once was a secondary reason for gambling, according to Jan McMillen, professor of gaming at the University of Western Sydney.

"The main attraction was social interaction and luck," she said. "But money is now the dominant force — and that's related to commercialisation.

"All societies gamble but only modern Western society has commercialised it to such an extent."

—DOUG CONWAY