

**SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION - INQUIRY
INTO AUSTRALIA'S GAMBLING
BY
MORELAND CITY COUNCIL
BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON MONDAY 23 NOVEMBER 1998**

Moreland City Council is pleased to take the opportunity to make this submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Gambling.

As a result of community concerns about the increase in incidents of electronic gambling in Moreland, Moreland City Council undertook to develop a local planning, policy and community development strategy which would better define the nature of community concern about the impacts of gambling, the opportunities for Moreland City Council to influence this relatively new and rapidly expanding activity and the broader opportunities for Local Governments, communities and other levels of government to ensure that the detrimental impacts of electronic gambling were minimised.

Council and community understanding about the issues have been considerably advanced through a working party convened by Council. This working party comprised members of local trader associations, venue operators, community support organisations, faith community leaders, Moreland City Councillors and officers. With the initiation of the Responsible Gambling Strategy in early 1998 this group became a steering committee to aid in the development of the strategy.

The Moreland Responsible Gambling Strategy was completed in May 1998.

The Moreland Responsible Gambling Strategy – Key Issues

Copies of the Moreland Responsible Gambling Strategy have been submitted to the Productivity Commission and the report is included as an appendix to this submission.

The Role of Local Government – Why should Local Governments be concerned?

As the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority research demonstrates, Moreland contains high proportions of the groups that are at greatest risk of social and economic disadvantage from gambling. Local communities have sometimes reacted forcibly to the introduction of gaming venues. The Council has been concerned at the limited control it can exert, the rapid pace of introduction of gaming machines and the comparatively large numbers of machines allowed to locate in Moreland. It has also been concerned about the impact on businesses such as shops, the net expenditure outlays from the community, and the lack of Government support to establish adequate social support services to help problem gamblers and their families. Other municipalities have expressed similar concerns.

Moreland City Council has resolved to produce an effective policy response to gambling issues. The Council identified that it has the opportunity to respond to community

concerns by adopting a leadership role with a clear strategic framework. It can use its strength as an organisation with strong community links to initiate action at the local level.

Summary of Recommendations

The Moreland Responsible Gambling Strategy identified that a wide and broad community planning view of the electronic gambling industry would hold the greatest potential for positive impact. The report recommends Council undertake activity on a range of matters including social and recreation policy, urban planning policy, community development initiatives, inter governmental relations and research.

Town Planning Code for Gaming Venues

The Moreland Town Planning Code for Gaming Venues was adopted to apply to:

- The establishment of a gaming venue.
- The installation and use of electronic gaming machines.
- Intensification of an existing gaming venue.

The code requires assessment of social and economic impact, seeks to discourage concentration of gambling venues in any given area, addresses amenity items within gaming venues, seeks a commitment from venue operators to minimise the negative effects of gambling and to contribute to maximising the positive effects of gambling, and regulates car parking and hours of operation.

Charter for Responsible Gambling

The local venue operators identified that there was potential value in adopting a local charter for responsible gambling. Whilst recognising provisions at a state level for regulating the industry through codes of practice, the Moreland charter for responsible gambling is intended to operate as an elaboration of those codes of practice. The concept, supported by local venue operators involves local cooperation by local venues in furthering best practice and quality service. Essentially the proposition is one of self regulation, to be supported by Council. The Charter therefore goes further than the industry codes and seeks to build a level of good will, mutual obligations and understanding about the impact of gambling and the efforts of venue operators to address these impacts.

The key matter arising from the Moreland Responsible Gambling Strategy is the desirability of stronger local community control and planning in relation to the electronic gambling industry. The interests of local communities in the industry encompass the following:

The location of venues and the local community planning context.

- The size and nature of venues particularly their association with ancillary or related activities on the same or nearby premises.
- The availability of local information about the social and economic impact of gambling.

- *Access to* support services for people with 'problem gambling'
- The extent to which proceeds from gambling, particularly the taxes and revenues available for public purposes, are put to local benefits in some recognition of the negative aspects of electronic gambling.
- The role of gambling as a social and leisure pursuit within a range of local recreation and or social programs and facilities.

These are the more immediate issues which demonstrate the very real need for locally responsible planning powers, controls and community development initiatives.

Submission Summary

Moreland City Council is pleased to be provided with the opportunity to present this submission and looks forward to further elaborating in detail the matters raised above and the work undertaken in developing the Moreland Responsible Gambling Strategy.

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