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Elwood VIC 3184  
4<sup>th</sup> November 1998

Productivity Commission  
Gambling Inquiry  
PO Box 80  
Belconnen ACT 2616

To the Productivity Commission, Gambling Inquiry

I am writing in response to the article "Need gambling help? You bet" which ran on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1998. I am a telephone counsellor at G-Line, a crisis and referral service for problem gamblers. I am writing from my personal experience and the views I express are not necessarily those held by G-Line.

These are my views:

- Loss of control is a frightening experience, particularly when the gambler rationally knows they are doing the wrong thing but they cannot stop themselves from gambling
- It is a hidden problem. An alcoholic may not be able to hide their addiction, but a gambler can
- It is very difficult for a non-gambler to understand the compulsion a gambler feels. One may ask why the gambler doesn't just stop or avoid going to the venues. This has become increasingly difficult when Tabarets are readily available in most localities
- Gamblers feel shame, embarrassment and guilt about their habit
- Those from lower socioeconomic groups are more prone to be gamblers. I regularly speak with pensioners and the unemployed
- Gambling can break up families
- Most people I speak with are calling for the first time. I have worked at G-Line for over two years. This means there are potentially thousands of people a year who are developing gambling habits to the extent that they will call a stranger for support
- Amongst other things people gamble to block out unpleasant things which are happening in their life, to chase what they have lost, for social contact or because they are bored.

I would like to relate a call I had last week. I have not included any identifying information.

"Helen has a husband and 3 children aged 16, 13 and 10. Her father died 18 months ago. She was close to her father and at around this time she also experience conflict with other family members. She felt her mother and her sisters were criticising her parenting skills amongst other things and she felt betrayed. She has strained relations with her sister and still feels terrible anguish when she thinks about it. Her gambling became a habit 18 months ago and has steadily become worse. She and her husband

run a small business. She regularly spends \$500 per week on gambling, the takings from the business. On the day Helen called, she had told her husband to leave so she didn't have to put him through this anymore. She wanted to "sort herself out" but she didn't want him to give her money and fix it. She emphasised that the problem was hers and that she didn't want him to fix it. She felt she was to blame and that there was nothing else that was attributing to the problem. She said she wasn't suicidal, but that she'd be better off dead. She was carrying a very heavy weight."

This is one out of hundreds of calls we receive, stories which may frustrate you or may move you to tears. Gambling is a huge social problem which has escalated with the ease of access to poker machines. Unhappy people can forget their worries when they gamble, and walk out feeling so much worse, because their problems are still with them, but they have lost their money and must live with the guilt and perceived lack of will power.

Thank you for allowing the opportunity for people to express their experiences with gambling. I hope you have received many responses which help you with the inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Emma Fitzgerald". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Emma Fitzgerald