

THE GAMBLING CRISIS & COUNSELLING SERVICE INC.

HON . SOLICITOR :
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Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
Select Committee on Gambling.

The Chairman and members,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you as a spokesperson for the
Gambling Crisis and Counselling Service.

As a resident of Canberra for over 30 years I have seen the growth of gambling in this city. On my arrival in Canberra there were a few clubs, the odd TAB and Tatts Lotto on Saturday night. The population of Canberra was young, most had left their families interstate to work here and the clubs provided a family meeting area with cheap meals, entertainment and a few poker machines of the "one arm bandit" variety. Over the years the clubs have prospered, they have built bigger buildings with larger gaming areas, expanded into the newer suburbs and the emphasis has changed from the family club to a money making enterprise. By viewing club advertising on television it appears that everyone is a winner - there are no losers!

The revenue from gaming taxes to the ACT Government is approximately \$32M of which the poker machines contribute in the vicinity of \$26M.

The club industry will state that they provide thousands of jobs and contribute large sums to the community. What they do not recognise, nor does the Government that this figure of \$26M represents approximately \$116M of the Canberra population's disposable income being poured into poker machines and not being used to purchase goods and services which would provide employment and taxes to the ACT Government.

The misery that our organisation confronts from people addicted to poker machines is frightening ; people who have lost all their wages, taken out personal loans to pay off their debts, not payed their rent, electricity, telephone or bought food.

Some sell all their possessions, others contemplate suicide. Women ring for help as their partners have gambled all the weekly pay packet and there is no money for food. Men ring for help when they find that their partner, who has gone off to play "bingo" during the day has emptied the joint bank account playing the poker machines.

In an attempt to limit the social impact of poker machines I feel that the committee should look at certain measures.

- (a) No poker machines in hotels.

Canberra clubs are owned by the members and cannot be sold as a operating entity and under legislation must return profits to their members. Hotels with an increased revenue of \$50,000 per machine can increase the value of their property on the cash turnover. This is a saleable item. There are no members to return profits .

- (b) Limit the trading hours of clubs.

Some clubs trade 24 hours a day and “prey” on shift workers who drop in to wind down after work and overspend on the poker machines.

We have experienced several taxi drivers who have spent not only their share of the nights takings but the owner of the cabs share as well! Also women who leave home at 11.30 pm because the club gave them a free bingo card for the midnight game.

- (c) Educate the public on what they are really spending .

Ten years ago the idea of one and two cent poker machines would have caused laughter. The minimum bet was five cents and people could play a machine with \$5 for some time by feeding in one coin at a time. Poker machines have become more sophisticated , dollar coins are used to provide credits and notes up to \$100 can be fed directly into the machines. People talk of playing a one cent machine and losing \$1000 in a night . They are not playing a one cent machine, they are playing 20 lines(20 cents) X number of bets per line - this can be up to \$5 per play.

- (d) Limit the amount of money that can be removed from EFPOS machines.

A high proportion of the problems we receive are from people who have spent more than they expected. This is because they carry a limited amount of cash with them and quickly run out. They then use their plastic card in what they think is an ATM at the club and draw more money. As the machine does not give them a card stating how much they have withdrawn or their account balance they have nothing to reference too and return time and again until the EFPOS states “insufficient funds”.

These machines used to have a limit of \$400 per day which has now increased to \$1000 per day and a new day starts at one minute past midnight!

We have experienced many cases where people have received a fortnights salary on a Thursday and have unwittingly drawn \$1000 plus that night from a club EFPOS.

(e) Provide education to year 10-12 students on the pitfalls of gambling

Young people on turning 18 want to experience the temptations of life. When first playing the poker machines it is inevitable that they will win a jackpot and they think this is easy money. They then chase another jackpot and increase their betting to cover their losses. In a very short time they are "hooked".

May we state that our organisation is not against clubs or the recreational playing of poker machines as entertainment. Two clubs provide the only income for our organisation to continue operating.

Many people in the 20-45 age bracket have no concept of enjoyment outside of the club scene as they were brought up in that environment by their parents. Diner or a show - at the club! Bored at home - Go to the club and play the pokies or bingo! They have little knowledge of financial management and cannot understand what has happened to their money.

Some clubs do provide assistance to the community at large but little is directed to organisations helping that known 1% of addictive gamblers.

The ACT Government has provided no assistance to this organisation other than promises since 1992 and could find that if a small percentage of the gambling revenue was directed to organisations such as ourselves, then the cost reduction of the social impact of gambling (unpaid rates, rent, court costs etc.) on the community could be greater than the loss of Government revenue.

Yours Sincerely

Ralph G Goslin

President
9/11/98