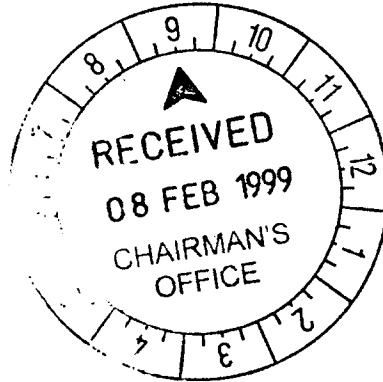


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4 February 1999

Mr Gary Banks  
Chairperson  
Productivity Commission  
Inquiry into Australia's Gambling Industries  
PO Box 80  
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

Dear Mr Banks

**SUBMISSION FROM DAREBIN CITY COUNCIL**

Please find attached a submission from Darebin City Council. This submission was endorsed unanimously at the Council meeting of 1<sup>st</sup> February 1999.

The submission outlines a range of issues and concerns about the negative social and economic impact of gambling on the Darebin community. It also proposes a number of actions which would result in improved management of the negative impact on the community and promote a responsible approach to gambling by the industry.

Yours faithfully



**KEVIN BREEN**  
**GENERAL MANAGER URBAN AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Attach

# SUBMISSION BY DAREBIN CITY COUNCIL TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S GAMBLING INDUSTRIES

## The City of Darebin

Located in the northern suburbs of metropolitan Melbourne, the City of Darebin comprises the former City of Preston, the larger part of the former City of Northcote, north of Heidelberg Road, and small parts of the former Cities of Coburg in the west and Heidelberg and Diamond Valley in the north.

Covering approximately 54 sq km, the City encompasses the neighbourhoods of Northcote, Fairfield, Alphington, Thornbury, Preston, Kingsbury, Oakhill and Reservoir. Darebin's nearest neighbours are the inner suburban municipalities of Moreland, Yarra, Boroondara and Banyule; and the outer suburban municipalities of Whittlesea, Hume and Nillimbik.

At the time of the 1996 Census, 36% of Darebin's residents were aged between 20-39 years. The second largest group of residents were beyond retirement aged. The proportion of people in both these age groups was higher than the average for the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) and for Victoria.

Darebin's total population of 121,800 is a genuine melting pot. Representatives of almost any community group in Australia can be found in this diverse municipality.

The majority of residents (61%) were born in Australia. However, many of these people identify themselves as members of ethnic groups of non-English speaking background (NESB). Darebin has a relatively high proportion of residents (35% or 45,120 people) born overseas, a rate higher than the average for the MSD and Victoria. In addition to the long-established immigrants from countries such as Italy and Greece, there are a host of smaller, more recently arrived NESB immigrants, including people born in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Iran, and Slovenia.

The 1,100 members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) community represent one of the most important groups in Darebin, particularly in the area near Northland shopping centre - a historically significant site for ATSI people.

## Why DCC is responding to the Inquiry

Darebin City Council acknowledges that a diverse cross section of its residents enjoy responsible gambling as a social and recreational activity and that this activity is generally accepted by the Victorian community as part of its social landscape.

**Council's concern is not with the moral dimensions of gambling, but with its negative social and economic impact on the well being of many of its residents.**

As is the case in neighbouring municipalities in the Northern Metropolitan Region (NMR), the profile of Darebin's population heightens its overall vulnerability to the negative social and economic impact of gambling.

**Whilst people of all backgrounds and circumstances can and do become involved in 'problem gambling', residents already struggling with personal or financial pressures are often the most vulnerable to gambling beyond their limited means.**

As with most of its neighbours in the region, Darebin has a disproportionately high number of residents experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

- 29.9% of Darebin's population receives a gross weekly income between \$120 and \$199.
- Darebin residents account for one fifth of all persons in the NMR in receipt of sole parent pension (20.1%) and/or Health Concession Cards (19.3%), and nearly one quarter of persons in receipt of the Disability Support Pension (23.4%) and Pensioner Concession Cards (23.8%) [(DHS, Northern Metropolitan Region, 1997)].
- Darebin has the second highest proportion for each of these indicators of socio-economic difficulty experienced by its residents of the 7 municipalities in the region.

The likelihood of using gambling to resolve existing difficulties is exacerbated by increasing access to gaming facilities in Darebin and neighbouring municipalities, and the attractive marketing of their 'services' to punters.

**Reports from professionals providing Council-run services such as financial counselling and family support cite problem gambling as the source of an increasing number of individuals seeking help for:**

- **financial problems including misused credit cards, bankruptcy, resulting in the sale of family homes, and partners being forced to borrow against their will**
- **lack of basic funds for the provision of food or children's educational needs**
- **food vouchers from emergency relief agencies**
- **marital separations**
- **domestic violence**
- **family tension and breakdown**
- **deaths**

## The Issues

Darebin City Council concurs with the summary of issues identified by the Victorian Local Governance Association in its submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Gambling Industries (VLGA, 1998) and with those of Moreland City Council's Responsible Gambling Strategy (Scott and Associates, 1998).

**Council would emphasize the following issues which are of particular relevance to the Darebin community:**

- The speed and inequitable distribution of Electronic Gaming machines (EGMs) in municipalities (including Darebin) whose population comprises a proportion of people earning low and limited incomes, or who receive a 'social wage' through benefits noted earlier in this submission.
- Increased access to gaming facilities by those least able to afford it and most vulnerable to see it as a 'quick fix' to their problems. There were:
  - ⇒ 937 EGMs and 17 gaming venues in Darebin as at March 1997 (Baseline Data Project, Victorian Casino Gaming Authority, 1997).
  - ⇒ 1044 EGMs and 19 gaming venues in Darebin 9 months later - December 1997 (Source: Comparison of EGM Numbers - 21.1, Scott and Associates, 1998).
- Widespread promotion of gaming facilities, with little exposure to information about the risks and potential adverse affects on people's lives.
- Increasing concern expressed by communities about the negative social and economic impact of gambling (Northcote Leader, 1998)
- Increased pressure on local governments to respond to these problems.
- Increasing requests received by local community agencies to assist residents who have not been able to keep their gambling under control and are experiencing personal, relationship and financial problems directly related to their gambling behaviour.
- Dissatisfaction with Councils' incapacity to manage the spread and impact of gambling within their communities, by members of the community and by Councillors and Officers.

Councils' powers to affect change are limited by the provisions of relevant Acts, for example, Section 60B of the Victorian Planning and Environment Act. Councils have had little control over the locations or conditions of operation of gaming venues. In most cases, a planning permit is not required.

- Development of the infrastructure to support problem gamblers is largely in its infancy and generally inadequate.

- Inadequate funding and support provided to existing gambling support and financial counselling services in many municipalities, including Darebin.

### **What DCC would like to see happen as a result of the Inquiry**

Darebin City Council believes a responsible approach to gaming is the joint responsibility of State and Local Governments, which needs to be undertaken in partnership with the their communities.

Council supports, in principle, many of the strategies for change developed other councils such by Moreland City Council in its Responsible Gambling Strategy. The specific actions Darebin City Council recommends to achieve improved management of the negative impact of gambling on the community and to promote a responsible approach to gambling by the industry and members of the community are:

1. Support for regulation of the gambling industry to establish controls at local, state and national levels.
2. Greater consultation and involvement of Local Government by the State Government in proposed and existing planning and regulatory policies and processes.
3. Agreement that Councils secures a moratorium on any further machines in municipalities with EGMs per head of population which exceed an agreed threshold.
4. Extention of the statewide cap on EGMs beyond 2000.
5. Change in planning controls to designate the introduction of any number of EGM's as a change of use of premises, requiring a planning permit.
6. Investigation of enhanced regulatory controls, including, but not limited to:
  - acknowledgment of duty of care by proprietors and managers of gaming facilities
  - improved methods of identifying and responding to problem gambling
  - tighter controls on advertising relating to gaming
7. Definition of a set of principles governing the social impact of gaming facilities, to be applied by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and responsible authorities.
8. Development of criteria for more equitable and effective distribution of monies from the Community Support Fund.
9. Return of a greater proportion of gaming revenue to the community, through the Community Support Fund.
10. Improved levels of funding for local counselling/support services to work with problem gamblers and their families.

11. Funding of information and promotional material at gaming venues and community facilities which educate members of the community about responsible gambling behaviour and sources of assistance for difficulties with it e.g., winning odds, support services, notices at venues about the risks or gambling beyond ones means.
12. School-based education for young people about the costs of gambling.

## References

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