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The Gambling Study
Productivity Commission

Dear Mr Fitzgerald

On "Australia Talks Back" - 21/7 I heard your informed comments on gambling; and submissions were sought for the inquiry.

May I say at commencement of my submission that I have never been a gambler; but having been brought up in Ascot Vale, near the 3 race courses and the show grounds (trots), the gambling centre of Melbourne in those days, I was very conscious of the gambling problems of many people. I always wondered - why ?

After decades of wondering I came up with some hypotheses. They are, 1. "Risk seeking" Until a few thousand years ago, life for most humans was a very risky business. Almost daily they were at risk, and their survival depended upon knowledge and chance. In recent times, many of the risks have disappeared. It may well be that, having spent most of our evolutionary time coping with risks, risk taking may be a "natural" process. In these less risky times, our conditioned "life is risky" feeling may be compensated for by taking risks like playing pokies - gambling. At the end of the program, boredom was mentioned as being a characteristic of a group of gamblers - this fits with this hypothesis.

I have had this hypothesis for about 10 or 15 years. In fact I put it to a tennis friend who was Prof. of Anthropology at the ANU at the time. He thought it was very interesting.

Hypotheses. 2. For many people who are lower down the socioeconomic pile, gambling presents about the only way they can enhance their income and life style. After all, each day on TV they see the way life could be if they became wealthy; and for most, gambling is the most accessible means.

For the poor, both these hypotheses will apply, with dominance of number 2 perhaps.

For the better off, number 1 may be dominant.

If hypothesis 1 is reasonable, then the ways of regulating gambling may be different to those currently used. Not having reviewed the sociology literature about this, I don't know whether these hypotheses (particularly No 1) are original or not. It may well have been considered. It will surprise me if it hasn't.

Although I am not a gambler I am a very keen bush walker, runner, mountain bike rider, rock climber; and I've flown hang gliders, ie. I satisfy my need to take risks. •

The program was very interesting; and all the way through I kept thinking - yes it fits with my hypotheses.

However I do wonder why are we (Australians) the worlds top gamblers. Issues mentioned like government revenue from it etc. are important, but it does suggest that governments do not properly understand the longer term costs to society such as robbery, and increasing demand on government resources and increasing health problems - be they mental or physical'.

I am a non-pedantic scientist (CSIRO). In respect to speculation and hypotheses, be it in hard science or psychology and sociology etc. I often say "the more we know, the more it seems we don't know". And gambling is a great area for speculation and hypotheses.

I hope your project is successful.

Yours sincerely



Howard Crockford

21/7/99