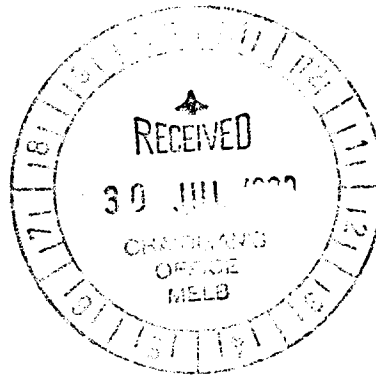




Australian Centre for  
Social Innovations



27th July 1999

Mr Gary Banks  
Chairman  
Gambling Inquiry  
The Productivity Commission  
Level 28, 35 Collins St  
Melbourne 3000

Dear Mr Banks

### RESPONSE TO GAMBLING REPORT

I enclose a response to the report, which I hope is constructive. Instead of focussing on negatives - how to warn and restrict gamblers, it looks at the Productivity aspects.

1. PRODUCTIVITY AS RECREATION, with indices of pleasure and health. What alternative recreation could be offered to gamblers that are more pleasurable and healthy?

2. PRODUCTIVITY IN ECONOMIC TERMS for Australia.

a) Gambling diverted to investment could promote Australian businesses and reduce our need for foreign investment, which expands our foreign debt

b) If low-income earners had opportunities to improve their fortunes by saving, they would be less desperate to gamble. This in turn would reduce the burden on taxpayers of social welfare and criminal justice.

As a former clinical psychologist and researcher working in disadvantaged areas I found that while middle-class children and adults expected to prosper through hard work, working-class children and adults felt, often with reason, that their only hope of prospering was through Tattsлото and other forms of gambling.

I have tried to make my response readable rather than formal. Apart from the essential actions to prevent the temptations set by pokies in shopping strips, nearby ATMs, and advertising, most of the 'negative' approaches to the gambling problem will be as little successful as 'Smoking kills' on cigarette packets.

A fuller account of Alternatives to Gambling is set out on the ozideas website, <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~ozideas>.

Yours sincerely

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Something to read for entertainment - but for positive entertainment as described below  
It is Fun, but Fun to be taken seriously

## **How entertaining is gambling?**

### **The Productivity Commission should ask, how productive is gambling as entertainment?**

Life is so short. If you are going to amuse yourself, you might as well amuse yourself to the full.

The two criteria for entertainment as recreation - re-creation - are Positive Pleasure and Good Health.

Few if any entertainments could score full marks on all the possibilities for healthy and positive pleasure, but the higher they score, the more the Productivity Commission could be pleased.

Check these out in assessing the Productivity of Entertainment

### **Positive pleasures from entertainment:**

Happiness during and after, laughter and good humour, great physical sensations, excitement, novelty, profit, friendship, pleasant surprise, comfort, consolation, adventure, exploration, discovery, aesthetic pleasure in perceptions of beauty, even a frisson in an element of recognised risk or danger to obtain a greater payoff.

### **Health from entertainment** - personal health, and health for others, the environment and fellow creatures -

Fresh air, physical exercise, mental exercise, profitable outcomes, benefits others, improved relationships, increased happiness, raised self-worth, laughter, good humour, development of personal qualities, pleasure taken in a health-encouraging environment, relaxation after stress, escape that invigorates for return to everyday duties.

### **Negative pleasures from entertainment:**

Pleasure from watching the suffering of others

Pleasure from inflicting suffering,

Pleasure from benefiting the expense of others

Pleasure regardless of how much others suffer to provide it (eg gladiatorial spectators)

Escape that debilitates for return to everyday duties.

Escape that seeks to be permanent escape

Callous humour

Hope for undeserved gain

### **Sources of negative health from entertainment**

Excessive loss of income  
Obsessive and addictive development that prevents enjoyment of real life.  
Physically debilitating  
Prevents adequate fresh air recreation and exercise  
Excessive noise/flashing lights/pollution  
Harms relationships  
Mind-numbing  
Numbing or damaging the senses - vision, hearing, sensation, awareness  
Guilt or shame  
Loss of self-respect  
Escape from boredom because inability to make anything of real life  
Repetitive and monotonous  
More losses than gains  
Gains at the expense of others  
Harms others in the short or long term  
Encourages antisocial behaviour - e.G. Cheating, crime, selfishness, greed  
Cuts off from relationships  
Prevents attending to responsibilities in real life  
Is safe for some but destroys the spirit and lives of many others  
Reduces people to ninnyes  
Opens pressures or opportunities for crime

With all the other opportunities around for enjoying life, with more assured pleasure and greater recreational health, why then, do 40% of Australians take time off for pokies and casinos, and 3% spend the time to their life's detriment?

**All the commonsense warnings that are proposed will make no more difference to these habits than the message 'SMOKING KILLS' on cigarette packets deters most smokers and novice smokers.**

**An experiment in the psychology of gambling** A friend was curious about why people get obsessed with gambling, and (shocking me to my Scottish core) allocated \$1000 to satisfy this curiosity by gambling at the Casino. He found that at first he was just interested in whether he won or lost. He then had a winning streak. So he played on. Then he lost it all again. THEN he found that he was getting emotional about it, and observed that he felt determined to win his money back. And the more he was losing, the more he became

emotionally determined to win it back, as if his self-respect was at stake. But he went home without his \$1000. The reason he did not become addicted, to try to win it back again, may have been that he was still able to retain some objectivity in his experiment - perhaps rather like Bettelheim was able to survive in a concentration camp partly because his professional curiosity about survival gave him a minimum objectivity, to prevent utter despair.

Many other people may not be driven by the personal need to win back, but by **features of 'playing the pokies'** that are more like the escape and obsessive qualities of drugs, and even some aspects of discos. The gloom of the windowless place is lit by the constant flashing lights and the sounds are noise; in a self-inflicted factory setting acts are repetitive and numbing - in the old days many of those grannies would be knitting not feeding machines. People who have become inept at human relationships need none with the machine - there are people today who will say they prefer supermarkets to the small shop because 'you don't have to speak to any attendants, and you don't know anybody else.

**People whose lives are boring** need some surprises to give a bit of pleasure - other people may look forward to getting letters, or phone-calls or visits from friends, from the newspaper, email, or radio, favorite TV, or family events, from how things grow in their garden, an outing.

**People whose lives are unrewarding and unappreciated** can try to get some pleasure from being rewarded by a machine.

Bus trips to New South Wales used to be a great social picnic for groups going to play the pokies. Now such social outings do not spend so much time being social, and more of the time involves self-isolation before the god of the machine.

**People whose lives involve no element of the spiritual**, who lack any expression or even awareness of the religious motives humans have had from time immemorial, whether linked to any credo or deity or not - these people may be expressing sacrifice, expiation and even idolatry in their willingness to give to the machine or throw on the wheel more than they can afford. Not for nothing does the typical pokie machine have a 'head' that lowers over the worshipper/victim. The many superstitions built up by gamblers support this theory of machine-gambling for lack of a real spirituality to link them with the living world.

**People with no strong moral values** that it is wrong to take what you have not earned, from the losses of others, may feel they are only sharing in what every speculator is doing, and what every one is

doing who takes more than is fair from their investments of capital or through their ability to determine their own salaries and perks.

It is so clear that some forms of gambling for entertainment are healthier than other forms, and some gives more positive pleasure than other forms, and some leaves more time for less selfish forms of recreation.

**If it were not for the gambling instinct, humans would not have survived** - they have dared to explore, to innovate, to put their lives on the line for great causes.

I am a problem gambler, gambling more than I can afford on trying to making a cartoon literacy video for adults, in the face of massive educational lack of interest. I like to gamble in entering competitions where others may be better than I am. I am a problem gambler, for example sending a third letter to a newspaper, just after scoring one out of two on two earlier letters.

**If Australians are gamblers to the core**, we should offer alternative gambling that is less socially destructive and could benefit our society. Ways for everyone to invest in Australian industry, ways to bet on your local industries, to gamble your life to help others, to back people who need a hand up. Fair sport is a form of gambling too. Competitions that call for skill of any sort are forms of gambling. There are lots of problems around for problem gamblers to gamble about.

**Governments could get more cake** from the pro-social sorts of gambling. And \$11 billion saved from pokies represents Australian savings that could replace a lot of foreign investment we would not then need.

**It is not just foolish, it is stupid to try to act like a repressive Nanny to stop or limit all forms of gambling.** Trying to limit by warnings will not help either, while the deliberate temptations are left in place. **The instinct is there. Use it.**

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*Amuse - divert from serious business (with trifling)*

*Entertain - occupy agreeably*

