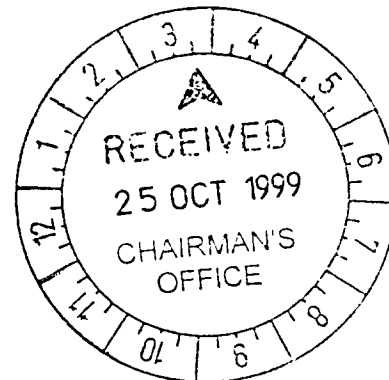


Our reference: F96/1646
Contact: CT; extn 2208



20 OCT 1999

Mr Gary Banks
Chair
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
BELCONNEN ACT 2616



Originals = GB
Copy letter =
Gambling

RE: Gambling Inquiry

Dear Mr Banks

I write to bring to your attention a special report on problem gambling contained in the *Ethnic Affairs Report 1998*, which was recently tabled in the NSW Parliament. The Commission has had concerns for some years about the lack of comprehensive, state-wide treatment services for problem gamblers from ethnic communities. These concerns and the Commission's attempts to address them are set-out in pages 141 - 146 of the attached Report.

The Ethnic Affairs Commission is a government authority established under the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act, 1979, as amended by the Ethnic Affairs Commission (Amendment) Acts, 1987 and 1997. One of the functions of the Commission is to assess the effectiveness of public authorities in implementing the Government's ethnic affairs policies.

The Community Benefit Fund within the Department of Gaming and Racing was established to reduce the negative impact of gambling and benefit the people of New South Wales through the responsible administration of the Casino Community Benefit Fund (a 2% levy on gaming revenue from the Star City Casino). The Commission is required to assess the effectiveness of the Department of Gaming and Racing's implementation of NSW Government ethnic affairs policies.

Amendments to the Act passed by Parliament in 1996 require the Ethnic Affairs Commission to prepare an annual report on the status of ethnic affairs in NSW. The special report on problem gambling was prepared in accordance with these legislative responsibilities.

I regret our late submission but the Report has only recently been tabled in Parliament, and therefore, been publicly released. The contact officer for this matter is Christina Thomas (02 9716 2208) should you require further information.

Yours sincerely

Stepan Kerkyasharian, A.M.,
Chair

HEAD OFFICE
164 Liverpool Road
ASHFIELD NSW 2131
P.O. Box 1266
ASHFIELD NSW 1800
DX21225 ASHFIELD
Tel: (02) 9716 2222
TTY: (02) 9716 2818
Fax: (02) 9798 3860

ILLAWARRA REGION
84 Crown Street
WOLLONGONG 2500
P.O. Box 363
WOLLONGONG EAST
2520
Tel: (02) 4226 8480
Fax: (02) 4226 8482

HUNTER REGION
79 Hunter Street
NEWCASTLE 2300
Tel: (02) 4929 4191
Fax: (02) 4929 7369

SPECIAL REPORT ON PROBLEM GAMBLING

As identified in the White Paper 'Building on our Cultural Diversity: Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000', the Ethnic Affairs Report will '... assist in identifying areas for future action by Government, and note issues which may require the development of new Ethnic Affairs Agreements'.

In line with these responsibilities, the Ethnic Affairs Commission in the 'Ethnic Affairs Report 1997' identified the issue of problem gambling as a matter of concern in ethnic affairs. The Commission noted the need for the development of a comprehensive and integrated approach to problem gambling. This could include the provision of long-term counselling for problem gamblers who speak English poorly or not at all, and on-going bilingual counselling through a 24-hour crisis line.

The Commission has continued to monitor this area, and has also commenced work on a project on problem gambling, as outlined below.

Background

Gambling is widespread in our community. It is estimated that 38% of the Australian population gamble weekly. While there may be some winners, losses incurred by individuals through gambling can be substantial. The NSW population incurred net losses of over \$3.6 billion in gambling in 1997-98. Gaming machines accounted for 80% of the losses, lotteries 11%, Casino 7% and Keno 2.7%.

It is estimated that between 0.5 – 3% of people who gamble develop a problem controlling their gambling. There is growing public concern about the level of problem gambling in the Australian community. People in ethnic communities are no different in this regard. Many ethnic communities have raised the issue of problem gambling as one of the major problems affecting their communities.

Whilst the problem is the same in all communities, some people in ethnic communities have particular difficulties in accessing services that can help them. These difficulties include: (1) lack of proficiency in English, (2) a stigma about problem gambling that prevents them seeking help, (3) a cultural tradition against discussing emotional problems, particularly with people outside of the family, (4) cultural values different to those that underpin Western concepts of counselling and (5) a lack of knowledge of available services.

Services to Assist Problem Gamblers

There are a number of services for problem gamblers including psychiatrists, psychologists, voluntary groups (eg Gamblers Anonymous), private hospitals offering in-patient treatment for severe gambling addiction and services provided by mainstream charitable organisations (eg Salvation Army) and other community organisations.

The Casino Community Benefit Fund is the principal source of funding for research, education, counselling, treatment and rehabilitation services in NSW. The Casino Community Benefit Fund comprises 2% of the gross annual gaming revenue of the Sydney Casino. This levy is part of overall taxation arrangements that apply to Star City.

Problems with Existing Services

Very few of the mainstream charitable organisations appear to use professional interpreters or provide services in languages other than English. The Casino Community Benefit Fund funds the 'G Line' which takes inquiries and crisis calls. It has counsellors who speak a range of community languages, however, this service does not provide on-going counselling and must refer callers to other services.

The Casino Community Benefit Fund has provided some grants to ethnic community organisations in the Chinese, Arabic and Vietnamese communities. However, most ethnic communities are without access to professional bilingual counsellors. Nor is accredited professional training available or provided.

Training is particularly important because it ensures that those working with problem gamblers do so professionally, using sound and proven methods, based on an understanding of the cultural basis for gambling problems.

A hotline that does not provide backup services for people of non-English speaking background could further exacerbate the associated mental and emotional problems since ongoing support is crucial to dealing effectively with gambling problems. Since it may take a great deal of courage or desperation to make the initial approach for assistance, it is essential that 'seamless' back up services are available which will increase the chances that problem gamblers will continue with counselling.

In extreme cases, as already occurs in mainstream situations, in-patient admission to other facilities may be necessary, although there is little information available on these facilities. In addition, fees may be payable which deters people whose problems with gambling have led to severe financial problems.

Action taken by Ethnic Affairs Commission

Concern about the lack of appropriate services led the Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW to put in a joint submission with Western Sydney Area Health Service for a state-wide multicultural gambling counselling service. This proposal was submitted to the Casino Community Benefit Fund for funding.

The submission proposed a comprehensive, systematic and integrated multicultural gambling counselling service over three years comprising:

- face-to-face language specific counselling in five high demand languages by professionally qualified bilingual counsellors;
- face-to-face counselling in minority languages by professionally qualified bilingual counsellors through a state-wide brokerage program;
- a consultancy and training service to mainstream gambling counselling providers to assist them in establishing culturally appropriate and accessible services;
- the establishment of peer support groups for problem gamblers;
- community education programs to raise awareness among ethnic communities of the impact of problem gambling on individuals and families.

Referrals to the service would come through the 'G Line', welfare and health services, ethnic community organisations and self-referrals.

Links would be made to research programs into gambling to provide much needed data in relation to gambling and ethnic communities.

Professional bilingual counsellors would be specifically trained in gambling counselling by an experienced gambling counsellor. The service would be delivered at the Multicultural Health Unit of Western Sydney Area Health Service and at community centres, migrant resource centres and community health centres throughout Sydney and NSW.

The submission was rejected in 1997 and again in 1998 by the Casino Community Benefit Fund. The Fund informed the Ethnic Affairs Commission that no data was available which demonstrates that there is a greater problem with gambling in ethnic communities than in the community generally and that people who are non-English speaking are a large part of the clientele of mainstream services.

Project of the Ethnic Affairs Commission

The Ethnic Affairs Commission Amendment Act makes it the responsibility of Chief Executive Officers in the public sector to ensure that services delivered by their agency are accessible and appropriate to the needs of clients who are of non-English speaking background. This responsibility specifically includes ensuring that any services funded by the NSW public sector implement the NSW Government's Ethnic Affairs Priorities Program. The Ethnic Affairs Commission is responsible for monitoring these funding agencies as well as providing them with support and advice.

Given the problems identified earlier in relation to services for problem gamblers from ethnic communities, that is, the lack of use of professional interpreters, lack of professional bilingual counsellors and lack of on-going treatment services, the Ethnic Affairs Commission has commenced a project to:

- identify what services are available to problem gamblers from ethnic communities and what services are still needed;
- clarify whether gambling counselling services funded by NSW government departments are accessible to and appropriate for problem gamblers in ethnic communities;
- report on the level of gambling treatment services provided to ethnic communities and also on what services are needed.

The project began in late 1998 and will continue through 1999.

Preliminary findings

- The Ethnic Affairs Commission has met with representatives from the Arabic Communities Council, Chinese Youth League, NSW Indo-China Chinese Association and Auburn Asian Welfare Service.

These organisations have been funded to provide bilingual counselling to problem gamblers. The Indo-China Chinese Association also provides a service negotiating with creditors. All report that people in ethnic communities with gambling problems rarely seek help early and most only do so in a financial crisis. Callers have frequently lost homes, cars and businesses. These services report that whilst they receive several calls each week, people are often reluctant to turn up for appointments, such is the stigma attached to problem gambling in some communities. These services advertise in the ethnic media to combat this stigma and encourage people to seek help.

Men of all ages account for around 80% of known cases. The services point to social isolation as a key factor in the development of gambling problems. Shift workers seem to be particularly vulnerable to developing gambling problems, as well as older women who are on their own during the day.

Poker machines in local clubs represent the most common form of problem gambling followed by the Casino.

It was evident from these discussions that the Casino Community Benefit Fund's ad-hoc approach to distribution of funding makes cooperation between funded services difficult. There is no framework for the type of services that will be funded or the geographic boundaries of services. Services feel that they may be competing for funding and are reluctant to be over-generous with the amount of information and expertise that they provide to other agencies.

Another issue is the lack of a systematic approach to training qualified gambling counsellors. There appears to be no framework to guide services on the minimum acceptable qualifications and experience for gambling counselling. This is particularly difficult for smaller ethnic communities, where there is also a short supply of qualified social workers and psychologists.

Services themselves set a high priority on the need for community education to encourage problem gamblers in ethnic communities to seek help early.

These issues identify a number of strategies that need to be implemented urgently

1. Coordination would be made easier if the Casino Community Benefit Fund developed a strategic plan for the provision of treatment services and research. This is in line with the comments made by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in its recent Report to Government: *Inquiry into Gaming in NSW*, that there is a lack of coordination of support services and research. IPART recommends the establishment of an independent Gaming and Liquor Agency to be the lead coordinator of the government's contribution to support services for gaming related problems and research and to provide appropriate Casino Community Benefit Fund administration.
2. There needs to be a strategic approach by the Casino Community Benefit Fund to developing a pool of professionally qualified bilingual counsellors.
3. This could include a multicultural marketing campaign in the ethnic media to combat the stigma, to familiarise people with the concept of counselling and to provide information on how to protect yourself from a partner's debts.

Further work

The Ethnic Affairs Commission is also looking at whether mainstream problem gambling counselling services are accessible to ethnic communities. It has sought detailed information from both the Casino Community Benefit Fund and the Department of Community Services on how they ensure that the non-government organisations they fund implement services which meet the needs of problem gamblers from ethnic communities.

A further report on this project will be provided in the *Ethnic Affairs Report 1999*.