JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON GAMBLING REFORM

INQUIRY INTO PRE COMMITMENT

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

At the moment, the machines and many of the environments in which they are located, are in the main, set up (engineered if you like) to facilitate maximum losses by patrons. However, people can be redirected through various changes to the machines/environment and pre commitment. Changes to the machines and the environment are particularly crucial if at the end of the day a voluntary system is chosen. I am sure most people do not want to cause harm to themselves or anybody else through the use of this product.

All this bickering over 'problem gamblers' about what they will and won't do, the various ways in which they are defined, the deviousness attributed to them and all the rest of it, I find really disturbing – it seems they are just putty for everyone's agenda. It is future generations who will benefit most from pre commitment once all the bugs are ironed out. Its real power lay in prevention rather than cure and I have always understood this to be the case. Although seat belts have the capacity to prevent a person sustaining horrific injuries, nothing can be done to reverse the intensified damage sustained in the event of seat belts not being worn. Seat belts are worn to keep everyone as safe as possible and wearing them does not imply that everybody is a bad driver.

I really don't understand why there is this bogging down and continual harping over current problem gamblers, it is so short sighted - if they are lost, they are lost. This might sound harsh, but a line in the sand has to be drawn somewhere and this should have been done a very long time ago. To date, there has been little or no concern (except for paying lip service) about all those gone before who have already fallen into the abyss and continue to do so while this debate goes on and on. So, to feign concern now and dispute about how it is not going to save current problem gamblers or even some at risk gamblers due to their 'deviousness'/irrationality and purported inability to set reasonable limits etc (implying full pre commitment is a waste of time and energy) is completely missing the point and is hypocritical to say the least.

Of those I know, they were not 'problem gamblers' when they started out playing these machines and I am sure this applies to many, many more. Judging by the way some people speak you could be forgiven for thinking they were. The assumption seems to be that 'recreational' gamblers are somehow an immune species, whereas others are doomed to be problem gamblers. To this I would say many of us have no problems or even much interest in other forms of 'gambling'. Consideration should be given to the idea that people can get into trouble with these machines in ways that may defy clichéd preconceptions.

As I stated previously, I played these machines throughout their evolution. What bothers me are these arguments in relation to the proposed measures being untried, untested and the 'concern' about 'unintended consequences'. To whatever degree these are legitimate concerns it must be acknowledged that this is what the public had to accept as a matter of fact in relation to these machines from way back. All these modifications to the machines/environments over the years took place literally right under our very noses with not so much a hint of concern of the 'unintended consequences' or anything else for that matter. If it is claimed some consideration was given to the escalating risks, well, this must have been of a perfunctory nature. The machines went from being quite benign to hazardous. It was like slowly adding ingredients to a fairly harmless drug which then became dangerous and problematic to many people. There were no warnings given to the public of the potential danger these changes to the machines posed. This would not have been so bad had the machines been confined to a casino.

The following comment was made by Anthony Ball from Clubs Australia in an open letter he wrote in relation to a forum done by the ABC entitled 'State of Play'.

It is claimed that poker machines are the most addictive form of gambling. The anti-gambling lobby base this claim on the fact that poker machines account for the majority of problem gamblers in Australia. This is hardly surprising given poker machines are the most popular form of gambling, accounting for 62.2 per cent of local gambling activity.

The Productivity Commissions says:

Lotto and scratchies are the most popular in terms of participation rates (lottery products including keno) account for 12% of the total share of the 19 billion dollars spent on gambling in 2008-2009

EGM's are the dominant source of gaming revenue. This is despite the fact that most Australians do not play them at all. Specifically 70-75% of adults surveyed indicated that they do not use them in any given year. EGM's account for 62.2% of the 19 billion spent on gambling (55% Clubs & hotels, 7.2% casinos) see Pages 5, 7 and 2.5.

Obviously Mr. Ball is talking about the money being spent by people who are playing the machines when he says they "are the most popular form of gambling". All lottery products combined including keno are only a fraction of EGM expenditure despite having the highest participation rates for 2 products in this category. Add to this all other forms of gambling and when pooled still they only amount to a bit over one third of the total expenditure of 19 billion dollars against approximately 12 billion dollars for poker machines. It could be reasonably argued that this is indeed an indication of their addictiveness rather than that of people being happy about throwing away more money than perhaps they otherwise would if it were something else.

One of the many positive things about full pre commitment is when you consider the amounts being talked about for cards to be used outside the system to cater to people who only want to drop small amounts into the machines. These amounts of money would be something akin to what many would spend on gambling products etc each week, or whatever. If these people start playing gaming machines more frequently (which are considered to be one of the riskiest forms of gambling) where they then find themselves spending beyond what was reasonable for them to spend on such products. Once past a certain threshold they would then be required to be within the pre commitment system. Before it got out of hand they could much more easily nip it in the bud as the means to do so would be right there at their fingertips.

I would have liked to comment more on pre commitment but at the moment the situation just seems a bit chaotic and you need time to properly go over it all. If at a later date the public are invited to comment on it again I shall do it then.

Thank you.