

CLUB INDUSTRY TO SPEAK ON FIELDING BILL TO BAN POKIES

Friday 12th September 2008. The CEO of Clubs Australia will today tell a Senate Committee at the State Library that a ban on poker machines in clubs would cause the closure of thousands of clubs across Australia and the loss of more than 50,000 jobs.

David Costello will also inform the senate committee that the incidence of problem gambling in Australia has substantially fallen in the past ten years since the only national study into gambling was conducted.

“In the past year alone, almost every state and territory government has commissioned an independent study on the level of problem gambling in their community. Each report has shown less than 1% of adults are affected.

“This is a significant achievement given it represents a reduction in the level of problem gambling of approximately 50% during the past decade. It is enormously frustrating that a handful of people within our community ignore this fact and instead quote ten year old data as being representative of 2008.

“Clubs Australia wants to introduce a range of measures which will allow problem gamblers to receive support sooner such as family intervention and mandated training for both gaming staff and problem gambling counsellors.

“There is no evidence to support Senator Fielding’s belief that problem gambling will simply disappear overnight by shutting down clubs. Does Senator Fielding know that 20% of online gamblers are problem gamblers and that just like poker machines, some people gamble too much on horses and greyhounds and sporting fixtures?

Clubs Australia Chairman Peter Newell said Senator Fielding’s bill has confused everyone.

“Senator Fielding wants poker machines banned from clubs but to remain legal in casinos and at race tracks. Where is the logic in removing poker machines from venues that return their revenue to the community while supporting their retention in casinos which give their profits to shareholders?

“Not only does Senator Fielding appear not to understand the very nature of clubs, but he also seems to believe that problem gamblers will simply stop gambling if poker machines are removed from clubs.

“Australian and international evidence indicates that the best way to reduce problem gambling is to target the individual. We need to provide problem gamblers with counsellors that examine why they are gambling to excess and help them address these issues first. You can’t treat the problem without first addressing the cause,” he said.

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Below is an extract of Gambling Research Australia’s (GRA) submission to the Senate Committee. GRA is an initiative of the Ministerial Council on Gambling.

What Senator Fielding told Federal Parliament	Fact
Around 52% of problem gamblers said they had borrowed money and not paid it back	One in five problem gamblers borrow money without paying it back.
About 36% of problem gamblers said they had sold property to raise money to bet;	Around one in ten reported selling property to finance their gambling
And one in four problem gamblers suffered divorce or separation.	One in ten problem gamblers report a split-up with partners due to gambling.
Not only are poker machines addictive for players, but they are also addictive for state and territory governments.	Many references indicate that problem gamblers gamble on many products with EGMs (electronic gaming machines) a favoured game. <u>However, for the clear majority of EGM players EGMs are not addictive.</u>
More than half of regular poker machine users in Victoria, are problem gamblers or at risk of becoming problem gamblers.	An estimated 15.2 per cent of regular gamblers in Victoria are at moderate risk. 0.97 per cent of adults are high risk/ problem gamblers
The Productivity Commission found one in ten people with significant gambling problems said they had thought of committing suicide because of their gambling.	“...simple correlations between problem gambling and adverse personal impacts, by themselves, can be misleading. The Productivity Commission’s extensive inquiry suggested that adverse impacts such as divorce, crime and depression were typically symptoms rather than causes of problem gambling.”
Problem gamblers were spending more than \$440 a week on poker machines.	The estimates from the Caraniche Report are based on a survey of 418 EGM players—not randomly selected but approached at venues (based on volunteers hence raising the issue of bias). The authors state that this was an ‘opportunistic’ sampling method. They state that: ‘the findings are suggestive and not definitive.’

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