

Research Essay

Poker machines should be banned in Victoria." Discuss.



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“Australia now has the largest number of EGMs (Electronic Gaming Machine) per head of population (Howat & Maycock, n.d., p.1).” There are more than 27,500 poker machines in Victoria. “There are currently 6.92 gaming machines per thousand adults in Victoria (Kennedy, 2006, p.29).” From 2005~2006, \$42.7 million was spent on poker machines in the city (Launchpoker, 2006). Poker machines are welcomed in pubs by club owners, and the local government (Victoria, 2008). The reactions from Poker gamblers are similar with 'Problem gambling'. (Doughney, 2006) However, this essay will argue that the administration should prohibit poker machines in Victoria for several reasons: people cannot resist the temptation to play poker machines, the results may lead to family problems and social issues, and the benefits from poker machines are dispensable part in revenue.

Firstly, people may become addicted to poker machines. Poker machines are responsible for people becoming gamblers. The designers of poker machines are trying to engage people’s attention by using new technology. For example, both coin and bank notes are available on ‘pokies’ in order to make playing poker machines easier and more convenient (Tucker, 2006). People are kept playing poker machines by music and sounds (Online Pokies, n.d). Free food and drinks, which are suggested to be banned, are also available in casinos (The Australian Greens, 2006). As a result, 83% of gamblers choose poker machine as one of the most favorite activities (Graffam & Southgate, 2005). In addition, the poker machine misleads people by the probability of winning. For instance, according to state law, at least 87% of the total amounts of funds need to be returned to players per year (Department of Justice,

2004). However, it is random for a program to choose whether the player can win the game (Department of Justice, 2004). “Poker machines are a form of entertainment that you pay to use. The longer you play a poker machine, the more likely you are to lose all the money you have wagered (Department of Justice, 2004, p.6). ”

Secondly, the effect of poker Machines have adverse effects on families. Children are victims when parents become problem gamblers in poking machines. In Bill’s story, which was shown as a typical narrative on the Problem Gambling website, Bill often indulged in poker machines over the weekend, when he used to accompany his child before (State of Victoria, 2008). The children could be neglected by their parents when they are playing poker machines (Allsop, n.d.). What is more, poker machines can cause family tension. In Bill’s case, he had no food, no money on his bank account, and he got a large amount of bills which were not paid (State of Victoria, 2008). According to Healey’s journal (2000), there are more than 50% of problem gamblers who borrowed money and never returned it, and 36% of the problem gamblers used their own belongings to sell for money for gambling. From 2004 to 2005, there were 480 personal bankrupts because of excessive gambling, which included poker gambling (Allsop, n.d.). Family breakdown is a result of playing poker machines (Steve, 2008).

Finally, playing poker machines cause social problems. Poker machines pose threats to the psychology among gamblers. In Bill’s experience, he used to enjoy his favorite activities, but he had socializing problems after he got hooked on poker machines (State of Victoria, 2008). The gamblers felt frightened, panic, guilty,

ashamed and depressed when they finished playing the pokies which disrupted the normal life for gamblers. Gamblers will not respect their value in society (Kennedy, 2006). In addition, poker machines may lead to crime. There are cases people where used up their entire savings in poker machines (Dowling, 2008). In the same news, a teller from ANZ bank was put in jail for stealing \$826,000 to use for gambling (Dowling, 2008). In one submission, which was written by Victoria, there are four stories that are related to a high amount of credit card debt, which is borrowed illegally from the bank (2008).

It has been suggested that despite the arguments outlined in the previous paragraphs, poker machines should not be banned in Victoria because the taxation revenue from poker machines is important for the government. Poker machines have been available in Victoria as local government benefits for the taxes since 1992. The revenue, which has played a part in the taxation system, has become important for the government during these years (Doughney, 2001). One of the gaming groups 'Tattersall's Ltd' warned that the budget would encounter problems if the administration removed poker machines (AAP, 2007). However, although it may be true that the government might meet difficulties by getting rid of the poker machines, it is not a good solution to pass a financial crisis to gamblers. The lowest income areas are the most profitable market for poker machines (Doughney, 2006). "The pokies just take from the poor and give to the rich," states Jackson (The Australian Greens, 2006, p.1). Furthermore, it is not the right way for administration to promote finances by introducing poker machines. The statistics shows that 75% of Victorians believed that

poker machines cause negative effects (Pandazopoulos & Hancock, 2006). 42% of poker machine profits should be given to the government (Zirnak, 2007). "The State Government has an unhealthy reliance on the gambling revenue, making Victoria one of the most gambling dependent states in Australia," states Jackson (The Australian Greens, 2006, p.1).

In conclusion, poker machines should not be allowed in Victoria. This is because 'pokies' are not only addictive for people, but also lead to family problems. Poker machines are bad for the community, and the profits from 'pokies' cannot make up the taxations for the government. It is clear from the arguments above that if the poker machines are allowed to exist, there will be more problems arising which will not only damage individuals but also cause disastrous effects for society and the economy.

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However, the real assault on poker machines is based on two claims: that pokies produce higher numbers of problem gamblers than any other form of gambling, and that problem gambling is a particularly pernicious social ill. Opponents of poker machines argue that the negative impact of problem gambling on individual gamblers and their families outweighs any benefits which may be derived from gaming.

The Productivity Commission's 1999 report found that 2.1 per cent of poker machine users were problem gamblers. While there has been no national study since then, most state-based surveys have indicated a rate of problem gambling at less than half that level. And if surveys in Queensland are typical, it is a declining rate, in that state going from 0.83 per cent in 2001 to 0.47 per cent in 2006-07. According to the PC report, problem gamblers accounted for 43 per cent of losses on the machines and, despite evidence of a declining percentage of problem gamblers, opponents of poker machines argue that the figure is an underestimate and that now half of losses come from problem gamblers, which seems unlikely, unless a more wealthy cohort of the community are now becoming problem gamblers.

One recent commentator, Charles Livingstone, listed 'financial ruin, relationship breakdown, **the neglect of children**, theft and fraud, and in some cases suicide and imprisonment' as being among the harm that poker machines cause. While it is clear that poker machines have contributed to these problems, the actual figures seem to be much lower than Livingstone implies.

In 2004-05, there were 4,372 business bankruptcies in Australia of which 63 were attributable to gambling speculation. In the same year, there were 16,324 personal bankruptcies of which 480 were gambling related. (And bear in mind that the gambling category includes all types of betting, not just poker machines.) Twice as many business bankruptcies were caused by 'failure to

keep proper books' while four times as many personal ones were caused by 'domestic discord'. Maybe Senators Fielding and Xenophon should turn their attention to accountancy courses and marriage guidance.

Interestingly, on the issue of marriage and relationships, a 2006 Relationships Australia survey placed gambling 22nd of 24 possible factors 'negatively influencing relationship with partner', with a score of just 3 per cent. Six times as many people had relationship problems due to disputes over housework and three times as many complained about the 'influence of in-laws'. So while pokie critics stress about poker machine spin rates, perhaps they could do more good if they worried about in-law visitation rates.

As one of the most regulated industries in the nation, the gambling industry has been forced to take a number of measures designed to ameliorate the problems caused by excessive gambling. Given the range of voluntary measures also taken by industry in recent years-codes of conduct, staff training, exclusion policies-it is obvious that the gaming industry knows that it needs to do everything it can about problem gambling if it is to have a viable future.

Rage against the machines

Earlier this year Senator Fielding announced a 'bold plan' to rid pubs and clubs of poker machines. His plan, if implemented, would deny many Australians-particularly older Australians-their trip to a pub or club, a trip involving a cheap and wholesome meal, a couple of drinks. The chance to put a few dollars into a poker machine is a highlight of the week, with transport to the venue often provided as well. Many of these people would not have the means, or the desire, to travel to the far away casinos or racetracks where Fielding wants to corral pokies. They like going somewhere local, where the staff and other customers know them, and they feel secure. So when Fielding takes their pokies away, first the small flutter they enjoy would be denied them, next to go would be the subsidised meals and drinks, and finally the club or pub could also close denying these citizens a

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Poker machine removal to 'impact profit'

November 30, 2007 - 11:44AM

Gaming group Tattersall's Ltd has warned the removal of poker machines in accordance with new Victorian government regulations will likely have an impact on profit this financial year.

The Victorian government has introduced new regulations that require Tattersall's to remove 283 gaming machines from January 1 under a regional caps policy.

Tattersall's managing director and chief executive Dick McIlwain said on Friday the company would struggle to exceed the \$288.58 million operating profit delivered in fiscal 2007 following the machine removal.

"It will be difficult for the business to exceed the operating profit recorded last financial year, notwithstanding the effort we have made to comply with these new restrictions, including a \$27 million investment in new machines and games during the first half," Mr McIlwain told shareholders at the company's annual general meeting in Melbourne.

Mr McIlwain said race wagering had begun to recover after its "exceedingly strong growth" was stalled by the equine influenza outbreak.

"Race wagering sales have declined by seven per cent year to date," Mr McIlwain said.

"They have begun the long road back to positive territory ... this recovery will accelerate when metropolitan racing resumes in NSW and Queensland tomorrow."

Mr McIlwain forecast first half earnings to be \$5 million lower than the \$69.8 million delivered in the previous corresponding period last year.

"We expect that the first half profit shortfall of around \$5 million will be substantially recovered in the second half even if sales are marginally behind the level set last financial year," Mr McIlwain added.


"The second half of fiscal 2008 is expected to see a recovery in the wagering business while Tatts pokies will struggle under the weight of new government restrictions."

In October, the Victorian government awarded 10-year lotteries licences to both Tattersall's and Greek-based gaming company Intralot, breaking Tattersall's 54-year monopoly of the market.

Tattersall's will continue to operate lottery products such as Tattslotto, Powerball, Super7's OzLotto, Super 66 and The Pools, which comprise around 85 per cent of total lotteries sales in Victoria.

Tattersall's shares closed up 11 cents on Friday at \$4.00.

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Looks can be deceiving

Despite their physical appearance, the only thing that modern electronic poker machines have in common with old-fashioned mechanical poker machines is that, over time, they will return less money to players than is put into them.

Modern electronic poker machines are controlled by computer programs. They are faster and provide many more game options than the old 'one-armed bandits' ever could.

How the machines work

Most poker machines in Australia have five 'reels' and three visible rows of symbols. Each time you play a poker machine, the computer program controls which symbols appear. Nothing you do can influence the symbols that appear.

The computer's choice of symbol is *entirely* random and no symbol is more likely to appear than any other.

The symbol chosen for each reel is also determined *independently* of each other reel.

Poker machines cannot react to the frequency of wins or losses. The games operate randomly at all times no matter how many wins or losses have occurred in the past. A machine that has not paid out for some time has no higher chance of paying out in the future.

Nothing you do can influence the symbols that appear when the reels stop spinning.

Return to player

The 'return to player' setting is the average amount won by players as a share of the cumulative amount staked. By law, Victorian poker machine venues and the casino must return to players at least 87 per cent of the total amount that is bet each year.

Except by some colossal fluke, no single player will experience the 'return to player' setting during a play session. It takes millions of games for a machine to tend towards its 'return to player' setting.

There is no requirement for an individual poker machine to actually return the expected rate in any given period of play.

The next time you gamble, know the facts...

Poker machines are a form of entertainment that you pay to use. The longer you play a poker machine, the more likely you are to lose all the money you have wagered.

1 **Fiction:** Poker machines are more likely to pay out at particular times of the day.

Fact: *The result of each game you play is entirely random and is not affected by anything going on around you. The game has no way of knowing the amount of money the machine contains.*

2 **Fiction:** You can confuse poker machines into paying out by altering play patterns.

Fact: *No matter what you do, the computer program determining the result does not change. The machine responds only to you pushing the button.*

Governments are now correspondingly more dependent on poker machine taxes. The factors presented in the first paragraph are the fundamental cause. All governments have endeavoured to give business lower taxes. The Commonwealth squeezed the states and, inter alia, introduced a GST. The states themselves competed to lower the supposed 'business tax burden' and to reduce borrowing and repay debt. As the community lost more on poker machines, correspondingly higher pokie tax revenues were locked in to state budgets. Victoria's accelerated integration into the pokie partnership makes its dependency appear all the more stark. Indeed the combination of a high rate of pokie tax and reduced state revenues from other sources means it is now the state government most dependent on gambling taxes

Before moving on to discuss this result let us, first, restate what we already know about poker machine losses and, second, introduce an apparently small but significant finding from other recent research. Two important facts have already emerged from independent research: machines are concentrated in municipalities that have a lower than average socio-economic status; and average losses *per adult* are concentrated in these municipalities. Figure 4 shows how losses are distributed across metropolitan Melbourne's local government areas (LGAs), which are ranked from lowest to highest by socioeconomic status.⁴ The Productivity Commission referred extensively to the

relationship depicted in the figure in its *Draft Report: Australia's Gambling Industries* (PC, 1999). It noted:

It remains the case that, in Victoria at least, gaming machine densities are higher in socially and/or economically disadvantaged areas and that, in turn, this is likely to mean that people in those areas spend [i.e. lose] more on gaming machines than people in other areas ...

Whatever the reasons, where socially and economically disadvantaged areas do have a high density of gaming machines, there will be implications for the local community ...

Further, it is possible that, in communities that already suffer from significant socio-economic disadvantage, overlaying an additional source of socio-economic stress

4 Socioeconomic status here is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) socioeconomic indexes for areas (SEIFA) index of disadvantage (DIS). This index is based on a number of variables related to the economic and social characteristics of families and households, as well as personal education qualifications and occupation. High status areas obtain high index numbers and vice versa. Rankings for the Melbourne metropolitan LGAs range from Maribyrnong at 887.680 to Boroondara at 1133.77. The SEIFA(DIS) average for Melbourne is 1024.839. It should be noted that we have defined Melbourne here and in all subsequent data to exclude the City of Melbourne proper. This eliminates the distorting effects of venues in the Central Business District. Charles Livingstone was the first to draw attention to the association represented in Figure 1.

This might be by dramatic reforms that change the character of poker-machine provision (fewer machines, fewer lines, slower spins, smart-card tracking, smaller ‘bets’ etc.). If this is unacceptable to the industry then the lesser evil would be prohibition, until such time that the machines could be introduced according to the precautionary principle: i.e. prove that the product and its method of provision are safe. Altogether the worst possible state of affairs would be the status quo.

We do not need further research in order to have answers sufficient for policy development and implementation. Of course, while the status quo prevails continuing psychiatric/psychological and neurobiological research will be needed to understand the problem and to help people who use poker machines in ways that harm them.

Mesothelioma and asbestosis, too, require research to help in treatment and to understand their specific pathologies and cellular causes. However, do we really need research to tell us what is their first-order cause? No, we know the answer to that. Exposure to asbestos causes asbestosis and mesothelioma. Ban asbestos products and remove the last vestiges of asbestos from our workplaces and homes and we will defeat asbestos disease.

Similarly, **poker machines cause poker-machine caused harms and associated ‘problem gambling’ behaviors.** For policy, we know enough.

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Pokies scourge creates new criminal class

Jason Dowling
February 17, 2008

POKER machines are creating a new criminal class ? pushing law-abiding Victorians into a life of crime to feed gambling addictions that are tearing families apart while the State Government reaps a \$1 billion-a-year tax jackpot.

People with no prior criminal records are being jailed for years after succumbing to pokie addictions and resorting to fraud, theft and embezzlement, often after gambling away their life savings.

In one case, a woman was murdered by a colleague for a shop's takings. The killer then went to the casino and within four hours of the May 2006 killing had lost a third of the money.

Lawyers say the Government must act urgently to address the gambling crisis which saw Victorians lose \$2.5 billion last year.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd last week expressed concern that gambling tax contributed more than \$5 billion to the states' and territories' annual revenue.

The State Government is set to announce new 20-year poker machine licences within weeks ? a once-in-a-generation chance to reduce the number and accessibility of gaming machines, according to Opposition gaming spokesman Michael O'Brien.

He said the State Government was ignoring "the social cost and the economic cost through the criminal justice system, through the health system, through the social welfare system that gambling addiction creates".

His views are backed by senior lawyers. Bernie Balmer, who represented Kate Jamieson, a former Bendigo Bank loans officer and a mother of two who stole \$3.5 million to feed her gambling addiction and is now in jail, says poker machines are white-anting ordinary families.

"Once upon a time you didn't have this offending in court ? these are mums who have been dragged away from their kids for four years," he said. "The community have got to support them in jail ? husbands become single parents, it's just bullshit."

[A Melbourne-based ANZ bank teller who stole \\$826,000 after gambling away her savings was recently jailed for 4? years.](#)

Last week, it was alleged in a Victorian parliamentary gambling licence inquiry that a former Tattersalls chief executive had said in 2002 that "he was going to ? screw the problem gamblers for as long as he could until he was forced to stop by government legislation".

The political party Family First is trying to fast-track such legislation. It entered a bill in Federal Parliament on Thursday aimed at phasing out pokies from pubs and clubs and limiting them to racetracks and casinos.

Independent senator-elect Nick Xenophon, of South Australia, who will meet with Mr Rudd to

- 68 per cent of participants had only one preferred gambling activity, and 23 per cent of participants had two preferred gambling activities.
- 83 per cent of participants identified poker machines as one of their preferred gambling activities.

The findings suggest that the development of a gambling related problem was associated with an increase in the number of times community services were used per year, the range of community service types used, and also created a new pool of community service users who had previously not used community services. This is both an upward and an outward expansion of the use of community services. Therefore, gambling has not only impacted on the gambler and his or her family, but the impact has extended to community services organisations, in terms of the number of times community services were used, the number of people using services, the types of community services used and the types of resources used.

Stage Three: Survey of Community Services Staff

The third stage of this study was a survey of community services staff in Eastern Melbourne.

- Questionnaires were received from 44 staff of community services organisations in Eastern Melbourne. These staff worked within family, health and welfare services.
- The survey asked about any methods that the service had to identify clients with a gambling related problem, the perceived impact of gambling on the service, suggestions to improve service delivery, and feelings when dealing with a client with a suspected gambling related problem.

Key Findings:

- Amongst the 44 respondents, none reported methods in place specifically for identifying gambling related problems. Gambling was identified only when the client self identified as having a gambling related problem. There is therefore limited capacity for community services organisations to collect data related to the impact of gambling on community services.
- There were several perceived impacts on community service organisations: 15 people suggested an increased demand on services and resources (34%); 15 suggested 'I don't know' (34%); 14 suggested not much of an impact (32%); 5 suggested families and partner of gambler require more support (11%); 2 suggested staff can get frustrated (4%); and 2 suggested clients can get aggressive if they don't receive the required assistance (4%).
- There were several suggestions given to improve service delivery to people with gambling related problems: 13 people suggested more training about gambling related problems and how to identify them (30%); 11 suggested improved knowledge of other services, better access to more knowledgeable providers, and easier client access to other community services including Gamblers Help (25%), 2 suggested a need to quantify the problem (5%), and 1 suggested more time with each client (3%).

GAMBLING IN AUSTRALIA

Participation and frequency

FORM OF GAMBLING	Total Participation (%)	Less than Once a month	1-3 times a month (%)	1-3 times a week (%)	More than 3 times a week (%)
Poker or gambling machines	38	62	25	12	2
Racing	35	71	14	13	3
Lotto/other lottery game	60	25	24	45	6
Instant scratch tickets	47	51	34	14	1
Keno	16	72	20	7	1
Casino table games	10	83	15	2	0
Bingo	5	49	22	23	2
Sports betting	6	54	24	23	0
Played an internet casino game	0.4	63	13	21	3
Private gambling	5	66	23	9	2
Any gambling activity	82	27	25	35	12

THE BALANCE SHEET

Benefits and costs of gambling by mode of gambling 1997-98

FORM OF GAMBLING	NET CONSUMER BENEFIT \$M	SOCIAL COSTS OF GAMBLING \$M	NET BENEFIT \$M
Racing	623-653	219-1,008	(385)-444
Lotteries	1,378-1,812	121-576	802-1,492
Gaming machines	2,746-3,212	569-2,704	42-2,643
Casino gaming	540-725	94-448	92-631
Other	16-21	97-463	(446)-(75)
All gambling	5,353-6,304	1,094-5,201	152-5,209

Figures in brackets represent a loss

FINANCIAL IMPACT

on problem gamblers in past year

	YES	NO
Borrowed money without paying back	51.6	48.4
Borrowed from loan sharks	7.4	92.5
Bounced cheques deliberately	18.1	81.9
Sold property to gamble	36.0	64.0

WHAT PROBLEM GAMBLERS GIVE UP

(as revealed in counselling)

WENT WITHOUT	Food	Savings	Paying Bills	Car	Holidays	Entertainment	Restaurant Meals
Always	4.0	21.2	1.5	16.0	25.7	18.4	24.2
Often	11.8	31.1	7.3	15.2	20.4	23.6	22.0
Sometimes	27.2	29.9	12.3	28.5	23.0	31.8	22.7
Rarely	16.5	6.8	12.3	10.3	9.1	8.2	12.1
Never	40.4	11.0	66.7	30.0	21.9	18.0	18.9

Source: Productivity Commission



depressed as a result of their gambling; 37 per cent had considered suicide, while 11.2 per cent had attempted to kill themselves.

"We believe this report shows gambling is a major health issue with serious policy ramifications," Mr Fitzgerald said.

Federal Treasurer Peter Costello, who commissioned the report, said the findings were important and should be "carefully considered by all forms of government".

The report finds 2.3 per cent of adult Australians have significant gambling problems, losing more than \$12,000 each a year

Among several initiatives, the commission calls for an overhaul of gambling machine operations and "wealth warning signs" in gambling lounges, and for licensed premises to be able to ban problem punters.

Although no formal policy findings are made, it also calls for all States to separate their gambling policy and finance arms and to set up independent gambling authorities to oversee the running of the industry.

The Australian
20 July 1998, p.1

Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia
community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008.

Please see below our submission which focuses specifically on a case for continuing the ban on poker machines in community hotels in Western Australia. Indeed the arguments also apply for a similar ban Australia-wide.

Sincerely

Peter Howat, Professor; Centre for Behavioural research in Cancer Control, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia

Bruce Maycock, Assoc Professor;
Western Australian Centre for Health Promotion Research, School of Public Health, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia

A case for keeping poker machines out of the WA community.

Abstract

The numbers of Electronic gaming machines (EGMs) or poker machines have expanded in many parts of the world, particularly in Australia. Most States and Territories in Australia now have poker machines in casinos as well as in numerous community clubs and hotels (bars).

Australia now has the largest number of EGMs per head of population.

The amount of money lost and the extent of gambling related problems have increased in relation to the increases in EGMs. Western Australia (WA) is the only State that has legislation forbidding EGMs in community clubs and hotels. Consequently it has the lowest rate of gambling related problems in the country. Public health advocates have had to work hard over several years to convince politicians that lifting the ban would result in significant community costs related to increased gambling rates.

ACTION AREA 01

Putting the pieces back together: a problem gambler's story

A year ago the only relationship in Kate's life was the all-consuming one with a poker machine at her favourite club.

In the six months that followed until she picked up a phone to get help, the rest of her life simply fell away.

The intensity of the relationship plunged Kate into turmoil. By her own admission, Kate was in a dark pit and unable to control her gambling or her life.

Fear, panic, guilt, shame and depression followed each lengthy session at the pokies.

"I started gambling because it seemed to give some release from the stress and anxiety in my life. I had paid off my house and I had money to spare. But it very quickly went from me wanting entertainment after work to looking to gamble.

"I would be thinking about it all the time at work. I just couldn't wait to get there. If I could, I would be there every day 24 hours a day."

She kept her relationship with the poker machines a deep secret.

A decision to return to study part-time was the lifeline Kate threw herself.

"Everything I valued had been undermined." wanted this to stop and, one particularly black day, I called Gambler's Help Line, looking for a quick answer to my problems.

"Making the call wasn't so hard because I was talking to someone in confidence and they understood. Discovering that there was no magic pill that would make everything right for me was hard."

Kate began regular counselling with Gambler's Help and over 12 months has been able to put the pieces of her life back together "just as if they were a puzzle".

"Counselling is the long-term solution. You can get help with techniques to limit your gambling when it is out of control. But, for me, counselling has been a great personal breakthrough. I am becoming aware of what caused my gambling to get out of control in the first place."

Kate is still in counselling and her infrequent visits with friends to the pokies now fit the category of responsible gambling.

"...counselling has been a great personal breakthrough. I am becoming aware of what caused my gambling to get out of control in the first place."

Gaming Machine Caps Review Panel.
The Panel found that the Government's regional caps policy was an important component of its ongoing problem gambling strategy.

A separate Supplement on the Government's response to the Panel's recommendations has been produced in association with this strategy.

What we will do

New regional caps

The Government committed to double the number of capped regions and extend the boundaries of the existing metropolitan capped regions in 2002.

The Government will implement this commitment and cap gaming machine numbers in more communities at risk from the harm caused by problem gambling. Nineteen regions across metropolitan and regional Victoria will be capped, increasing the number of local government areas covered by regional caps from 14 to 20.

The maximum number of gaming machines permitted in capped regions will be 10 machines per thousand adults.

The Government will also freeze the density of gaming machines in capped regions that currently have below 10 machines per thousand adults at their current density level to prevent further growth of gaming machines in these communities.

Gaming machines in Victoria: the facts

- [A maximum of 27,500 gaming machines are permitted to operate in Victoria outside the Melbourne casino.](#)
- At 30 June 2006, 27,147 gaming machines were located in 521 venues.
- [There are currently 6.92 gaming machines per thousand adults in Victoria.](#)
- Victoria has the lowest density of gaming machines of any state or territory in Australia, apart from Western Australia which has no EGMs outside the casino*.
- Victoria's density of gaming machines is almost one third that of NSW and almost half that of QLD and SA.
- 248 hotels have gaming machines, which equates to just 13 per cent of total licensed hotels in Victoria (1,963).
- 272, or just 13 per cent of the 2,117 licensed clubs in Victoria operate gaming machines.
- Growth in spending on gaming machines has declined to an average annual rate of 1.9 per cent over the past three years, compared with 16 per cent in the three years to 1999.
- Spending is now \$3 billion lower than it would have been had spending continued to grow at 16 per cent.
- Around \$1 billion was collected in gaming machine taxes in 2005-06.
- Gambling taxes comprised 7.1 per cent of all government revenues in 1998-99. In 2006-07, gambling taxes will contribute just 4.8 per cent.
- Around 85 per cent of the Government's gaming machine taxes – or \$4.4 billion in the six years to 2005-06 – were allocated to health and community projects across every region in Victoria.

* Australian Gambling Statistics

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News Item

Poker Machine Spending Up in Victoria

By launchpoker, Aug 15, 2006

The Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation has estimated that during the 2005 to 2006 financial year gamblers have spent nearly \$43 million on gambling and poker machines in the City of Greater Bendigo. **The findings, recently released, show that the electronic gambling machine spending in the city was \$42.7 million**, this is a jump of over \$2.5 million dollars from the previous financial year, 2004 to 2005. Council of Gamblers Help Services Executive Officer Eddie Chapman commented that estimated 40% of poker machine gamblers are addicts, and that the rise in numbers is a problem. A counter argument coming from Ministry for Gaming John Pandazopoulos pointed out that the growth rate was the third lowest since the poker machines introduced in Victoria in 1992.



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Poker Pro Admits Multi-Accounting Sin

By launchpoker, Aug 31, 2008

In the world of online poker to multi-account means to have more than one account at one poker room, and this is considered a very bad thing. [Read More](#)

PokerStars Rocks the Boat with RBS

By launchpoker, Oct 13, 2006

When the United States Congress passed a bill that will likely be signed into law in the coming weeks that says that banking institutions should not allow transactions to poker websites from US customers, RBS said they will be happy to comply. [Read More](#)

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Online Pokies - Your Online Guide to Pokies & Poker Machine Information

OnlinePokies.com

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It is estimated that 80% of problem gamblers in Australia play the pokies. Slot machines are said to be the most addictive form of gambling. This is partly due to the way the games work and also due to the music and sounds. The games are developed with an aim to keep you playing.

Because pokies are so widespread in Australia the amount of problem gamblers is increasing at a rapid rate. Current estimates put the number at around 300,000 people who lose an average of \$12,000 per year.

It took a long time for the state governments to act on this information. In 1995 they put a freeze on the amount of poker machines for each state and in 2000 they brought in new laws restricting the advertising of pokies. Considering the fact that it is the governments who make the most money out of the pokies these measures have not made much of a difference.

Help for problem gamblers

If you suspect that you have a gambling problem there are many ways to get help. Below are 20 questions from Gamblers Anonymous. If you answer yes to five or more of the questions you should consider seeking help.

1. Do you ever play until you run out of money?
2. Do you ever play for longer than you had originally planned?
3. Have you ever borrowed money to gamble with?
4. Have you ever sold anything to finance your gambling?
5. After losing do you have an urge to play again to win back your losses?
6. After winning do you have an urge to win more?
7. Do you ever lose time from work due to gambling?
8. Does gambling reduce your ambitions for life?
9. Do you ever feel remorse after a gambling session?
10. Has your gambling ever made your life at home unhappy?
11. Has gambling effected your reputation?
12. Do you ever gamble to solve financial problems?
13. Are you reluctant to use gambling money for other expenses?
14. Has gambling ever made you careless of your welfare or your family's?
15. Do negative emotions give you an urge to gamble?
16. Does good fortune give you an urge to play the pokies?
17. Have you ever considered harming yourself as a result of gambling?
18. Have you ever committed an illegal act to finance gambling?
19. Does gambling cause you to have difficulty sleeping?
20. Do you ever gamble to escape thoughts of worry?

How to Get Help

The following links all lead to sites that offer help for people who are problem gamblers. If you answered yes to more than five of the questions listed above then we highly recommend that you visit the sites below to see how they can help you regain control over your gambling.

Gamblers Anonymous (www.gamblersanonymous.org.au)

Problem Gambling Victoria (www.problemgambling.vic.gov.au)

Problem Gambling SA (www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au)

Centrelink Support Services (www.centrelink.gov.au)

Gambling Treatment (www.stvincents.com.au)

Pathological Gambling category at Dmoz.org (www.dmoz.org)

Gambling Addiction category at Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com)

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Record: 1

Title: ANTI-POKIES PARTY FORMS.

Source: BRW; 10/26/2006, Vol. 28 Issue 42, p37-37, 1p, 1 color

Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: *POLITICAL parties -- Platforms
*GAMBLING industry

Geographic Terms: VICTORIA
NAICS/Industry Codes813940 Political Organizations
713210 Casinos (except Casino Hotels)
713290 Other Gambling Industries

People: PANDAZOPOULOS, John
HANCOCK, Linda

Abstract: The article reports on the founding of the People Power Party in response to the gambling problem in Victoria. The state's Minister for Racing and Gaming John Pandazopoulos has released a series of reports from the Gambling Research Panel which found that 75% of Victorians believed that gaming machines are harmful. Linda Hancock, who will represent People Power in the November 2006 elections, stated that they want the Poker machines be pulled back and regulate gambling in the state thereafter.

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problemgambling

Bill's story

Bill's story

My name's Bill, I work in the construction industry. I have a lot of hobbies like gardening, DIY, relaxing in front of the TV, watching DVD's or listening to music. I grew up in the 70's so went through the era of Pink Floyd, Skyhooks, Beatles all of those things but I think Bowie is the one that stuck with me over the years. I like cooking as well, I'll often come home and cook something elaborate. I also mentor a young child on Saturdays, which keeps me busy on Saturday mornings.

An average day at work I suppose would be answering emails of which I get probably 50 or 60 a day that are mostly budget related and going through and working out what the important ones are and dealing with people's issues for them in relation to budgets.

Gambling for me started when I went with a group of people to the casino which was in the old casino in Melbourne, newly opened. I'd actually been into poker machine venues before that and was never interested, never put any money into them, but went into the casino and the atmosphere and the people and the feeling was what dragged me in. Going back a few times it became a habit of going in there every Saturday night and then it went to Friday night as well as Saturday and it just went from there. If you're in a bit of a negative frame of mind to go into something like that where there's all of these positives, supposedly all of these positives, it's a really good feeling. It wasn't until that point in the casino that I actually started playing them and thought this is fun?

The trap from my point of view was the first win I had which was \$500 in the casino, initially I'd just been winning small amounts or losing, constantly losing and to get that win I was trapped, I was hooked. It wasn't until later on that I actually started realising how much I was losing and how much I was wasting on the machines.

When my father passed away I was only very young. I was six. It really influenced my life. From the time when he died it influenced my life. I was always very, very negative, I was always relatively depressed, I always felt very, very lonely because I'd been abandoned basically. I had that feeling of being abandoned constantly. And that feeling of abandonment actually started going into the relationships that I was getting involved in so I was never really fully committed because I thought they were going to disappear. Initially, when I moved six years ago, I was not only moving for work, but was also trying to escape a relationship that wasn't working. It wasn't argumentative or violent or anything just was nonexistent, just two people had got together who weren't suited to each other and the relationship was going nowhere and I was looking for avenues to fill that void and gambling became one of those avenues.

To get hooked on poker machines I think for me happened very, very quickly. Initially you'd have one machine that was your favourite and if someone was on it you'd go to your second favourite and third favourite and so on. You wouldn't leave the machine, if you had to leave the machine for any reason you'd reserve it. The amount that I'd spend each time would be anything up to \$600 at a time and that could be several times a week. Constantly you'd think it's gotta win within the next hour or so? To have a big win, look, I played the poker machines for 5, 6 years, actually no it'd be more than that, it'd be 10 years, and I could count the amount of large wins on one hand.

I was frequently in denial, if someone said to me that I had a problem with gambling I'd completely avoid it. You got the point where you didn't even realise that you were lying. Someone would say at work here were you, you were supposed to be doing such and such? and you'd just lie outright. It got to the point where I was using my credit card and going and getting cash on the credit card so that it wasn't showing up on the joint credit card that I was spending the amount of money that I was. I would not eat properly because it was more important to gamble than to eat. I couldn't concentrate for more than about an hour at work before I started thinking about gambling. I'd become a recluse. I didn't see people, I didn't talk to people. I didn't like being at work talking to people. I didn't like answering



Bill's issues with gambling were rooted in grief and depression.

the phone. That's pretty severe depression. You can't tell someone to stop, they've got to want to do it themselves, and it took me a while to get to that point.

The moment that finally made me do something about it, do something about the gambling issue was when I had a \$13,000 dollar credit card debt, when I had no food in the house, when I had a whole pile of bills sitting on the bench to pay and I couldn't pay them, not even with a credit card and my bank balance, my savings account bank balance was zero. I had to do something. If I had have gone on any longer I can't imagine what would have happened, I don't want to imagine what would have happened, because it was pretty bad.

have happened, I don't
initiative - Victoria: The
Place To Be

I initially found the number for Gambler's Help, I think it was actually in one of the poker machine venues, the fear of actually going in there in the first place was the hardest part of it. I look back on it now and say I'm glad I went and got help, I needed to get help, I could not have done it myself? so someone had to help me work through this. It turned out that the person who I was seeing was very experienced and very supportive and helped me deal through the issues, I wouldn't say quickly, but we worked through things in a systematic and very effective manner.

Not gambling has improved my life substantially. Not only do I have money now and I can go out and buy, well, food for a start that I couldn't do before, I've got involved in the community, I've created a lot of friends, I've done that mainly through the men's support group that I've been going to and it's just been very, very positive. My self esteem's lifted substantially, so I now feel a lot better about life and work and living.

If what I've said, you can relate too then go and do something about it, don't, don't sit there and feel sorry for yourself, you've got to actually work through it. You're in control of it, no one else.

[« back to testimonials list](#)



FAMILY FIRST



Steve Fielding Family First Senator for Victoria

Senator Steve Fielding
FAMILY FIRST Senator
FAMILY FIRST Senator for Victoria

Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008

Second Reading Speech

14 February 2008

Family First has today declared war on poker machines with the introduction of the *Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008*. It is a bold new plan that will see pokies phased out of pubs and clubs and restricted to racetracks and casinos.

Everyday Australians are ambushed by the temptation of poker machines at local pubs and clubs. Family First believes pokies should be restricted to racetracks and casinos, which are dedicated gambling venues where people go to have a flutter, not community venues where families go to eat dinner.

Family First bill phases in a new federal tax on poker machines in pubs and clubs to push pokies out of community venues. The tax will be phased in over a number of years to allow these businesses to wean themselves off pokie profits. All revenue from the tax will be held in a trust fund to help community and sporting groups through the transition.

Poker machines have inflicted a devastating toll on thousands of families, particularly children, and the problem is not going to go away. About 293,000 people have a significant gambling problem in Australia and about 85% of problem gamblers use poker machines.

As the *Herald Sun* editorial said this week **for all the flashing lights, the dark reality for problem gamblers is often crime, social dislocation and family breakdown.**

www.stevefielding.com.au

The Greens call for cutbacks in electronic gaming machines

3/11/06 Greens candidate for Narracan District, Kate Jackson, says the the costs of problem gambling are directly related to easy access to poker machines.

"In State Parliament after November 25, the Greens will work to cut the number of electronic gaming machines in Victoria by two thirds, when current contracts expire," said Kate Jackson. "Easy access to ATMs and high credit limits for cash withdrawals make it all too easy to spend too much money."

"The State Government has an unhealthy reliance on gambling revenue, making Victoria one of the most gambling dependent states in Australia."
said Kate Jackson.

"The Greens are concerned that the social costs of problem gambling lead to impoverishment, violence, depression, homelessness, suicide, relationship and family breakdown," said Kate Jackson. "That's why we will work for the strict regulation and containment of the gambling industry."

"The pokies just take from the poor and give to the rich," said Kate Jackson. "We've got to stop this."

In State Parliament after November 25, the Greens will:

- remove two-thirds of poker machines and establish a state-wide cap, when contract expire,
- remove all poker machines from 'convenience gambling' locations, such as shopping centres,
- remove ATMs from all gambling venues except in country towns with no other accessible machine,
- remove banknote acceptors from poker machines and return them to coin-only operation,
- reduce the maximum credit balance from \$9,900 to \$200,
- fund gambling research and problem gambling services.

For more information and comment please contact:

Kate Jackson on (mob) 0439 832 438

or

Dave Lane on (mob) 0419 156 213

-ends-

The Greens say no to more pokies and yes to less

28-08-2006 East Gippsland has more poker machines per person than the Victoria average, yet not only do the Nationals want to leave all those machines in place, they are also expecting the gambling industry to look after problem gamblers.

Geoff de Jonge, Greens candidate for Gippsland East, said that the Nationals' plan will make no difference to the gambling blight on our community.

"The social costs of gambling are huge," said Geoff de Jonge "Tens of thousands of Victorians have a gambling problem and for each of these, at least five more people are adversely affected."

"Poverty, depression, suicide, relationship breakdown, fraud and violence are all consequences of problem gambling," said Geoff de Jonge. "Problem gamblers are often hard to identify and usually afraid to seek help

The Greens policy of slashing machine numbers by 20,000 (two thirds) will remove some of the temptation. Removing pokies from convenience gambling sites will also help," said Geoff de Jonge.

The Greens in state parliament after November 25 will also work to introduce other measures to tackle gambling problems. These include:

requiring payouts over \$250 to be by cheque
Removal of ATMs from all gambling venues, except in country towns with no other accessible ATM - and ensure EFTPOS facilities at venues do not permit cash withdrawals,

Removal of banknote acceptors from machines, to return them to coin-only operation,

Reduction of the maximum credit balance (i.e. how much can be inserted into a machine) from \$9,949 to \$200, and

Ban the provision of free food and drink in gambling venues.

"We must take urgent action on problem gambling; it won't just go away," concluded Geoff de Jonge.

For more information and comment, please contact:

Geoff de Jonge on (mob) 0438 567 516

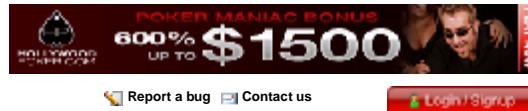
or

Dave Lane on (mob) 0419 156 213

Background:

The Greens gambling policy can be found at

<http://www.vic.greens.org.au/about-the-greens/policy/GamblingPledge>


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Victoria Government Criticized for Poker Machines

A government-commissioned study suggested that the Victoria government unable to cope with the social risks of addictive [poker](#) machine use.

Sensitive to criticism about the creeping tide of poker machine addiction in the state, the Bracks government Victorian Gambling Research Panel undertook a study of "The Changing Electronic Gaming Machine Industry and Technology". Published in June 2006, the study is ostensibly about technological aspects of the electronic gaming machine industry in Victoria.

Money for the research came out of the Community Support Fund and, indirectly therefore, gambling industry tax inflows. The proponent was the Australian Institute for Primary Care at La Trobe University in the capital.

Interestingly, the commission also interviewed self-confessed "problem gamblers". For the truth is the human factor serves as the underpinning of this extensive review of technological innovations. The researchers took into account both gambling regulation and a "special kind of consumption... de-materialised and potentially continuous with no apparent physical limitation." Gambling is, in short, addictive.

The Institute observed that technology gives the gaming and wagering industry every advantage. Continuous product and design development, for example, makes trying a new video poker machine model a compelling experience. Secondly, the fact that poker machines in Victoria are all linked to a wide area network makes marketing opportunities all too easy to collate and act on. New model or not, poker machines bear features that increase the likelihood of compulsive use. These include 'free' spin features, multi-line betting, and [accepting both coins and bank notes](#). As well, the researchers blamed venue operators for giving customers ready access to ATMs.

The playing public is not adequately informed, the research panel went on to say, that poker machine technology effectively lengthens the odds against their getting "faire returns."

But perhaps the most alarming datum was that residents of economically disadvantaged neighborhoods were prone to spend much more on poker machines. That this makes sociological sense - low wage earners have fewer options for improving their lives - does not prevent a remorselessly high concentration of poker machines in such residential areas. More than any other, it is this finding that must have compelled Victoria Gaming Minister John Pandazopoulos to declare earlier this month a cap on establishing more poker machines in relatively destitute zones.

A question that must be addressed, the researchers note, is whether the authorities are able to establish a judicious balance between widespread use of poker machines for entertainment and "management of the social harms" brought about by such consumption. Sadly, this is not the case.

In the end, the Institute offers the wan hope that since the government lacks a "real commitment" to redressing social harms, technological innovations could be found that minimize the risks of indulging in poker machines.

August 01, 2006
John Tucker

The client has developed a severe dental disorder which has only increased his depression and capacity to return to the work force.

Financial assistance has been given to enable his dental work to be undertaken and thereby increasing his self esteem and improving his work projects. The client is continuing to receive ongoing problem gambling counselling.

Story 4:

The client is 50 years old and lives in an outer suburb of Melbourne with her husband. Her children are now all adults. She was not born in Australia and has a low education level and speaks minimal English. For many years, she worked as a factory hand, however a little 12 over months ago she was made redundant from her job. After a period of having no work, she was rehired as a casual worker at the same factory where she worked previously.

The client recently sought assistance from a Financial Counsellor who discovered she had approximately \$100,000 debt from 12 credit sources. Of the 12, 10 were credit cards. Five cards had a credit level of \$5,000, three had a credit level of \$15,000 and two had credit levels of \$20,000.

While the client has used the credit cards for everyday living expenses, the debts have mostly been incurred as a result of a gambling addiction. Her main gambling activity has been poker machines, aided by the ready access to ATM machines within the gambling venue. The client frequently made multiple cash advance withdrawals on the one day in order to service her addiction. With each successive visit to the gaming venue, the amount withdrawn from the credit cards as a cash advance quickly escalated well beyond her ability to repay the debt.

The client is now exploring the impact of going bankrupt, including the provisions of Bankruptcy Act that make it an offence to become bankrupt as a result of gambling.

The client and her husband also face the prospect of losing their house as a result of this process. This aspect of their circumstances has created high levels of stress within the relationship, and also with other members of the family. Counselling continues.

Conclusion:

The effect of gambling addiction is devastating. The destruction brought to family relationships, household security, mental and economic wellbeing is of great proportions and is experienced at every level of society.

Within the range of gambling activities available to the Australian community, one of the most popular and also one of the most habit forming activities is the patronage of Poker Machines. These machines are easily accessibility to patrons due to their placement in pubs and clubs, they are manufactured to draw the user in, and they are fed by the ready access to cash by the close proximity of ATM machines. These machines are also popular to the pub and club owners, and State Governments because of the revenue they generate.

Facts about Poker Machine-Related Harm

- **Poker machine** gambling is a particularly problematic form of gambling i.e. it hooks people in very easily. Australia has about 20% of broadly comparable machines in the world; these machines generally allow more intensive play, posing potentially higher risks for problem gambling (Productivity Commission, 1999:11, 8.1).
- **A very high proportion of people who play poker machines are problem gamblers** (Blaszczynski, Sharpe and Walker, 2001:55; Schellinck and Schrans, 1998; P.C., 1999:6.54).
- The prevalence of problem gambling is related to the degree of **accessibility to gambling**, particularly poker machines (P.C., 1999:2, 22).
- **Poker machines** are the dominant form of gambling in Victoria in terms of losses and gambling-related harm to families and the community (Zirnask, 2002).
- People who are already **socially and economically disadvantaged** are most susceptible to poker machine gambling problems (Arthur Anderson, 1997; Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research - the University of Melbourne, Deakin Human Services Australia - Deakin University, National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, 1997; Borrell and Hartley, 2002; Kate Dempsey and Associates (with Borderlands Cooperative), 2002).
- **Poker machine taxation** is regressive for both individuals and communities (i.e. it places a disproportionate burden on lower income people and communities) (Livingstone, 2001; Pinge, 2000; Hayward & Klinger, 2002; Doughney & Kelleher, 1999; Doughney & Sinclair, 2001; Smith, 1998, 2000; P.C., 1999:30; Deakin Human Services Australia, Deakin University et al, 1997).
- **A very high proportion of poker machine profits (42%) and associated taxation revenue in Australia comes from people with a gambling problem** (P.C., 1999:7.45, 7.46). The same has been found in overseas studies (P.C., 1999:7.42, 7.43).
- **Poker machines are enormously unpopular in the community**. Population surveys consistently and unequivocally demonstrate that most people think they do more harm than good and that their numbers should either be curbed or, at least, not be increased (AIGR, 2001:45, P.C., 1999:14).

Source: Dr Mark Zirnack Social Justice Development Officer, Uniting Church in Australia

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