

21st February 2013

Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform
PO Box 6100
Parliament House, Canberra, 2600

**Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform Inquiry into the Advertising
and Promotion of Gambling Services in Sport**

Submitted by:

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Our Interest in Gambling:

The University of Sydney Gambling Treatment Clinic (GTC) is a free, confidential, face-to-face counselling service operating within the School of Psychology. The clinic provides a service to individuals who have difficulty with gambling and their affected family and friends. Services are offered at a range of locations throughout Sydney, including at Darlington in the inner-city, and at Campbelltown, Narellen, Tahmoor, Parramatta and Lidcombe in the southern and western suburbs.

Associate Professor Michael Walker, a recognised international expert in the field of problem gambling, founded the GTC in 1999. Associate Professor Walker wrote one of the seminal texts on the psychology of gambling. In 2010, Professor Alex Blaszczynski assumed the Directorship of the GTC. Professor Blaszczynski is an internationally renowned expert in gambling treatment and research and has received several awards for his contributions to this field.

The views expressed here at those of Christopher John Hunt, arrived at in consultation with other staff of the GTC.

Submission:

In 2011, staff at the University of Sydney Gambling Treatment Clinic sent a submission to the Joint Select Committee's inquiry into Online Gambling, on which I was the first author. This submission made several specific references to problems associated with sports betting in

Australia. It was heartening to see the committee adopted several of our recommendations, particularly with regards to the live promotion of betting odds during sporting matches, and that the government acted to respond to some of these recommendations.

The majority of the comments made in the previous submission still apply today: sports-betting clients are continuing to constitute a minority of our clients, but they are a fast growing minority. We still observe significant harms in relation to this form of gambling. Spot betting continues to represent a particularly risky form of gambling likely to contribute to the development of, and to exacerbate existing, problem gambling. Rather than reiterate the comments made in the previous submission, I would like to highlight for the committee two issues that were not fully addressed in the previous submission that have become particularly problematic in recent years. These issues are the proliferation of media reporting and non-traditional promotion of wagering, and the increasing use of mobile phone applications for wagering. These comments are based on observations made during my work with problem gambling clients, consultation with my colleagues, and on reports from clients themselves on factors surrounding their gambling. More detailed research is needed on some of these topics.

Media Reporting and Non-traditional Promotion of Wagering

As mentioned in the previous submission, advertising of wagering products that links them to notions of winning and excitement, and the constant promotion of wagering odds during sporting matches, both support the development and maintenance of problem gambling. In recent years, this trend has been exacerbated. Not only are sports commentators routinely seen discussing wagering odds during pre- and post-broadcast commentary, but prominent bookmakers are now themselves appearing on both free-to-air and subscription television news and sports broadcasts to discuss current betting markets for upcoming sporting events. Newspapers, magazines and online news sources also frequently carry interviews and barely-altered press releases from wagering companies as news content. This constant intrusion of wagering into the sporting discourse has the effect of making wagering appear to be an integral and normal part of enjoying sports. This normalisation of the discussion of wagering makes a ban of reporting of odds during sporting matches ineffective, given the massive amount wagering discussion that is occurring in news segments, and in pre- and post- game commentary.

Whilst this confluence of wagering and sport has existed in horse and dog racing for many decades, most other sports in Australia have traditionally existed independently of wagering. This includes sports that occupy a central part in the Australian cultural identity, such as Australian football, rugby league and union, and various Olympic sports. While specific events such as the Melbourne Cup command large audiences, regular weekly NRL and AFL matches tend to attract a greater number of spectators, both at the grounds and via television and the Internet, than typical



horse racing events. By moving towards a similar model to horse and dog racing, and embracing wagering as an integral part of the sport, there is a high risk that, over time, wagering will be taken up by a much larger proportion of the population than is currently observed. While I do not intend to argue that everyone who will take up wagering will go on to develop gambling problems, a proportion will. Thus, the incidence of problem gambling is likely to increase over time from this binding of sports and wagering.

Furthermore, sports such as the AFL, NRL and various Olympic sports have also traditionally appealed to, and have been marketed towards, children and families in a way that horse and dog racing has not. By normalising wagering associated with these sports, there is a high risk that the prevalence of problem gambling will increase as generations who have grown up with ubiquitous discussions of gambling around sport reach the legal gambling age.

In addition to these large-scale promotional activities that normalise wagering, more individualised promotions of wagering to gamblers via inducements and personalised messages are also problematic. Several clients of this clinic report that following attempts to cut down or stop gambling, they received emails from wagering services encouraging them to return to betting, occasionally even offering inducements such as free bets to do so. Such tailored promotion of wagering can make it very difficult for those who are struggling with gambling to cut down or stop.

Use of Mobile Phone Applications

The use of mobile phone applications (or apps) is another area of concern that has grown dramatically since our previous submission. An increasing proportion of clients report using apps in order to place bets. This method of accessing gambling differs from other internet-forms of betting in that it can be accessed with more easily. Clients are able to place bets at any time in any location, whereas previously they may have been limited to placing bets at times when they had access to a computer. Several clients have reported that this has allowed them to place bets more frequently than they would have previously, which has increased the losses accrued. Clients also report that given the ease with which they are able to place bets via this method without having to re-enter their credit card details means that it is often difficult to keep track of their current losses, increasing the likelihood of larger debts being created. At this point, such reports are anecdotal, and research is currently needed to support claims of increased harm as a result of the use of apps, and what harm minimisation features can be incorporated into future app designs.

Recommendations

Based on these observations, I would strongly support the following proposals to help limit the rise of sports wagering-based problem gambling:

- Continued restrictions on the promotion of wagering during the broadcast of sports, and, just as importantly, an examination of ways to limit the ubiquitous discussion and promotion of wagering during news and sports commentary broadcasts, and in print and online media. Given the widespread nature of such promotion, a ban during sports broadcasts alone is likely to be highly ineffective.
- Restrictions or bans on the offering of “free bets” and other inducements that encourage individuals to take up or continue wagering.
- The funding of research into the potential impact of mobile phone applications on problem gambling, what harm minimisation features would be effective, and how these can be incorporated into regulatory structures.

Christopher John Hunt, PhD.