

**Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry  
Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008**

**Submission by the Social Issues Executive  
of the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney  
12 June, 2008**

We commend the Community Affairs Committee for conducting this inquiry and thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

We support this Bill and its aim to reduce the harm caused by problem gambling. We would like to make the following comments:

- Along with charitable organisations, churches are places that people in crisis often turn to for help. Strong anecdotal evidence from a number of clergy in the Sydney Diocese of the Anglican church confirms that numerous people are suffering greatly from the effects of problem gambling. As the problem is by nature usually hidden and incremental, it is often too late to assist people effectively.
- We believe that problem gambling cuts across all groups within our society, however we are particularly concerned that the impact is often felt greatest in the communities who are already experiencing hardship.
- We are also extremely concerned for the family members such as elderly parents and children who are often powerless to protect themselves and become secondary victims.
- At a time of rising fuel, housing and food prices, figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that Australians spend far more on gambling than they do on food are particularly alarming.
- We note in the recent Government Green paper *"Which Way Home: A new approach to homelessness"* that the risk of homelessness can be exacerbated by problem gambling. As the government commendably turns its attention to addressing the complex 'drivers' of homelessness, we urge the parliament to take strong action to protect the community against the effects of problem gambling.
- While not all gambling is problematic, the concentration of problem gamblers amongst the population of poker machine users suggests that this is an area requiring more intense government regulation, not less.

We note and support the following policy statement by the Council of Churches in NSW, representing the Anglican Church (Sydney), Baptist Church, Christian Reformed Churches, Churches of Christ, Fellowship of Congregational Churches, Presbyterian Church and The Salvation Army:

The NSW Council of Churches:

- a) *recognizes that for some people gambling is a dangerous and addictive activity;*

- b) *recognizes the extent to which families and dependents of gamblers may be deprived of financial and emotional support and may as a result experience significant frustration, anger and loss;*
- c) *calls on State and Federal Governments to take urgent action to:*
  - a. *develop sustainable alternative sources of state revenue;*
  - b. *reduce the prevalence of gambling in our communities;*
  - c. *support those for whom gambling is a problem;*
- d) *urges Christians to express support and encouragement to politicians and other public figures who oppose gambling;*
- e) *encourages churches to provide opportunities for teaching and learning on the harmful effects of gambling including its impact on the family and friends of gamblers;*
- f) *encourages Christians to learn how to refer problem gamblers to professional counselors or support groups such as the G-line or Gamblers Anonymous;*
- g) *recommends the implementation of reasonable measures to discourage advertising and sponsorship of gambling.*

At the 2007 Synod of the Sydney Diocese of the Anglican Church it was also resolved that the Synod:

*Call[s] upon our government, clubs and community groups to work together in reducing reliance upon the revenue of gambling and alleviating the crippling effects of gambling within our communities.*

We therefore support the *Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008*. We recognise that the solutions to problem gambling are not straightforward and easy. However we believe that the social cost of this national problem is so great that it requires urgent, decisive and co-ordinated action and that this Bill is an important step in that direction.

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