

Submission to the “*Participation of Australians in Online Poker*” Inquiry 2017

Introduction

I am a 27-year-old Australian born male from Sydney, working full time . I have been playing online poker as a hobby for about 3 years and enjoy the game just as much as I did when I first started learning how to play. Poker for me is a hobby that I play maybe 3 days a week to relax after a hard day at work and enjoy the experience of the game as an alternative to watching TV or reading a book.

There are three main reasons why I choose to play online poker:

- Convenience & Comfort
- Low Financial Risk
- Mental Alertness

I will attempt to address the terms of reference of this inquiry via exploring these three main reasons below.

Convenience & Comfort

Being able to play poker online is immensely more convenient than live poker (at a casino). Not only is there the obvious convenience and comfort from not having to leave the house, there is also the benefit of being able to play for however long I want and to switch between games/tables instantly with no wait. For me, going to play poker at the Star Casino in Sydney involves getting ready (15-20 mins) driving and parking (45-60 mins) and then once at the casino you need to put your name on the waiting list for a table before you can play (average 30-40 mins). So if I decide to play poker at the casino I need to allow close to 2 hours before I can even sit down at a table. This means that if I only feel like playing poker for 30 minutes, going to a casino is not a very time optimal choice.

The ability to start up your computer and be on a table playing in less than 2 minutes online (compared to 2 hours) is an incredible benefit to many Australians. For me this means I have the ability to play a quick half hour or so of poker in an evening and still have plenty of time to spend with my family after work. I have many friends that also enjoy this benefit of playing poker online which means they don't spend hours upon hours at casinos and hence don't miss out on quality time with their families.

Low Financial Risk

The stakes on offer at online poker websites are as little as 1cent/2cents. The game that I play on a regular basis has a maximum buy in of \$2. This means that even if I lose all of the money on the table (which is very unlikely) I will only lose \$2. I work full time and earn an average salary and this basically means that even if I were a terrible poker player it would be extremely difficult for online poker to have any financial impact on me whatsoever. I enjoy playing the \$2 online poker game because it's so cheap that I won't be upset if I lose but it's still a very fun and challenging game.

If I compare this to the lowest stake poker game at the Star Casino, the difference is just crazy. The minimum buy in is \$100 and maximum \$500. Every good poker player knows that buying in for the table minimum is not a good strategy (this is mathematically true) so if I want to play a proper game of poker at my local casino, I have to be risking \$300-\$500 at a time. \$500 is not a small amount of money for me to risk on a game that is supposed to be fun. I understand that it is not financially viable for the casino to offer lower stake games because they have to make enough money to pay their dealers however I think for an average Australian \$300-\$500 is a lot of money to risk in a card game. This is why online poker is such a great option for Australians; it provides a cheap solution to enjoy the game. For me personally, I deposited \$75 into my online poker account 3 years ago and have never had to put in any more money. In those three years I've won some and I've lost some but overall online poker has had absolutely no negative financial impact on my life whatsoever. I'm not sure I can say the same about my daily \$3.30 coffees though...

Mental Alertness

Unlike most casino games or forms of gambling, poker is an immensely complicated game that is a mixture of skill and chance. For me, learning poker has been a beautiful learning curve that never ceases to amaze me. The more that you learn and study the game, the more you realise just how complex it really is. The game requires a strong understanding of probability, which means that you actually get to put into practice what you learnt in 10th grade maths. If you really want to learn the game you need to understand odds and ratios, be able to quickly calculate combinations of hands and study the probabilities of different scenarios occurring in different card run outs. The maths alone is great for keeping your brain active.

The real reason why I think online poker is such a great option for Australians is because of the complex decision making skills that you form from playing the game. Poker is a very dynamic game and in each situation there are always several options that each player has available to them. Good poker players use all the information presented to them and attempt to make the best decision in each and every situation that presents itself (similar to doing a maths equation with unknown variables). The reason why online poker is so much better than live poker is that you can get more hands per hour online. You don't have to wait for a person to shuffle and deal the cards and everything is done with the click of the mouse so the game is much faster, this means that you can see more situations, which gives you the ability to learn at a much faster rate.

I strongly believe that online poker should continue to be allowed for Australians as a mentally engaging leisure activity. I enjoy watching TV or movies to relax however it is not a mentally stimulating activity. Passive activities like watching TV are fun but they don't engage you in a challenging way, playing a game such as poker provides an avenue for Australians to keep mentally active and grow key life skills such as strong decision making and mental awareness.

Regulation

I understand the government's desire with these types of regulations in the gambling industry, as the main purpose is to protect Australian's from problem gambling and

addiction. I most definitely agree that problem gambling and addiction (of any sort) are serious issues for Australia and I support all government parties that are taking action to address these issues. My strong opinion of the recent amendments to the Interactive Gambling Act though is that online poker should be exempt as it does not pose any significant harm to Australians and will cause much sadness to the thousands of Australians that enjoy online poker as a hobby.

As discussed above, poker is very much a game of skill but it does involve an element of chance and for this reason online poker is key to protecting Australians from significant financial risks. Online poker can offer incredibly low buy ins that no live casino can plausibly provide, hence giving Australians the option to buy in for as low as \$2. Poker is a slow, thinking game that just cannot be bundled together with such forms of gambling as sports betting, slot machines or roulette and other casino table games.

Summary

In summary, I believe that online poker should be exempt from the Interactive Gambling Act 2001 amendments because it is a low risk, convenient and mentally stimulating game that brings joy to many Australians all across the country. I hope that you can please consider the points I've raised throughout this submission and I hope that you will come to the conclusion that online poker should be exempt from this act. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me via the details provided in my online submission.