

**Ms Peta Murphy MP**

Chair, Standing Committee  
on Social Policy and Legal Affairs  
Parliament of Australia  
Canberra, Australia 2600.

10 October 2022

Dear Ms Murphy,

**Re: Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs:  
inquiry into online gambling and its impacts on problem gamblers**

This preliminary submission is provided on behalf of the Voices for Gambling Reform, people with lived experience of gambling harms, working within The Alliance for Gambling Reform.

Firstly, we would like to thank the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs for calling this inquiry to explore broad terms of reference relating to online gambling in Australia.

Gambling causes enormous harm to many people and their families as well as exacting significant social and economic costs to the Australian Community and the input from people with lived and living experience to this inquiry will help to bring the harms associated with online gambling into the public arena and show the truer picture of harm and what needs to change.

At this early point in the inquiry I would like to note that for people experiencing gambling related harm, the term 'problem gambler' in the terms of reference for the inquiry not only exacerbates the shame that comes with gambling addiction but creates additional harm and makes it harder for people to ask for help when they most need it, creating a barrier to people participating in the inquiry.

The terms 'problem gambler' and 'responsible gambling' are highly stigmatising phrases that place all the blame and sole responsibility on the individual. The resulting stigma and shame will stop many from coming forward to give evidence and sharing personal stories that would otherwise be incredibly useful for the Committee.

Unfortunately the term 'problem gambler' and 'problem gambling' has been used by the industry, governments and some academics for far too long. While this is changing especially amongst academics, the term works particularly well for the gambling industry putting all the blame on the user rather than the product or the business model. Considering that in Australia we lose more money per capita to gambling than any other country in the world, it would seem to be working well for the gambling industry.

Those with lived experience of gambling harm believe that the 'problem' that exists in Australia with gambling is the lack of responsibility taken by the gambling industry, governments and financial institutions for the harm that gambling causes.

We are particularly keen to convey to the Committee that harms extend far beyond the individual who is gambling and impacts others including partners, families, communities and employers who also suffer harm as a result of gambling.

It also works well for governments who do not adequately regulate such a dangerous product, nor put appropriate legislative measures in place that would reduce harm from gambling. The close ties between lobbyists from the gambling industry to governments at both State and Federal levels, political donations and the reliance that governments have on gambling revenue are problematic.

While the use of language such as 'problem gambler' continues, governments and industry can justify not taking action by convincing themselves and others that it is an issue of personal responsibility.

In recent years there has been a significant shift in the ways that gambling harm is talked about and because of this change of messaging more people are coming forward, telling their stories and allowing the possibility of change that could protect Australian consumers.

This inquiry is indeed an indicator of that change and the Voices for Gambling Reform are very supportive of the Committee in their work to address this critical issue, however we see the use of this language as a barrier for many to be involved.

It is our view that in order to understand the full scope of gambling harm, those experiencing low and moderate harms as well as those who are affected-others must be encouraged to participate by addressing the language barrier. It must be inclusive and inviting and support those who consider sharing their stories with the confidence that they will be received without further shame and stigma should they choose to come forward. The Alliance has developed language guidelines that might be useful for the committee.

**The Alliance suggests that each time the phrase 'problem gambler' is used, the word 'gambling harm' is used to replace it. For example, the title of the inquiry should be changed to 'Inquiry into online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm.'**

Please don't hesitate to contact us to discuss further and we thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



**Anna Bardsley**

Voices for Gambling Reform,  
Community Builder  
#EveryStoryCounts



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