

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

Inquiry into the prevention and treatment of problem gambling

Submission from the Social Issues Executive, Anglican Church, Diocese of Sydney

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. We write on behalf of the Social Issues Executive (SIE) which has been appointed by the Anglican Diocese of Sydney to advise the Diocese and comment on public policy issues for the purpose of helping the Diocese contribute to public governance.

In general, our submission supports a multi-faceted approach to problem gambling. Whilst we do not have technical expertise in the areas being covered by this Inquiry, we have made this submission to congratulate the Government on work already done to treat problem gambling, and to urge the Government to continue to consider all available options to prevent and treat further problem gambling. The evidence has shown that Australia has a very significant gambling problem. The H2 Gambling Capital report revealed that Australia leads the world in gambling, with Australian adults gambling more money per resident adult in 2010 than any other nation. Given this, we wish to encourage the Government to take all necessary steps to treat and prevent any further problem gambling.

We are pleased to provide the following comments with particular reference to:

(a) measures to prevent problem gambling;

We support a multi-faceted approach to problem gambling prevention and treatment, as what assists one person may be different from what assists another.

We have focused primarily on EGMs, on the premise that these are causing the most harm. We have relied on the Productivity Commission report, finding that 15% of regular EGM users fall into the category of 'problem gamblers', with a 40% share of the total spend on EGMs. However, the SIE wishes to commend the Government for its

consideration of harm minimisation in other areas with problem gambling. We support the continued investigation of how to reduce and treat problem gambling in all its forms.

We support the pre-commitment trial being proposed for the ACT, but are concerned that the trial has been too limited to be a genuine opportunity to assess mandatory pre-commitment. Being restricted only to the ACT, and not all of NSW, makes 'escape spending' into NSW highly probable, damaging the integrity of the trial.

A second element of the multi-faceted approach to problem gambling supported by the SIE is \$1 bet limits on EGM's, as recommended by the Productivity Commission.

Additional measures that we support are:

- ❖ reduction in the intensity and speed of EGM's to reduce their addictiveness as conditioning machines,
- ❖ all new EGMs being fitted with pre-commitment technology,
- ❖ better information flows to gamblers, including systems to provide information about how long a gambler has been using the same machine (or how long they have been in the gambling precinct), together with how much money has been lost,
- ❖ removal of ATMs and other cash machines from gaming venues, except in regional areas where it is the only accessible ATM at various times in the day,
- ❖ longer mandatory closures periods for gaming venues,
- ❖ removing the quoting and advertising by radio and television of betting odds on sporting events and any discussion of gambling odds from sports commentary, and

Further, the SIE believes that gambling support services should be delivered by community-based organisations in conjunction with services such as family and relationship counselling, financial counselling and parenting programs. The Productivity Commission noted the coexistence of other forms of vulnerability and relational instability experienced by problem gamblers and their families. For this reason, gambling services must take a holistic approach to supporting the person seeking help for gambling addiction and

equipping them and their family with strategies to handle associated vulnerability.

(b) measures which can increase risky gambling behaviour;

Australia now provides the backdrop where adults have the ability to bet on everything, from sporting and political events to whether or not the Reserve Bank will change interest rates. The SIE is concerned, and believe many others with us, over the prevalence of gambling in Australian society. We have moved from a situation where Australians enjoy an 'occasional flutter between mates' to something that is now included in every aspect of social life – sport, politics, and general society.

The SIE is particularly concerned about online inducements to gamble, which take gambling out of a social context and place it in an anonymous, individual context that opens the way for problem gambling at levels unseen to date. Online gambling reduces any external restraint that arises from social interaction. We urge the Government to exercise caution in the burgeoning area of online gambling, to ensure that adequate regulation is provided to prevent new instances of problem gambling. In this context we oppose any liberalisation of legislation pertaining to regulation of online gaming.

(c) early intervention strategies and training of staff;

The SIE has no comment.

(d) methods currently used to treat problem gamblers;

The SIE has no comment.

(e) data collection and evaluation issues;

The SIE supports more data collection to better understand who is gambling, how much they are losing and in what ways, and why.

(f) gambling policy research and evaluation;

The SIE supports further research into gambling policy, particularly in the area of new technologies including mobile phones, smart phones and interactive television, which increase the risk and incidence of problem gambling.

We suggest that an evaluation of the prevalence of gambling in Australia, risk factors and the effect of public health and anti-gambling

measures be established on the COAG agenda to ensure consistent efforts and information sharing between all jurisdictions.

To support the co-ordination and monitoring of these measures, we suggest a gambling policy research and evaluation function be established in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, possibly connected to the Social Inclusion Unit.

Further we suggest that every second year COAG deliver a publicly available report on the progress of anti-gambling measures and the prevalence of gambling in Australia.

(g) other related matters.

The SIE encourages the Government to consider all measures, not just those that have been used in other jurisdictions. As mentioned above, Australia is leading the world in the amount lost on gambling per resident adult, so we can expect that we will also need to lead the world in making serious efforts to tackle problem gambling, potentially with strategies that haven't yet been employed in other jurisdictions. We urge the Committee to pursue a cautious and careful approach.

In the past, churches and other community based organisations encouraged people towards their 'best' behaviour, whilst governments sought to curb the 'worst' behaviour through regulation. Over time, governments have assumed both functions of promoting and encouraging good behaviour and restricting the excesses of society. We want to encourage the Committee to consider how Government can partner with like-minded community organisations in creative ways to work together to prevent and treat problem gambling.

Rev. Dr Andrew Cameron

Chairman, Social Issues Executive,
On behalf of the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney