

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BY COALITION SENATORS

Coalition Senators participating in this inquiry acknowledge the devastating economic and social impacts of problem gambling in Australia and the commensurate need for governments to act to contain and reduce this problem. Evidence presented at the inquiry makes clear the need for cross-government cooperation and high quality data collection to be prominent in our armoury in dealing with this issue.

Coalition Senators endorse the recommendation in the body of the report in so far as it recommends that the *Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008* and the *ATM's and Cash Facilities Bill 2008* not be passed at this time. However, we believe that there are elements of the *Poker Machine Harm Minimisation Bill 2008* which do warrant further immediate consideration and which, if applied uniformly across the nation, would have some beneficial impact on the level of problem gambling. The *Poker Machine Harm Minimisation Bill 2008* contains a suite of measures addressed to design features of EGMs and the way they are deployed which may encourage or promote problem gambling. The bill *inter alia* limits the size of bets placed on EGMs in certain circumstances, limits the use of other devices which stimulate a gambler's interest in continuing to place bets and prohibits jackpots of greater than \$2000.

The inquiry heard that a number of these measures already exist in the legislation of some jurisdictions. Some of these measures have been applied for several years to minimise problem gambling in some states. While the evidence to the inquiry was inconclusive as to whether these measures *in toto* decreased the effect of problem gambling, it does appear that at least some of them are having a positive effect and are accepted within the gambling industry.

Gambling researcher Professor Jan McMillen submitted that some of these harm minimisation measures had been undercut "because venues and patrons take advantage of fundamental flaws and deficiencies in policy design".¹ Coalition Senators feel that the application of these measures across the country, using the best available evidence as to which have been effective in particular jurisdictions, would be a positive move and would send a strong signal that government in Australia is prepared to "lift its game" in dealing with this issue where, all too often, a conflict of interest is perceived to exist for governments.

Coalition Senators are not persuaded that these measures would be technically difficult to engineer or deliver or that they would impose a serious financial burden on clubs and pubs where these machines are located. On the contrary, we feel that the passage of such legislation would send a strong signal to Australia's gambling industry that a fresh take on the scale and nature of our problem with gambling is warranted, and that this industry needs to be prepared to innovate and cooperate in achieving reductions in the level of problem gambling.

Senator Gary Humphries

Senator Judith Adams

Senator Sue Boyce

¹ Professor McMillen, *submission 18* (HM Bill), p. 6.

