

Report highlights pokies

GM GAMBLING MATTERS

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There has been a flurry of gambling report releases in recent weeks. Chief amongst them was the Productivity Commission Draft Report, "Gambling"¹. Although the final report is not due until February 2010, the draft foreshadows the Commission's recommendations for public policies aimed at reducing gambling harm but maintaining gambling benefits.

Section headings contained in the report give a clear flavour of where much attention has been directed²:

- "A focus on pokies - where most harms arise"
- "Changing gaming machines"
- "Lower loss rates and more disclosure"
- "Pre-commitment remains the key"

In all, there are forty-one draft recommendations across such topics as counselling support services; information and education; accessibility of gaming machines; access to cash and credit; game features and machine design; online gaming; wagering; and research and evaluation³.

In the future?

- **\$1 max. pokie bet**
- **\$20 max. that can be inserted into a gaming machine, with no addition until the max. credit falls below \$20.**
- **Winnings above \$250 to be paid by cheque or direct credit to the gambler's account.**
- **No inducements like free alcohol or food to a patron who is gambling.**

The Commission acknowledges the need for evidence to support policy decisions – and notes a range of measures introduced in the last decade which have had questionable effect. However, it also states that there is a risk of "policy paralysis", leading to more harm, if governments wait for an excessive standard of proof before acting. It states, "There are good precedents for precautionary policy action in areas involving people's safety"⁴.

The proposals relating to pre-commitment strategies are amongst the most involved and, given the varying views of stakeholders, likely to be amongst the most contentious. They deal with self-exclusion arrangements (where gamblers can bar themselves from gambling venues) and measures that will allow gamblers to pre-set limits on their future gambling. The Commission's position is that pre-commitment is "a strong, practicable and ultimately cost-effective option for harm minimisation" and that it "overcomes some of the existing severe deficits in achieving self-control for problem gamblers and for genuine informed consent by many other consumers."⁵

The recommendations⁶ include proposals that:

- self-exclusion apply to all venues in a jurisdiction, triggered by a single, simple application by the gambler concerned.
- a universal pre-commitment system for gaming machines be implemented by 2016 that:
 - provides a means by which players could set personally-defined pre-commitments and, at a minimum, a spending limit, without being subsequently able to revoke these.
 - encourages gamblers to play within safe spending and time limits by specifying default limits.
 - enables gamblers to opt-out, with periodic checking of their preference to do so
 - applies to all gaming machines in all venues in a jurisdiction.
 - does not unduly affect the enjoyment of those selecting safe playing options.

From a Gambler's Help perspective, a universal pre-commitment system is long overdue. In its submission to the Inquiry, the Council of Gambler's Help Services⁷ drew upon expertise and experience accrued in the Victorian Gambler's Help service system over more than 14 years of operation. After providing detailed responses to a number of questions contained in the issues paper, the Council concluded in the following way:

"If the Council were to identify one standout matter, limited action on the consumer protection issues clearly articulated during the original inquiry (1999) is of great concern.

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On your reading list

"Accessibility and Gambling Problems Amongst Gaming Venue Staff",

Department of Justice, 2009. Online at www.justice.vic.gov.au. Go to Gambling and Racing/Research and Statistics/Research Measuring Problem Gambling.

"A Study of Gambling in Victoria - Problem Gambling from a Public Health Perspective",

Department of Justice, 2009. Online at www.justice.vic.gov.au. Go to Gambling and Racing/Research and Statistics/Research Measuring Problem Gambling.

"Gambling. Draft Report",

Productivity Commission, 2009. Online at www.pc.gov.au. Go to Projects/Gambling.

"Gambling. Draft Report – Key Points",

Productivity Commission, 2009. Go to Projects/Gambling/Draft Report.

"Impact of changes to Electronic Gaming machine characteristics on play behavior of recreational gamblers",

Department of Justice, 2009, Online at www.justice.vic.gov.au. Go to Research and Statistics.

"Inquiry into Barring Arrangements",

Independent Gambling Authority (South Australia), 2009. Online at www.iga.sa.gov.au. Go to Public Consultation.

"Romsey Hotel v Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation",

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, 2009. Online at www.vcat.vic.gov.au. Go to What's New.

"Social and Economic Impact Assessment Report (Ninth Variation to the Casino Management Agreement)",

Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation, 2009. Online at www.vcgr.vic.gov.au. Go to Latest News.

"Report highlights pokies" continued from p.1

Universal pre-commitment with player registration and tracking appears to present the single most effective means of minimising harm in the current gaming environment, yet no Australian jurisdiction offers this level of protection more than ten years after it was identified as a solution."

The focus on pre-commitment is particularly timely. The Victorian Government has already passed gaming machine pre-commitment legislation⁸, with a 3-part implementation process scheduled for 2010, 2013 and 2015. Some features of the model are yet to be finalised and are subject to advice from the (Victorian) Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council (RGMAC).

In addition to the Productivity Commission inquiry, in July of this year the federal Ministerial Council on Gambling agreed to develop national standards for pre-commitment. In light of these activities, the Victorian Government has extended the RGMACs reporting timelines so that federal developments, and their implications, can be considered⁹.

Although the full implementation of gambling-related policy, through legislation, is generally phased over

months or even years, it is clear that the final recommendations from the Productivity Commission have the potential to significantly change the gambling landscape in Australia. Written submissions in response to the draft report can be made until 18 December 2009.

Sources:

¹ Productivity Commission - Gambling Draft Report, <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/gambling-2009/draft>

² *ibid.*, Overview, XXIII-XXX

³ *ibid.*, Recommendations and Findings, XLI-LVII

⁴ *ibid.*, Overview, XXVII

⁵ *ibid.*, Precommitment, 7.41-7.42

⁶ *ibid.*, Recommendations and Findings, XLV-XLVII

⁷ CoGHS Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Gambling, http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/87474/sub132.pdf

⁸ Pre-commitment Fact Sheet, Office of Gaming and Racing, http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/DOJ+Internet/resources/file/eb130d474395062/Precommitment_Fact_Sheet.pdf

⁹ Gaming Minister's Letter to the Chair of RGMAC, http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/DOJ+Internet/resources/file/eb130e474398f02/Letter_to_the_Chair_of_the_RGMAC.PDF



UPDATE

Gaming Venue Applications

Marine Hotel Brighton

Increase from 40 to 50 machines
Adjourned:
date to be fixed

The Bended Elbow Dandenong

New venue with 60 machines
Forthcoming

Fast Fact #1:

VIC tax revenue from gambling

In 08/09, gambling contributed \$1.6 billion, or 13%, to Victoria's taxation revenue. More than \$1 billion of that amount came from pokies.

Source: Financial Report for the State of Victoria 2008-2009; Table 2.2; p.20

Mental Health Week 2009

Mental Health Week was a busy one for GHS, with the Community Education Team involved in 3 big events.

In Clarinda, local residents from CALD backgrounds came together for lunch, presentations and activities. Guest speaker, Dr. Maria Cendana-Paiva from Monash Division of General Practice, explored the meaning of the term "mental health" and addressed the negative perceptions and stigma sometimes associated with it. She also spoke about depression and its links to things like isolation, grief, relationship stress and issues such as alcohol and drug use and suicide risk.

"Before I came today, I was thinking that this forum was mainly for people with 'mental disabilities', now I understand more about the term mental health", said one participant.

Problem gambling was also highlighted, as the audience viewed and discussed "Taking the first step together" – a DVD produced by the Victorian Multicultural Gambler's Help Program.

Cheltenham hosted the third annual Celebrate Mental Health Walk and Festival. More than 500 people created a sea of purple in the event's signature t-shirts and enjoyed the party atmosphere. Fox FM's Matt Tilley was the MC and the Bipolar Bears headlined the musical acts. Over 100 surveys were returned by participants and key results included:

- More than 90% of respondents reported that they were treated with respect; felt safe while attending; had a good opportunity to socialise; and would come to the event again if it was held next year.

- 80% agreed the event had encouraged them to pay attention to their own mental health and wellbeing; and improved their knowledge of supports & treatment for mental illnesses.

In Frankston, the second annual Mental Health Week BBQ was held at City Life in the heart of the city. Approximately 200 members of the local community attended. The Frankston Homeless Band provided musical entertainment and Bronwyn Roberts of "Let's Laugh" facilitated a laughter workshop.

Information related to mental health and substance use issues, gambling, stress reduction and services in the Frankston/Mornington Peninsula area was distributed. Agency representatives were available to provide advice and information to all.

Between July and October 2008, fifteen thousand Victorians took part in a study exploring the prevalence and distribution of problem gambling, and factors associated with increased risk for problem gambling. The report, "A Study of Gambling in Victoria - Problem Gambling from a Public Health Perspective", was published in September 2009. The findings related to health and well-being included:

- problem gamblers were significantly more likely than non-problem gamblers to experience a mild, moderate or severe mental disorder.
- 27% of problem gamblers and 6% of moderate risk gamblers reported considering suicide in the past 12 months.
- 47% of problem gamblers and 31% of moderate risk gamblers, compared with 18% of non-problem gamblers, reported having experienced trauma and hardship in their lives.
- 21% of problem gamblers, compared with 2% of non-problem gamblers, reported being unable to access help from friends when needed.
- Problem gamblers were significantly more likely than non-problem gamblers to report not enjoying living in their community at all.

Source: http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/DOJ+Internet/resources/file/eb318c47e504b5d/FactSheet_11-HealthAndWellbeing.pdf

Gambler's Help Southern is focusing on mental health and social inclusion in integrated health promotion work with all four Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) in our region.

The reasons behind this emphasis are:

1. Mental health, wellbeing, social inclusion and inclusive communities have been identified as priority health issues in the PCPs.

2. Mental Health features strongly in the Victorian Government policy, "Taking Action of Problem Gambling".

3. The significant research evidence base focusing on the links between gambling harm and psychosocial health.

4. GHS experience and understanding of the risk and/or protective role of mental health in a gambling context.

Partner organisations included:

- Bayside City Council
- Centrelink
- City Life
- City of Kingston
- Commonwealth Carer Respite
- GROW
- Frankston Mornington Peninsula PCP
- headspace Peninsula
- Impact
- Kingston Bayside PCP
- Kingston City Council
- Mind
- New Hope Foundation
- PenDAP
- Peninsula Health Community Mental Health
- Reach Out Southern Mental Health
- Southern Health

DEALING WITH FINES



If you receive a fine for something like a parking, speeding or traffic camera offence, you have several options for dealing with it¹.

The most obvious option is that you pay the fine in full by the due date - and that is the end of the matter. However, this is not always financially possible, and in some cases you may not agree the fine has been fairly levied.

In brief, other options available are:

1. Request time to pay

This can usually be arranged by contacting the agency that issued the fine. If you organise to repay the fine in equal installments (a Payment Plan), the maximum period allowed is usually three months. Plans can be made for several offences at the one time, but are usually only granted once, so it's wise to adhere.

2. Request to appear before a Magistrate

This gives you the opportunity to put forward your side of the story - but the Magistrate may increase the penalty if you are unsuccessful. You also have the chance to have penalties converted to Community Based Orders if you take this action.

3. Request Internal Review

This is done in writing via the appropriate agency, should you feel you have been unjustly dealt with. It may be especially useful if you have not had a traffic fine for two

years or more, as your good driving record may result in the penalty being downgraded to an official warning rather than a fine and demerit points. If you still aren't satisfied with the outcome, the matter can be referred to Court.

4. Notice of Objection

This may be submitted if the alleged offence could result in loss of licence. e.g. drink/drug driving, excessive speed.

5. Apply for Special Circumstances

This relates to people experiencing mental illness, intellectual disability, drug/alcohol addiction or homelessness, whereby the condition or circumstance results in the person being unable to understand and/or control the offending conduct.

If you don't take any action and fail to pay fines, the matter will automatically progress to an Enforcement Order. Once this occurs, the alleged offence will be handled by the Infringements Court (part of Magistrate's Court).

For further information, contact Civic Compliance on (03) 9200 8111 or visit www.online.fines.vic.gov.au/fines/Default.aspx

¹ If someone else was driving your vehicle when the fine was incurred, you can nominate that driver to be responsible for the penalty.

Fast Fact #2:

VIC gambling losses

In 08/09, the total Victorian expenditure on gambling was \$5,109.9 million. This represents a 5.4% increase on the previous year.

Source	Amount Lost	% Change on previous year
Pokies (hotels & clubs)	\$2,707.3 million	3.7%
Casino	\$1,218.3 million	10.6%
Wagering	\$729.4 million	5.2%
Lottery products	\$448.3 million	3.1%
Club Keno	\$6.6 million	1.5%

Source: Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation Annual Report 2008/09; www.vcgr.vic.gov.au

Gambler's Help Southern provides free, confidential, professional support for gamblers, their families and others affected by gambling.

Services available include:

- Counselling for gambling related issues
- Financial Counselling
- Community Education & Development
- Professional Development
- Secondary Consultation
- Multicultural Services

If you have concerns about your gambling, or the gambling of a family member or friend, call Gambler's Help Southern Intake between 9.30 am and 4.30 pm on 9575 5353 or the Gambler's Helpline which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 1800 858 858.

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*Season's Greetings
from GHS*

