



Australian Government

**Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

Deputy Secretary

Ms Lyn Beverley
Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Beverley

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform's inquiry into the prevention and treatment of problem gambling.

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs ('the Department') has a strong focus on improving the lives of Australians, particularly those most vulnerable in our community.

Problem gambling is a priority concern for this Department as it can have devastating consequences for people, such as financial hardship, relationship breakdowns, job loss and mental health problems.

Tackling Problem Gambling – A Snapshot

The Department is playing a lead role in the implementation of the Australian Government's ('the Government') commitment to a range of gambling reforms. These reforms aim to reduce the harm caused by problem gambling in relation to poker machines and include:

- undertaking a large scale trial of mandatory pre-commitment; and
- introducing legislation that will extend pre-commitment technology to every poker machine across the country, that could be used for mandatory pre-commitment if it is supported by a trial.

The Department also supports the Council of Australian Governments' Select Council on Gambling Reform ('the COAG Select Council'). The COAG Select Council was established in 2010 to develop a national response to the findings and recommendations of the Productivity Commission Report on Gambling, including the recommendations relating to the three key areas of the Government's national gambling reform.

The Department continues to assist Australians impacted by problem gambling through the provision of a range of services including financial counselling and support

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services, online gambling help services, as well as related services such as Family Relationship services and services to assist with a variety of comorbidities. The Department also contributes to ongoing research programs into prevention strategies that may assist problem gamblers. Much of this work is done through working closely with states and territories.

The Department established a Problem Gambling Taskforce which has the role of progressing the Department's work on problem gambling.

Commonwealth Legislation

The Government remains committed to introducing legislation which will require:

- a \$250 daily withdrawal limit on automatic teller machines in gaming venues (except casinos) by 1 February 2013;
- all new poker machines manufactured from 2013 to be capable of supporting pre-commitment;
- all poker machines to be part of a state linked pre-commitment system from 2016 (except eligible small venues which will have longer); and
- electronic warnings and cost of play displays on poker machines from 2016.

Trial – Mandatory pre-commitment

On 21 January 2012 the Government announced the intention to conduct a trial of mandatory pre-commitment in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). It is anticipated that the trial will begin in February 2013. The Government has made an offer to the clubs industry in the ACT to participate in this trial.

The trial will be rigorously evaluated and subject to an independent review by the Productivity Commission – Australia's leading economic advisory body. The Productivity Commission will report to the Parliament in 2014 and make recommendations about whether to flick the switch to mandatory pre-commitment

Council of Australian Governments' Select Council on Gambling Reform

The Department is continuing to support the COAG Select Council as they progress the development of a national response to the Productivity Commission's 2010 Report on Gambling. This national response will include consideration of other harm minimisation measures, such as prevention, early intervention and treatment strategies.

In February 2011 at the COAG Select Council meeting the Queensland Government agreed to work with the Commonwealth Government to facilitate a trial of dynamic warning messages in a small number of venues across Queensland. This trial is currently in the preparatory stages and is anticipated to commence in the coming months.

At the meeting of the COAG Select Council held on 27 May 2011, all Ministers agreed to support the required infrastructure for pre-commitment technology in all jurisdictions, to be available to all players in all venues. Ministers also agreed to further consider implementation of dynamic warning and cost of play displays, and to continue to work together on the issue of ATM withdrawals.

Prevention and treatment of problem gambling

The Department has a strong interest in policy aimed at minimising harm from problem gambling and currently helps Australians impacted by problem gambling through the provision of a range of programs and services.

Financial Management Support

In particular, Financial Management Support Services (Commonwealth Financial Counselling and Money Management Services), funded by the Department, help people to deal with financial difficulties and build money management skills. These services aim to help people effectively allocate their money to provide for priority needs.

Additionally, the Department is working to provide 50 new financial counsellors through the Australian Government's financial counselling network to work with problem gamblers and their families. These financial counsellors will work with gaming venues and state and territory government gambling counselling services. The Commonwealth has committed to providing \$26 million over four years to deliver these financial counselling services in local communities.

Family Relationship Services

Assistance for problem gamblers and their families may not be limited to financial support services. Problem gamblers experiencing relationship breakdowns may benefit from a range of Family Relationship Services funded by the Department. These community organisations deliver early intervention services to couples and families to help them build stronger family relationships.

Personal Helpers and Mentors

Problem gamblers experiencing a mental illness, such as depression, can access community mental health service providers, funded by the Department, to assist them and their families and carers. Personal Helpers and Mentors aim to provide increased opportunities for recovery for people whose lives are severely affected by mental illness.

Online Support

The Department also manages the Government's problem gambling website: www.problemgambling.gov.au. This website provides information about the harms of problem gambling and advice on how to access counselling and support for people affected by problem gambling.

On behalf of the Government, the Department provides funding towards the Gambling Help Online website (www.gamblinghelponline.org.au). The website, also funded by each state and territory government, provides an online counselling service for people concerned about their own gambling or that of others. The primary aim is to attract clients who might not seek face-to-face counselling services and to provide them with useful information, referrals and counselling.

The Department is supporting the recent Government commitment to provide an additional \$300,000 towards enhancements to the website and expanding the reach of Gambling Help Online. This funding will enable Gambling Help Online to deal with the increase in clients making use of the services and facilitate an expansion of the website, in line with a recent evaluation of the service that found there was a strong demand for increased online counselling and support.

Other support initiatives

Family and Friends: A Resource

The Department is developing an information resource for family and friends of problem gamblers. This material will assist family and friends affected by problem gambling to better understand what this behaviour is, and to help these people deal with the effect it has on themselves and others. This resource will also provide further information on support services available, including those provided by the Australian Government, state and territory services and a range of other services.

The Department is also piloting a 'Peer Spokesperson' project with the Gambling Impact Society. This project will train a group of people (who have been effected by problem gambling) to speak at community awareness sessions, such as in schools, clubs and community organisations.

Strengthening Self Exclusion

Self-exclusion arrangements are an important support for problem gamblers and on 21 January 2012 the Government announced that work would be undertaken with states and territories to develop a nationally consistent approach to self-exclusion, including better counselling support as part of the process, consideration of third party (family member) self-exclusions and more central oversight.

Exclusions provisions will also be made available through the pre-commitment system and will be a part of the trial of mandatory pre-commitment in the ACT.

Improving staff training

It is acknowledged that staff in venues are at the frontline of dealing with problem gambling and are critical in identifying and supporting problem gamblers who wish to seek professional help. This role will be even more important under a pre-commitment system.

As part of the Government's 21 January 2012 announcement was a commitment to working with states and territories to review and update responsible gambling training in all jurisdictions. This will include a particular focus on staff interaction with players in a pre-commitment system.

Gambling policy research

The Commonwealth has commissioned research to design the parameters for dynamic warnings and cost of play displays on gaming machines as well as to design an evaluative framework of a trial of this technology. This work is being facilitated by the Queensland Government, which has also offered to facilitate a live trial of dynamic warning messages in a number of venues in that state.

The findings of the research and trial of this technology is expected to inform:

- what messages will be most effective at helping people to avoid engaging in problem gambling behaviours; and
- the most effective way to deliver these messages, including frequency, duration, format and type of delivery.

The Department also contributes to an ongoing research program delivered by Gambling Research Australia (GRA). GRA was established in 2002, through the Ministerial Council on Gambling, and was formalised in late 2003 through a National Memorandum of Understanding between all jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth. GRA is a working group comprised of representatives from all Australian jurisdictions and is responsible for developing a national gambling research program and commissioning research to provide a better understanding of problem gambling. GRA seeks to monitor current research programs within Australian and facilitate new research initiatives on a national basis.

The research program is funded with Commonwealth Government assistance through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the State of Victoria. In June 2009 all Gaming/Gambling Ministers extended the role of GRA, providing for a second five year GRA program (2009 – 2014).

Since it was established in 2002, GRA has completed and reported on 19 research projects, including:

- *Gamblers at Risk and their Help Seeking Behaviour* (2011);
- *Gambling and the Impact of New and Emerging Technologies and Associated Products* (2010);
- *Identifying Problem Gamblers in Venues* (2007)
- *Analysis of Gambler Pre-commitment Behaviour* (2006); and
- *Problem Gambling and Harm: Towards a National Definition* (2005).

The Department will continue to closely monitor the proceedings of this inquiry, particularly as it relates to Departmental activities, and would be happy to provide any further information required by the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Liza Carroll
Deputy Secretary

30 March 2012