

9/1/11

Committee Secretary,
Joint Select Committee,
P.O. Box 6100,
Parliament House,
Canberra 2600.

Dear Secretary and Committee,

I recently wrote to the Minister (copy enclosed) with copies to Senator Nick Xenophon and Mr. Andrew Wilkie to raise my at least mild concerns about the enthusiasm for pre-commitment as the best solution to assist those who have problems with their gambling. My background to my experience in this field is outlined briefly in the letter but I will add that I am a published author – sole or co-author – in both scientific and lay publications on the topic of gambling issues. I also am an Honorary Clinical Senior Lecturer at Sydney University.

However my concern is based on my discussions with my clients/patients who are all seeing me while “in the heat of battle” and actively gambling. They are most adamant that a step such as pre-commitment would not be taken up reliably, if at all, by them if it was voluntary as some are promoting. For the scheme to have any real impact it would, in my view, have to be compulsory and that may involve great cost and the use, in all likelihood, of “big brother” technology. I have suggested a much simpler line of reducing the prizes which even my most battle hardened customers acknowledge would reduce their enthusiasm.

I have tried to see where the passion for pre-commitment as the best solution has arisen. When I ask most say “The Productivity Commission recommends this”. Having appeared before this body I have great respect for their work but they can only configure proposals from the information they are given. There is no really consistent scientific work supporting such proposals, including, I concede, mine – other than the lower levels of problems in England where on the machines I saw clear limits of prizes were displayed. Much emphasis on the Commission’s conclusion seems to go back to comments in the report from Victorian counsellors that 65% of their folks say they would like to control their gambling.

In my thirty years of working with this group I have never seen such a high figure. Most have tried to set limits and failed. About 25% in my experience do want to continue in a controlled fashion and I work with them on that. However most abandon the attempt and return to hazardous action. Why? Well, they say old habits die hard but also there is the hope of winning back losses as they could pick up \$10,000 or more in a linked jackpot and that would help the debts most are in from their past problems. Lower prizes would make that less likely but more importantly from my discussions they would have been less likely to have got started down the gambling pathway if lower wins were either possible or had been achieved. Many start off with a good win early in their gambling careers and the seeds for problems are sown then.

Clearly if pre-commitment comes in- in whatever form -it will have some impact. The issue I raise is one of cost effectiveness and whether a simpler measure - if legally possible for national implementation – may not be easier and, based on my clinical outlook, more effective in assisting these folks.

Thank you for considering this view which I know may be outside the committee's terms which seem to relate to pre-commitment only. In that field my only contribution would be to say that if this step is taken it should be compulsory if it is to have any real impact at all.

I would be happy to provide further comment if required.

Yours Faithfully,

Dr. Clive Allcock, B.Sc., M.B.Ch.B, FRANZCP, LTCL