

Hi,

I would like this email to be a submission for the 2016 IGA Amendment Bill. I am writing on the behalf of the Australian online poker playing community as I have enjoyed this pastime for the past 8 years or so. Currently, thousands of Australians enjoy playing online poker recreationally as an entertaining gambling game of skill, as opposed to other forms of gambling like online slots/pokies that are games of chance with no skill aspect, no social aspect and increased risks of problem gambling for consumers.

Collectively, we, the poker playing community, are concerned that the IGA Amendment may threaten our ability to enjoy playing online poker from our homes if a suitable provision is not included allowing reputable operators to apply for a license to offer online poker games to Australians. We believe it is our right as consenting adults to participate in a game of skill with our money for entertainment if we choose to do so.

I also find it concerning that the Australian government would consider turning down a potential revenue stream in licensing and regulating reputable online poker providers and taxing providers on a share of the profits generated from offering online poker games to Australians. Large international companies such as PokerStars (acquired by Amaya in 2014 for 4.9 billion USD, over 6 billion AUD at current rates) currently service the Australian market and this company as well as their major competitors have entered into agreements in many countries in Europe including the UK to apply for regulatory licenses and they pay substantial tax revenue on business done in these countries that have taken the logical step of regulating online poker. This generates many millions of dollars in ongoing revenue for the governments of these countries, easing the burden on the taxpayer and providing governments with much needed revenue.

Any stance excluding reputable online poker operators (such as Pokerstars, 888 and Party Poker) from servicing the Australian market is anti-free market, anti-business and most importantly anti-consumer as it will force Australian consumers wishing to play online poker to play on shady unregulated online poker sites. This situation has led to fraud and theft against consumers from unlicensed and unregulated online poker companies in countries around the world that have banned online poker rather than licensing and regulating it.

Poker has been shown to be a game of skill with a social aspect unlike other casino games in many studies including the Australian Productivity Commission's report in 2009. It is also a game that the provider does not have an interest in who wins and loses which can allow the most skilled players to actually win in the long term and many other enthusiasts to receive many hours of entertainment for very small losses with a far lower risk of gambling addiction than other forms of gambling due to the nature of poker as a social game with very few turns played per hour compared to other gambling games.

I would like to bring to your attention the 2012 Final Report: Review on the Interactive Gambling Act 2001

<https://www.communications.gov.au/file/7811/download?token=F785mC4l>. It identified that online poker was explicitly a low risk activity and recommended "a cautious approach to regulation and does not support online poker being excluded from the IGA." The report stated "In making its recommendation regarding regulated access, the Productivity Commission

stressed the difference between online poker card playing and other forms of online gaming (for example online slot machines) noting that while all types of gambling carry some degree of risk, online poker card playing involves relatively lesser risk because:

- it has a different character to EGMs
- it is partly a game of skill
- there is no evidence players experience the trance like states (at least to the same degree) that occur when playing EGMs
- there is a social dimension in that you are playing against other people so it is very interactive
- other online games can be played much more quickly and the stakeholder for other games is the casino
- the ground rules, with players competing for a pot of money to which they contribute, limit losses.”

This position was supported by the Australian Psychological Society.

This submission contains many excellent points on the matter and should be read by those drafting any legislation that would affect online poker providers in Australia <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/compl...ons/sub249.pdf>

Regards,