

Participation of Australians in Online Poker.

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I am a qualified counsellor, a carer, and do volunteer work with local community services. I live in Victoria, with my partner.

In the last 3 years, I have begun to play poker online as a hobby and have developed my skills to a point where I have placed in a few small tournaments.

I started to play poker after my partner, who due to his mobility issues struggles to get out, began to play poker as a means of recreational entertainment. It has become something we both enjoy, and something we can do together without the complications that going out to a venue together brings.

Through online poker, we have both made friends in various countries, including Australia, and got to know a wide variety of people.

My experience is that the online poker community are a supportive, and fun group of people, who all enjoy poker as a hobby. There are of course the ones who play it professionally, but most of us just enjoy it as a relaxing evening hobby with a beer or two. It is also very interesting talking to people from other countries, learning about their daily lives, and enjoying the friendly banter amongst other players.

As mentioned above, for me and majority of players, it's a hobby to enjoy at the end of the day or on the weekend, to help wind down and relax after a busy day.

Its not an addiction that takes up all my time. I am a carer, which takes up most of my time, and can be very demanding both mentally and physically, so I enjoy sitting down at the end of the day and playing a few games of poker to unwind.

The Nature and Extent of any Personal or Social Harms and Benefits Arising from Participating in Online Poker.

While I understand there are people who have addiction issues with all forms of gambling, I don't believe myself to be one of those. Online poker doesn't affect my life in a negative way. I have always been good with organising my money, work to a budget, and are able to stick to that. Rent and bills always come first, then groceries and other expenses, and then I see how much I can afford or want to put on poker, which usually is around \$20 a fortnight. In the poker community, there is a term for this called 'Bankroll Management' which basically means, play the tournaments suited to your bankroll. For example, if you only have \$20 in your poker account, don't go entering a \$15 tournament, because there's your money gone, instead enter a \$2 or \$3 tournament.

I have made friends and acquaintances through online poker, both in Australia and overseas. I am also part of a community online who all support and encourage each other in the wins and the losses of poker. Even with the threat of this bill preventing us playing poker, we still all communicate on a regular basis, and enjoy playing poker together online.

In this online community that I am a part of, I am not aware of anyone having a problem with gambling in terms of online poker. I am sure there are people out there who do

though. In terms of addiction to other gambling means, such as betting on horse races or sports events, I am also not aware of any people in my circle who have a problem with gambling.

I have grown up around gambling, as my Grandad owns several greyhounds and is involved in the Greyhound racing industry and quite often bets on his dogs. He has always said that his motto is “only bet what you can afford to lose.”

I have taken on this attitude regarding my online poker play. I have also seen the difference in betting on the dogs or the horses, and playing poker online.

In betting on the horses for example, you have no control over them, you can just read the odds and information from previous races they have been in and use that to guide your bet, where as in poker, is it less of a gamble and more about the percentage chance of your card coming out, or the likelihood of other players having a better hand than you. There is a lot more information you consider, a lot more maths you do in your head to work out if there is a point in betting on your hand, how much you should bet on your hand or if it is in your best interest to just fold.

When I first began playing poker, I didn't realise there was so much involved with the game. I started learning from other players, about things like bet sizing, odds of cards appearing on the board, what hands to play, what hands to fold, when to raise etc, and poker became a learning adventure as well as a hobby. I aimed to improve my game by learning all these things, going over my hands played and learning from my mistakes. There are also websites you can look at which show your game play statistics which is a helpful tool in measuring your progress in the game. It also shows how much money you have spent over a period vs how much money you have won over that same period. This is also a helpful tool in keeping your financial side of things under check and in perspective.

As mentioned earlier, my partner has mobility issues which makes it difficult for us to get out places, for example just going out together for dinner can be a challenge, ensuring close parking proximity to the venue, the walking distance inside the venue to get to a seat etc. So when we do go out it can cost a fair bit as we may not be able to go to certain cheaper venues due to the difficulties in parking or size of the venue. If we could find a suitable venue to play poker, we would be looking at the cost of dinner, drinks, entrance fee for the poker game, and the taxi fare to and from the venue.

For us, having the ability to play poker online, cuts out the need to find a suitable location that meets the criteria needed, and cuts out the cost. It is cheaper to eat at home, buy some beers from the bottle shop, and enjoy some poker online.

It is also a cheaper form of entertainment (and easier) for us than going out to the movies, for dinner or to a concert.

Whether the Current Regulatory Approach, in Particular, the Recently Amended Interactive Gambling Act 2001, is a Reasonable and Proportionate Response to Those Harms and Benefits.

When this act was introduced in 2001, the internet was not as big as it is today. It was a tool that was less trusted, we didn't make online purchases as they were deemed as too risky, you couldn't trust someone you couldn't see. But in today's world, everything is online, everything is available to be purchased online and is a lot more trustworthy and reliable. The internet and technology has become the norm and the way of the future. With this in

mind, online poker sites have taken off and become a good accessible and trustworthy way for us poker players to enjoy our hobby. There are of course the dodgy sites, as there are with everything on the internet, but the main international poker sites, such as 888 Poker, Poker Stars, and Party Poker, to name a few, are secure sites that allow you to deposit and withdraw funds to enjoy playing poker. They also have safety features that allow you set deposit limits on yourself, have strict age and identity checking measures, keep your money secure and promote responsible gambling.

These things should be considered when amending the outdated 2001 Gambling Act.

Until this proposal came out, I was unaware that online gambling in Australia was illegal, or be it in a 'grey area.' All the main poker sites allowed access to Australian players, and I have had no issues regarding depositing or withdrawing from my bank account or poker account. So, I fail to see how this act has been effective in preventing or controlling online gambling when it has been so easy to play poker online all this time.

I have demonstrated above how playing online poker doesn't control my life or negatively affect it in any way, and I therefore feel that the government should take this into account when amending the bill, and ensure they don't ban something for all, just because there are some who struggle with addiction, doesn't mean all poker players or gamblers do.

I pay my rent, I pay my bills, I don't starve, I give back to the community through my volunteer work. I just like to come home at the end of the day and enjoy a game of poker online in the comfort of my own home and relax.

If poker was to be removed online in Australia, I would attempt to continue to play, as it is something I enjoy, and as have previously mentioned, it is not easy to just go and play poker at a pub or casino.

If this is about not receiving tax revenue as these poker sites are offshore, I would support regulated online poker in Australia. This has been the case with America, who's citizens can't play on the international sites anymore due to law changes there, so a site for Americans was set up, which also allows international players, but meets their legal requirements.

Perhaps something can be done with taxing offshore poker sites, or creating a site for Australians to legally play poker of which a certain percentage of winnings or deposits are taxed. This money could go towards helping problem gamblers, promoting responsible gambling, scientific research and punishing unregulated operators.

Creating something similar in regard to taxing and safe operating such as how the TAB works would be beneficial to poker players in Australia, as although we all enjoy playing poker as a hobby, and having the right to play poker, we also enjoy knowing that our money is safe and secure in our poker account, and that the poker operator is abiding by the law.

In closing, I believe that online poker in Australia should be legal, through the use of licensing and regulation, as it is a hobby enjoyed by many in this country and around the world. It is a game of skill, and it shouldn't be illegal due to an outdated bill or because gambling is a problem for some, we shouldn't all have to lose something we enjoy.