

**Centre for Gambling Studies
Social & Community Health**



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Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform
P.O. Box 6100
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Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

By email: gamblingreform@aph.gov.au

**PARLIAMENTARY JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON GAMBLING REFORM REGARDING THE
INQUIRY INTO THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF PROBLEM GAMBLING**

Dear Ms Beverley,

I write in response to an invitation from you (letter 14 February 2012) to provide an individual submission to the Joint Select Committee.

My name is Peter Adams and I work as associate professor in the School of Population Health at the University of Auckland. I have a twenty-year history of involvement with gambling in New Zealand which includes experience as a clinical psychologist, researcher and teacher, plus key roles such as chair of the Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand (1997-2002), membership of quasi-government committees (such as the Problem Gambling Committee 1998-2002) and director of our University's Centre for Gambling Studies (2001 on). I have published numerous articles on gambling in leading international journals and have published a sole-authored book, *Gambling, Freedom and Democracy* (NY: Routledge, 2008).

I do not have and have never had any financial relationships with addictive consumption industries including those associated with gambling, alcohol or tobacco. I have worked on projects that have received funding from a government levy on gambling consumption. I have not received any funding for this submission.

My submission focuses primarily on questioning the quality and integrity of the current knowledge base on gambling due to widespread conflicts of interest associated with the profits from gambling,

particularly electronic gambling machines. Three internationally peer reviewed papers that elaborate further on points in the article are:

- Peter J. Adams, Ways in which gambling researchers receive funding from gambling industry sources, *International Gambling Studies*, Vol 11, No. 2, August 2011, pp 145-152;
- Peter J. Adams, Redefining the gambling problem: The production and consumption of gambling profits, *Gambling Research: Journal of the National Association for Gambling Studies (Australia)*, Vol 21, No. 1, May 2009, pp 51-54; and
- Peter J. Adams, Stephen Buetow and Fiona Rossen, Vested Interests in Addiction Research and Policy, Poisonous partnerships: health sector buy-in to arrangements with government and addictive consumption industries, *Addiction*, April 2010, 105 (4), pp 585-590.

Distortions in Current Knowledge

The current knowledge base available on problem gambling and associated literature on treatment and public health interventions should be approached with caution because of a range of links to vested interests. The main aspects of these links are:

- It is commonplace for gambling researchers, including leading international academics, to accept funding for their research from industry sources.
- This is not accepted practice in other areas of addictive consumptions (e.g. tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs). Indeed it is hard to imagine tobacco industry funded research attaining any credibility in tobacco control.¹
- Profits from gambling consumption are deployed (and 'sanitised') for research through a range of mechanisms which include third parties, expert panels and representative committees. These are described in detail in the first attached paper.²
- Researchers who accept funding from such sources will have an interest in taking on projects and presenting results which conform (or at least avoid challenging) industry interests.
- As a result, much of the funding for research has been over-invested in two safe and convenient but overall minimally useful areas, namely large population surveys and treatment evaluation research. Little has been invested in approaches that might make a difference in reducing gambling harm.

Governments have a Significant Conflict of Interest

Gary Banks speaking on behalf of the Productivity Commission three years after its first report on gambling (1999)³ identified seven major priorities for the future of which the third talked of a lack of transparency about research which "can encourage suspicions that only 'convenient' research sees the

¹ This is discussed in detail in P J Adams, 'Assessing Whether to Receive Funding Support from Tobacco, Alcohol, Gambling and Other Dangerous Consumption Industries', *Addiction*, 102, 7, 2007.

² P J Adams, 'Ways in Which Gambling Researchers Receive Funding from Gambling Industry Sources', *International Gambling Studies*, 11, 2, 2011. (see first attachment).

³ 'The Productivity Commission's Gambling Inquiry: 3 Years On. Presentation to the 12th Annual Conference of the National Association for Gambling Studies, Melbourne, 21 November 2002.

light of day.” His fourth priority was the need for “independent research” and his seventh and highest priority was the need for independence in governance arrangements.

A central issue here is that in Australia state governments continue to receive high levels of tax revenue from gambling and simultaneously maintain control over who, how and what occurs regarding gambling research. Their multilayered links to gambling, particularly EGM gambling, underpins a major conflict of interest they have in ensuring the independence of research, but, from their point of view, were they to relinquish such control, this could lead to research that may threaten their revenue base. I have covered these conflicts of interest in detail in my book *Gambling, Freedom and Democracy*, but one aspect of the book’s argument is presented in the second attached article.⁴

Who controls the research agenda?

The knowledge that is generated around a particular issue is often a function of the influences and incentives that drive enquiry. The following illustrates this point:

One night a woman was walking along a street and spotted a man looking around under a street-light for something. She asked him what he was looking for and he replied that he’d lost his car keys. The woman, trying to be helpful, asked where he thought he was when he lost them. He pointed across towards the darkness at the other side of the street. With a confused look she suggested politely that he might have more success looking over there. He responded immediately, “Yes, but this is where the light is.”

This analogy highlights two important issues: first, what we know about an issue is often determined by where it is easiest and most convenient to search. The second point is that what is easiest to research is a function of where the light is, and whoever places the light and supplies it with power will in the end have a large say in what is revealed. Moreover, what is illuminated may not shed light on what really matters.

Research funding in many jurisdictions (including Ontario, UK, Queensland, Victoria) have adopted what I refer to as a ‘tripartite funding model’ that insists on equal representation of the interests of government sector, industry sector and health/community sector. This has led to a variety of mechanisms for commissioning research of which the commonest involves forming a committee with balanced representation from each of the three sectors. However, on closer inspection, health/community sector interests are typically represented by industry compliant agencies and the coalition between government and industry sector interests inevitably end up driving outcomes. Further examination of the flawed nature of these arrangements is covered in the third attached paper.⁵

⁴ P J Adams, 'Redefining the Gambling Problem: The Production and Consumption of Gambling Profits', *Gambling Research*, 21, 1, 2011. (see second attachment).

⁵ P J Adams, S Buetow, and F Rossen, 'Poisonous Partnerships: Health Sector Buy-in to Arrangements with Government and Addictive Consumption Industries', *Addiction*, 105, 2010.

Questions that need to be asked⁶

The following are suggestions for questions that would assist members in assessing the quality and independence of the knowledge and advice that they are receiving. I refer here to those providing input generally as a “source”; this could be a researcher, a research group, someone summarizing research evidence, a field expert or an expert report, a consultant, a sector leader or a government official.

1. Is the source funded for their contribution?

Gambling industry and other profit beneficiaries may have invested specifically for the proceedings of this committee. For example, experts can often be paid or be receiving other forms of remuneration such support for travel or research activity. A critique of another researchers or expert’s advice may also have involved an exchange of funding. A challenge here is a common tendency for sources not to declare their financial linkages. For example, the leading journal *Addiction* often encounters researchers with known links to addictive industry sources who fail to declare these links even when these associations are well known. This journal’s editors are now considerably more active in challenging researchers on these claims and pointing out historical associations. Accordingly, an option for members of the Committee could be to pursue independent sources about a particular source’s links to gambling funding.

2. Is the source associated historically with receiving gambling funds?

An alternative way of investigating sources is to explore their historical links to industry funds. Have they received such funding in the past? Have they been associated with research projects with a link to industry funds? Do their associates or institutional base accept such funding? A track record of industry involvement, particularly a serial involvement, provides a strong indicator of whether the source has links to industry interests.

3. Could the source be receiving other benefits?

The source could be receiving a variety of other undeclared benefits which may influence how they present research outcomes. For example, individual researchers may be seeking to preserve ongoing relationships with industry organizations as a means of securing future funding. Government officials may be working in agencies with a strong interest in the profits from gambling (e.g. treasury). Research institutions may be party to non-financial exchanges of kind, such as supporting industry interests in exchange for access to venues or favorable communications. A wider range of these potential inducements is covered in my book *Gambling, Freedom and Democracy*.

Improving the Integrity of the Knowledge Base

Progress in reducing the widespread harms from gambling is reliant on the quality of the information available to work out what is going on and what might make a difference. The following are measures I would urge the Committee to consider during the deliberations:

- Abandon tripartite funding arrangements because they privilege industry and government vested interests and block the emergence of research on effective measures.

⁶ This question is relevant to a recent book by a leading figure in the field, Jim Orford, *An Unsafe Bet: The Dangerous Rise of Gambling and the Debate We Should Be Having*, Chichester, UK, 2011.

- Set up mechanisms for independent review and funding of gambling research. With state governments severely compromised by gambling income, this would best take place at a Federal level and perhaps involve other independent research funding bodies (such as the NHMRF).
- Establish watch-dog processes empowered to monitor and review the independence of gambling research. This could involve establishing database systems for tracking and recording financial relationships (as we are currently working on in NZ). Again those responsible for the monitoring would report at a federal level and perhaps involve other commissions (such as the Ombudsman).

Thank you for inviting me to provide a submission and I would welcome the opportunity to contribute further.

Yours Sincerely

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