

Submission to Inquiry: Participation of Australians in online poker

3/7/17

My name is Daniel Laidlaw, and I have been an Australian online poker player for the last 11 years. I believe the thousands of hours spent playing online poker since 2006 makes me one of the most senior online players in Australia, and hence puts me in a relevant position to address this inquiry.

Since discovering poker on the internet while at university in my early 20s, its impact on my life has been uniformly positive. It has directly inspired me to explore, and deepen my understanding of, the fields of probability, psychology, mathematics, and decision-making theory. Progressing at the game has both required, and taught, self-discipline and insight into the nature of my own mind.

In playing competitively, it has also afforded me the opportunity to travel Australia and the world, permitting me experiences I would not otherwise have had, including meeting my partner.

In my experience, all online players who have spent more than a trivial amount of time playing poker tend to report similar types of intellectual and personal growth to a greater or lesser degree. It must be emphasized this is all stems from the fact poker is a game of skill, which rewards serious study of the above fields, and makes it fundamentally different in character to other forms of gambling.

Because of this fundamental difference, Australian players are dismayed at poker's inclusion in the *Interactive Gambling Amendment (Sports Betting Reform) Bill 2015*. Many players feel denigrated and misunderstood by its conflation with other types of gambling. They see it as unfairly diminishing the merits of their chosen hobby. Having been forced to counter a negative perception of their game for a long time, they now face the prospect of it being reinforced by its inclusion in the Amendment.

Further, online poker players regard the moral argument for conflating poker with other forms of unregulated internet gambling – protection from self-harm – as disingenuous. It is apparent that governments around the world have been unable to keep up with shifting consumer habits in a global online economy, and feel they are missing out on their share of the profits when they see domestic money flowing to offshore companies without being taxed. Players do not want or need protection from the consequences of their choices, so the idea that the government is motivated by protecting them rather than expanding its tax revenue is seen as insincere.

Independent of the legitimacy of motives, the Amendment is simply an unreasonable and ineffective restriction of freedom. If Australians choose to spend money on offshore sites playing a game of skill, they are exercising their economic freedom by doing so. A minority of people will always cause self-harm through abuse of freedom in any endeavour. Limiting that freedom is never the appropriate answer.

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