

**Community Affairs Committee
Inquiry into Poker Machine Harm Minimisation Bill 2008
25 September 2008**

**Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Responses to Questions on Notice**

QON 1

Schedule of Ministerial Council on Gambling meetings

Senator FIELDING—how many times has the Ministerial Council on Gambling group met?

Mr Lewis—they have met seven times in total.

CHAIR—can we get a schedule of the meeting dates just for our records?

Mr Lewis—we can table the list of meeting dates. The minister was very keen to have frequent meetings and the spirit in the room at the meeting which I attended was one in which there was agreement about the importance of the issue and there was a decision to have more frequent meetings around collaborative work. The meeting that has been scheduled for February, the next meeting, is very soon in terms of the workload that has been agreed as part of the last meeting's deliberations.

RESPONSE

The Ministerial Council on Gambling (MCG) has met nine times since its inception. The MCG first met in April 2000 and last met in July 2008.

19 April 2000	Canberra
21 April 2001	Adelaide
11 September 2001	Canberra
21 November 2003	Melbourne
2 July 2004	Melbourne
28 April 2005	Adelaide
7 October 2005	Canberra
25 October 2006	Brisbane
November 2007	<i>Not held due to federal election</i>
25 July 2008	Melbourne

QON 2

How long did States and Territories have to respond to the Productivity Commission's terms of reference?

Mr Lewis—The terms of reference were agreed, but the states and territories had an option to come back and provide comment on that within a short window after the meeting.

Senator XENOPHON—And the short window was how long—a couple of weeks?

Mr Lewis—I do not know. We will take that on notice.

RESPONSE

- At its meeting of 3 July 2008, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to recommend that the Productivity Commission update its 1999 Inquiry.

- At the Ministerial Council on Gambling Meeting on 25 July 2008, the Minister sought feedback from State and Territory Officials on the Terms of Reference.
 - The Department wrote to Treasury on 28 August 2008 to seek advice on the Productivity Commission's capacity to consider the comments received.
 - Advice received was that the Terms of Reference were agreed by the Council of Australian Governments and therefore final. However, Treasury advised that there is scope for these issues to be raised with the Productivity Commission once the Inquiry has commenced.
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QON 3

Has the Treasurer actually instructed the Productivity Commission to commence this inquiry?

Senator XENOPHON—Okay. This was announced with much fanfare. Has the Treasurer actually instructed the Productivity Commission to commence this inquiry?

Mr Lewis—I will take that on notice.

CHAIR—The committee can ask the Treasurer's office directly.

RESPONSE

Yes – on 20 October 2008 the Assistant Treasurer, the Hon. Chris Bowen MP, and the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Jenny Macklin MP, announced the Productivity Commission Inquiry will commence on 24 November 2008.

QON 4

Memorandum of Understanding for website

Senator XENOPHON—You said the MOU is yet to be finalised in relation to the website. Can you tell us which states have yet to finalise the MOU?

Ms Farrelly—I do not have that information at the moment.

Senator XENOPHON—Could you take that on notice.

RESPONSE

Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia have not yet signed the Memorandum of Understanding due to changes in their ministerial arrangements.

QON 5

Is the Australian National University Gambling Studies chair involved in Gambling Research Australia?

Senator HUMPHRIES—yes, it might be. The ACT government some time ago set up a chair in gambling studies at the ANU. Is that chair involved in GRA in any way?

Mr Lewis—We will come back to you on that but I suspect not at this stage. We can take that on notice.

RESPONSE

The Chair of Gambling Studies at the Australian National University is not currently involved in Gambling Research Australia (GRA).

QON 6

Does the Department fund community groups involved in gambling rehabilitation?

Senator ADAMS—I am noting that you are involved with the community programs group. As a department do you fund any community groups involved with gambling as far as rehabilitation? Is there any program funding that is available?

Mr Lewis—I suspect we do but through broader community support. I do not have any of that information with me.

Senator ADAMS—Would you be able to have a look and see whether there is anything?

Mr Lewis—We will have a look at that.

RESPONSE

- Treatment services for problem gamblers have traditionally been funded by State and Territory Governments.
 - The Commonwealth funds a number of programs which problem gamblers access including Emergency Relief (\$30 million 2006-07), Supported Assistant Accommodation Program (SAAP), and Commonwealth Financial Counselling (\$2.453 million to 41 organisations in 2006-07).
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QON 7

Is there any research within the Department connecting mental health with problem gamblers?

Senator ADAMS—my second question was: is there any research within the department connecting mental health with problem gamblers?

Mr Lewis—we will have a look at that as well.

RESPONSE

In 2008, the Department commissioned the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health and Centre for Mental Health Research – part of the Australian National University to undertake a study titled *A Population Health Perspective on Gambling*. The report will be published in 2009. This study examined, among other things, the nature of associations linking psychological, social and health outcomes to frequency of gambling, time spent gambling and main type of activity.

Briefing Note 1 Gambling Research Australia

***CHAIR**—For the information of the committee, could we get a briefing note on Gambling Research Australia—where it is, how many staff, some of the publications? I know some of that will probably be on the website, but I think it would be useful for us.*

***Senator BOYCE**—My question—and you might cover this in the material the chair asked about as to Gambling Research Australia—is about the composition of the board, who appoints the members and what interest areas are represented by them. I have also heard criticism as to the fact that they do not represent the whole industry, only parts of it or the regulators.*

***Ms Farrelly**—I would be happy to take that on notice.*

RESPONSE

Gambling Research Australia (GRA)

- The Ministerial Council on Gambling (MCG) approved a Gambling Research Australia (GRA) Board consisting of representatives from each jurisdiction on the MCG and a representative from the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC) Gambling Working Party. Individual members are appointed by each jurisdiction.
- The Convenor of the GRA is an official from the South Australian Independent Gambling Authority.
- The Secretariat of the GRA is located with the Victorian Department of Justice, Office of Gaming and Racing. The Secretariat consists of two staff members.

Jurisdiction	Location within Government
Commonwealth	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, Gambling and Financial Management Section
New South Wales	Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation, Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing
Australian Capital Territory	ACT Gambling and Racing Commission
Queensland	Queensland Treasury, Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation
Victoria	Department of Justice, Office of Gaming and Racing
South Australia	Independent Gambling Authority and the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC) Gambling Working Group
Western Australia	Department of Racing, Gaming & Liquor
Tasmania	Department of Treasury & Finance
Northern Territory	Department of Justice, Office of Alcohol, Policy & Coordination

GRA invited a representative from the Ministry of Health, New Zealand to participate in its deliberations on an “observer” basis. New Zealand has been represented on GRA since October 2007.

Briefing Note 2: 1800 number

***CHAIR**—In terms of information about the hotline, is there a briefing paper we could get about the cost, who has the contract and all that kind of stuff?*

***Mr Lewis**—Yes.*

***CHAIR**—It would be very useful. I do not want to presume anybody else's questions, but I would like kind of Senate estimates type response to the initiatives that have been announced, in particular that hotline, because it was mentioned by a couple of the people giving evidence as something they sought. They wanted see how it operated. We would like the specifics about who got the contract, how it was let, where operating and the evaluation process—all those things that we normally ask you for in Senate estimates.*

***Senator BOYCE**—Is there information of a similar nature for the website and the counselling service?*

***Mr Lewis**—The only proviso that would prevent us providing that to you directly would be our consultation with states and territories. If the contracts are relationships they have, we would have to talk with them about how they do that.*

RESPONSE

- The national 1800 (**1800 858 858**) problem gambling telephone number is a hotline for all problem gamblers and their families which directs them to local gambling help services regardless of where they are calling from within Australia.
 - For example, when someone from South Australia rings this number they will be connected to a State based counsellor, who will have all the information on local gambling help services.
 - The number does not replace existing helpline numbers it provides an **additional** pathway for problem gamblers and their families to access gambling help services.
 - The 1800 number operates **24 hours, seven days a week**.
 - The national number (1800 858 858) is currently live in all states and territories except the ACT. Technical routing issues are expected to be resolved in the near future so the number is active in the ACT.
 - The Victorian Department of Justice is responsible for managing the new national number. Victoria purchased the number on behalf of all jurisdictions and will bill each jurisdiction for re-routing to the new number.
 - The new number allows for flexible transition arrangements. Clients calling either the current 1800 number in their jurisdiction or the new national 1800 number will be automatically directed to the service provided within that jurisdiction.
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Briefing Note 3: On-line counselling

- The development of a national online counselling initiative has been led by Victoria, through the Community and Disability Services Ministers Advisory Council (CDSMAC) Gambling Working Party.
- The online counselling and web-based referral service will be managed by Turning Point Australia. Turning Point Australia was contracted for a state-based online counselling service in Victoria with a contract variation extending this to a national approach.
- The contract with Turning Point is managed by the Victorian Department of Justice. Turning Point provides a similar web-based service for drug and alcohol support, *CounsellingOnline*, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

Website

- The website will provide a multi-layered response to the needs of visitors. It will provide access to range of gambling information and resources (both local and virtual).
- It will provide 24-hour, 7 days a week counselling for problem gamblers and assessment and referral interventions.
- It is anticipated that the website will be in operation by March 2009.

Staffing

- The website will be staffed by professional gambling counsellors provided by Turning Point.
- Approximately 4.6 people will staff the website.
- Program management will be undertaken by the Victorian Office of Gaming and Racing.