

# CORRECTED VERSION

## SELECT COMMITTEE ON GAMING LICENSING

Melbourne — 12 February 2008

### Members

Mr G. Barber

Mr D. Drum

Mr M. Guy

Mr P. Kavanagh

Mr M. Pakula

Mr G. Rich-Phillips

Mr M. Viney

Chair: Mr G. Rich-Phillips

Deputy Chair: Mr M. Viney

### Staff

Secretary: Mr R. Willis

Research Assistant: Mr A. Walsh

### Witnesses

Ms G. Byrne, chair, (sworn); and

Mr T. Falkiner, barrister (sworn), Chrysalis Insight.

**The CHAIR** — I welcome Ms Gabriela Byrne and Mr Tim Falkiner from Chrysalis Insight. This part of the committee's hearing is in relation to the legislative and regulatory framework for EGMs, the post-2012 EGM licensing, the effectiveness of measures to address problem gambling, and the Community Support Fund. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and is further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence is taken under oath or affirmation and is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript in the next couple of days. The committee has allowed 5 minutes for you to make an opening statement if you would like to, or we can proceed to questions based on your submission.

**Ms BYRNE** — Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would like to summarise my points in this very brief document. Neither I nor Chrysalis — that is the organisation that I am representing here today — have ever said that gambling per se is an unacceptable activity. The reason I state this is because very often I am portrayed as an anti-gaming campaigner and I am an anti-pokies campaigner. I wanted to make that very clear.

What I do speak out against and will continue to speak out against is the unacceptably high level of problem gambling currently associated with the use of EGMs or poker machines. I consider myself somewhat of an expert in regards to pokies, and especially in regards to problem gambling because, in 1992, when poker machines were introduced to Victoria, I developed a hot, passionate love affair with this product. I was addicted to poker machine gambling. I lost about \$40 000 in five months before my husband controlled the access to money; I lost the money, though, on poker machines with a maximum of five lines compared to players who can play 50 lines right now; I lost it on poker machines with a lot slower spin rate; and I had to push \$40 000 in coins through a slot because we did not have note acceptors at that stage.

I guess far worse, though, was what the affair made me become as a person. Besides losing all this money, I lost four years of being part of my children's lives, and they were quite young at the time; I lost many friends; I lost two jobs; I nearly ruined my marriage; and I contemplated suicide on many occasions. After stopping in 1997 I have been actively involved and have tried to initiate changes and raise awareness in the community. For the last 10 years I have helped and supported hundreds of other problem gamblers and their families, so I can comment I think with some authority on the measures that are currently in place to prevent a person from becoming addicted to the pokies.

These measures I have been campaigning for do relate to product safety — and that is the reason I brought Tim Falkiner with me; he is an expert on this product that, as we have discovered certainly recently, has some incredible flaws and faults — and consumer protection. Poker machines are basically unsafe and there is no regulation of what this machine can be set up to do or not do. New machines are not tested for consumer safety by the government, and there is no regulation that prevents a new generation of machines entering the market to extract more money in shorter periods of time. Legislation has to be introduced so that any change to machine design will only be permitted into the market if industry can prove that the proposed changes will not increase the level of problem gambling. How is it possible that one of my clients — a young, single mother of two children — is able to lose \$7000 on a 1 cent machine in 45 minutes? I do not call this entertainment — I think this is an irresponsible industry supported by a government addicted to the revenue.

If the product — and I am just calling it as I believe it is, a product — any product has the potential to harm individuals, then our government has an obligation to its citizens to put legislation and regulation in place that will prevent people from getting hurt, even if it is just to protect people from themselves, and I quote here the seatbelt legislation. I also recall the Panadol case in Queensland, where a product was consumed and just made somebody slightly ill. I mean, nobody was actually killed, and this product was basically removed from the shelf and put there when it was proven to be safe, with measures protecting people from just getting access to the product.

As you have read in my submission, I do not believe just reducing the number of poker machines in Victoria would solve the problem. I believe the accessibility to this product is the major problem that we have to face and have to deal with. So I believe fewer venues is really what is needed. I therefore fully support Senator Fielding's attempt, which came out yesterday, to address this issue before Parliament, and his suggestion, through a radical federal tax plan, to provide destination gambling, as I would call it, and confine poker machines to casinos and racetracks.

Other ways of reducing problem gambling, which are also listed in my submission before, are things like slowing down spin rates, reducing the maximum bet per spin, reducing the number of lines, removing note acceptors to force the gambler to take more time inserting coins, removing ATMs from venues, introducing smart cards, removing linked jackpots, and reducing the maximum number of credits. I list this not in the order of priority. If I were to say which one is the most important one, I probably would say removing ATMs out of gambling venues and introducing smart cards.

In closing, I just thought I would offer you all a challenge, because maybe I am the first problem gambler you have come face to face with, I am not sure. I believe problem gambling is caused to a large degree by the poker machines, by the products themselves, and I would love you to give me your wives or daughters or sons for a couple of hours every day for two weeks, and I am convinced they would become as addicted to this product as I was. I guess that would be the only way that we might convince our government that the product is the problem, not the person. Thank you for your time, I am very happy to take personal questions, as personal as they might be. That is what I had to say.

**The CHAIR** — The reference you made in your statement and also in your submission to safe gambling products, can you tell us what you mean by a safe gambling product?

**Ms BYRNE** — There is a term that has been thrown around a lot, and that is responsible gambling with a safe product. I think these two terms are interlinked, because I think responsible gambling is something we have not really defined yet. If you talk about alcohol, you get guidelines that will talk about how much you should or should not drink to be in a sort of safe frame. In regard to poker machines in particular we do not have any guidelines as to how much is safe, how much money spent on a machine is safe, is responsible. Tim Falkiner worked overseas together with Roger Horbay and discovered that this product is actually rigged, to call it in his terms. Do you want him to talk about why he believes this product is unsafe, because he knows the technical things behind poker machine design much better than I do.

**Mr FALKINER** — Essentially there are two ways of cheating with machinery or with decks of cards and so forth. To take these dice as an example, these are casino-standard dice. They are transparent, square cut and numbered one to six on each side. Then you have — and you cannot see this — but they are loaded dice, and these dice look as though each side has a one-in-six chance of coming up, but they do not, because they are loaded. I make the additional point that these are heavily loaded dice, so anybody who plays with them or against them will not play for long; they will realise there is something wrong. When looking at these dice I have here, I am pretty sure you have made the assumption that these dice are all the same. In fact they are not. One of the dice has fives on each side, and this other dice — it is hard to pick them out quickly — has nothing but sixes and twos on it.

When people are playing a gaming machine, essentially there are two ways of rigging a gaming machine; although you can do it both ways. One way, which is the old way, is to starve one reel of a particular symbol. Could I just read an extract from a book? It has been given to you with other materials yesterday, Chair. It is only a short passage.

**The CHAIR** — We do not have a lot of time, Mr Falkiner.

**Mr FALKINER** — It is important. This is a statement attributed to Mr Peccole, who is a Nevada gaming commissioner. In one of the cases he said:

I can remember the old mechanical machines when you'd load up the first reel and the second reel and have one bar on the end, and if that isn't messing around with the pay line, I don't know what is. I mean you are just as deceptive in that instance as you are with any concept of deception. It will bring those bars up on the first two reels, but nothing shows on the third reel. And people keep coming back because they think they are going to win.

This is known as a near-miss machine, and our machines are as described by Mr Peccole. The machines have different numbers of symbols on each reel, so the effect of that is that, say, you might have 6 kings on reel 1, 6 kings on reel 2 and only 1 king on reel 3. The player will keep on getting 2 kings and missing on the third reel, and that is the problem. If the symbols were equally distributed over the reels, the machines would be paying out about 200 per cent; they would be paying out twice the amount of money that was put into them. Of course they do not; they pay out 90 per cent. In my view and in Roger Horbay's view — in Canada — that is what makes the machines so dangerous. That is why we look at — about 80 to 85 per cent of the problem gamblers in Victoria play gaming machines.

**Mr VINEY** — I do not actually have any questions, Ms Byrne, but I would say thank you for your evidence and particularly your willingness to give such personal evidence. I just add that I wish you were the only problem gambler I had met.

**Mr BARBER** — I have never played a poker machine, so you will have to explain to me how is it possible to lose \$7000 on a 1-cent machine in 45 minutes? When I hear 1-cent machine, I think you are betting 1 cent a go.

**Ms BYRNE** — No, no, that that is not possible, really. It is possible, but you have to load up the machine with at least \$1, because that is the smallest currency that you can — if you actually put a coin in, that is the smallest amount you can do to actually start playing. I mean, we do not have 1 cent coins, so that would not be possible. But then you could choose one line, one credit, which would be 1 cent. Most poker machines now have at least 25 lines, up to 50 lines.

**Mr BARBER** — That is lines of reels that appear to be spinning?

**Mr PAKULA** — Horizontal, vertical, diagonal?

**Mr DRUM** — Zigzag.

**Ms BYRNE** — That is 50 lines that in a lot of machines you could play, and then you can also double the credits. So, say if I have 50 lines that I play on a 1-cent machine, it would be 50 cents. If I doubled the credit, it is \$1. Every 1-cent machine, as well as a 2-cent machine or a \$1 machine, allows you to play \$10 per push.

**Mr BARBER** — So a 1-cent machine or a \$1 machine does not actually make any difference to what you could — —

**Ms BYRNE** — No, it is just the amount.

**Mr BARBER** — The maximum amount you could bet. It is just the unit?

**Ms BYRNE** — Yes. You can actually do that every 2.4 seconds. So if you push down \$10 every 2.4 seconds, regardless of what kind of machine you play, if you do not win, you can add up how quickly you can actually lose hundreds of dollars in a very short period of time. This young woman had her mortgage payments with her. Because she was in arrears she borrowed that money, and she thought if she could just win a little bit back, then it would allow her to get rid of her debt. This is the false pretence that problem gamblers get into. She took with her \$3000. Once she lost the \$3000, she was panicking, so she went to her bank, around the corner, actually, and went into her mortgage — whatever that amount is that you can draw on.

**Mr BARBER** — A redraw.

**Ms BYRNE** — Yes, and she took another \$4000 out, thinking she could use the \$2000 to win the money back and the other \$2000 to pay the mortgage with. And she lost that money. Then one of the attendants from the gaming venue approached her, which is not allowed, really, under the code of conduct that the gaming industry has. But he said to her — because he watched her, and she was a regular, and he said, ‘I hope you realise that even though you put all this money into this machine it does not mean that it has to come out of this machine and pay you back’. That actually broke the cycle, because she thought, ‘Somebody is watching me. They think I have a problem. I had better get out of here’. I did not mention this in my submission, but I believe there have to be some stronger intervention strategies developed on the floor so that the people that are their witnessing things are able to help or support. Does that clear up how it works with the 1-cent machine?

**Mr BARBER** — Yes.

**Mr DRUM** — I am interested to hear you talk about that interventionist approach, because I have also heard that it has shown some benefits at Crown, where they have those people in place. I am interested in the mindset of the problem gambler. As you walk into a venue would you be amenable to setting a precommitted loss limit?

**Ms BYRNE** — When I was a problem gambler I think anything that would have helped me to take control to some degree of the amounts that I spent would have helped, because it is a little bit like being in a

Jekyll-and-Hyde situation. When you wake up in the morning you say you are never going to go there again, and then all of a sudden something will trigger the voice that says, 'This time you can control it, let's just spend \$10'. And you walk into this room, and the minute you walk into the room, because of the way it is set up, all your senses get attacked and distracted.

Immediately you get into what people refer to as 'the zone' or this kind of heightened personality where you have no responsibility, no values. Everything that you had while you were out there is gone, and you become this ruthless person, and all you want to do is feed the beast, and you do not really care about your family, about values that you hold. As an example of how bad you become, I remember standing at Crown Casino car park. I had lost a lot of money. I had actually dipped into petty cash from my work. I had pawned my jewellery, including my wedding ring. I had lost that money, too, and I had no money to get home. I remember standing in the car park thinking that I had heard about people that sell themselves to make money, and had somebody approached me there and then, I would have done it. This is so far removed from who I actually am as a person that it would not have been possible if I had been in my sane sense of mind. It is just an example of how the total sense, distraction and addiction can take over everything.

**Mr DRUM** — I want to thank you and congratulate you for the courage. It is great for us to hear it firsthand.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — Could I ask you, the first time you played did you win?

**Ms BYRNE** — Not a lot, no. The first time I played I went with a group of friends on a Friday. We always frequented a hotel in Heidelberg. That was one of the first venues that became a gaming venue. So instead of sitting around a table discussing how bad our boss was, we went into this gaming room and stood around a machine as group, and we took it in turns to push a button. I still remember thinking, how boring is this. After doing this sort of regularly as a Friday entertainment — I remember I had a big argument with my boss one morning, and I wanted to resign on the spot, and this little voice said to me, 'Don't be stupid. Go somewhere and forget all about it'. Where do you go? I thought I will go to this pokie place. That was the first time I went by myself. Within three to five weeks I was there every day, sometimes three to five times a day.

I think it is a fact that it provides you with — in my case — a tool of total escape from reality. For a lot of females — and it is unfortunate that we do not have any females on this panel, but they might agree — we do not have places for women in Australia to go where you just go for the sheer pleasure of good company and lively conversation. You have to either join an arts and crafts or cooking class. You guys could, if you wanted to, go to a pub. From where I come from in Germany, we have a completely different pub culture. I can walk into my local pub there, and the publican knows my name and he knows what I drink, and I sit around the table with total strangers discussing how stupid my husband is — sorry, I hope you do not publish that!

**The CHAIR** — You can edit it, it is all right.

**Ms BYRNE** — Okay, thank you.

**Mr PAKULA** — I think our wives do the same thing!

**Ms BYRNE** — I guess the lack of these kinds of places where we can go, at an ungodly hour sometimes, is missing, and the gaming industry found its niche. As a woman I walk into a gaming room, and I am safe; I do not look like somebody is looking at me like I want to pick up. I can actually feel like I am doing something that is taking me away from reality and washing and cleaning and cooking.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — Did you mostly play in the daytime or at night-time?

**Ms BYRNE** — Any time I could. Very bad for me were Sundays because at that stage we still had the curfew where 10 o'clock was the finish in gaming rooms. I lost my licence because I initiated a fight with my husband after we had consumed a bottle of wine over a meal so that I could get out of the house and play the machine. I see him still running after my car saying, 'You have had too much to drink'. Anyway, I went to the local pub, and I had another glass that was free at the time — they know you, they give you free alcohol. Then it closed, and I did not have enough, so I wondered where I could go. So I went to Doncaster to see if that hotel was still open, and it was not, so my only chance was to go to the casino. I was driving really slowly, fighting inside of me

the fact I should go home as it is too far to drive. The police stopped me, and I lost my licence for 11 months just because I tried to go at times that I normally should devote to my family, really.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — Did you often drink while you were gambling?

**Ms BYRNE** — If I won. The money I needed was to gamble, so I would not buy a drink unless I won something, and then I celebrated. Or the hotel gave it to me anyway, because they liked me.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — Did many other people drink while they were gambling, did you notice, most of the time?

**Ms BYRNE** — I think a real problem gambler would rather save their money and stay as long as they can to feed the machine rather than invest in alcohol.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — Would it have made any difference if there had been a clear sign there saying something like, 'For every dollar you put in this machine you are going to lose 10 cents of it', making it clear the odds were against you?

**Ms BYRNE** — I am not sure; you know, it becomes part of the furniture. I think at one stage I was campaigning for clocks. I was part of that committee that went around and tried to design the right size. My opinion was that you just had to have a big one right on the screen after about 30 minutes or whatever. When they brought out this little china duplicate — people do not look at that anymore because it is part of the whole environment. No, I do not think so. It would not make a major difference, no.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — You said you thought about suicide quite a lot. How close do you think you came to suicide?

**Ms BYRNE** — I came very close. One particular night just before I stopped, actually, I attempted to kill myself, and it was just by the grace of God that it did not work out. Every person that I have spoken to who came to me since has at least thoughts, because it seems like such a vicious cycle. The problem we have is that out there it is so stigmatised — acknowledging that you have a problem with the pokies. It is okay to be a drug addict. I had a person telling me that she would rather admit to her counsellor that she is a heroin addict than say that she is addicted to the pokies. That is the reason I have been speaking out for 10 years, because I think unless more and more people acknowledge that it can happen to intelligent, middle-class, normal people — I am not out of a low socioeconomic area; We have a really nice house; I have a healthy family; I have a lovely husband; very supportive, and it happened to me — it can happen to anybody.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — Are you saying that you did not just think about suicide; you attempted suicide at one stage?

**Ms BYRNE** — Yes, one time. That sort of, I guess, was the thing that made me address the real issue in my life. I believe that every person who gets hooked on it, it does not matter what it is, has a puzzle piece missing in their jigsaw puzzle of life. It might be relationship issues, it might be grief unresolved, it might be just loneliness and boredom. Once you stop the behaviour I think you have to address what is the missing piece. In my case it was a very strong spiritual void in the sense of not knowing why I was here, what was the purpose. Being from Germany, away from my family, probably contributed. Once I addressed that — and I am a Christian — my jigsaw puzzle was complete. That is why I believe I can say that I am cured.

I want to make the point also that I can play blackjack in a casino and I can buy a Tattsлото ticket — which I do not do, though, because Tattersall's have had enough of my money. I can do all this. I can place a bet on a horse in the Melbourne Cup because I like the number or the name of the jockey. I have no issues with any other form of gambling, and a lot of people I have been seeing over the years say the same thing.

**Mr PAKULA** — Thank you, Ms Byrne, for coming before us today. I want to just pick up a few of the issues that you have raised. You said that you lost your licence. Did you continue to gamble on the pokies after you lost your licence?

**Ms BYRNE** — Oh, yes. I did some really clever stuff. I lived in Warrandyte and worked in Heidelberg, so it is a fair way. I worked for a German company and I had to be there at 7.30 to cook coffee for my boss. What I did was advertise and I got a person who was a German in to live with us, who looked after my children and drove

me to work and I got a lift home or took the bus. But very often what I used to do just to gamble was I called my husband from Warrandyte, already being at the pub, and said, 'Oh, I'm leaving the office now', so I got an extra hour. One of my main passions is basketball. I used to represent Germany and my husband is a dual Olympian, so basketball was my other passion. Even in the midst of all this, I used to have a girl pick me up from basketball, then pretend that I was sick, and I went and played the pokies and then came home. So there were lots of indicators.

**Mr PAKULA** — So you were resourceful?

**Ms BYRNE** — My husband always said to me, 'Gabi, if you would have put as much energy and imagination into a business as you did into being addicted to the pokies, we'd be millionaires by now'.

**Mr PAKULA** — It sounds from your evidence that you have played at different venues and machines.

**Ms BYRNE** — Yes.

**Mr PAKULA** — It brings me to the issue that I think all of us at this table have grappled with, the most effective methods. As an addicted pokies player, if there were fewer machines or you had to travel further to find a machine, would any of that have deterred you?

**Ms BYRNE** — Yes. In Germany, as an example, casinos are very far spread out around Germany; they are not very close together. To actually gamble in a casino you have to live 150 kilometres away from there. Because we have ID cards, it is easy to check. They run your ID card and if you live in that vicinity you are not allowed to gamble. It never occurred to me. We went there maybe once every three years and it was a major outing. I think over here if all the poker machines were in this casino, I would not drop my kids off to school and then travel for 45 minutes in peak hour to go and gamble for an hour.

**Mr PAKULA** — I accept that, if it was all in the one venue. If it was not at the local pub 2 kilometres away but at a licensed venue 10 kilometres away — I am talking about once you were already a problem gambler — would that have deterred you? It sounds as if you went to some pretty extraordinary lengths, as it was.

**Ms BYRNE** — I guess it would have an impact. Whilst you are travelling — I talked about this internal war —

**Mr BARBER** — You are not gambling while you are travelling.

**Ms BYRNE** — No, while you are travelling you are not gambling, so it makes a difference to the bottom line, I guess. But also there are the chances of your coming to your senses. It is the impulse that a problem gambler experiences. The minute he makes the decision, he wants to go. If he has to actually go, the first day he might still go, but the more he has to do it on a day-by-day basis, the more it becomes like that time when you actually think and have a choice. That is why I think taking ATMs out — by the time you walk somewhere to draw out money, you have a chance to come back to your senses, if that makes sense.

**Mr PAKULA** — I am sorry to ask this, but was your addiction to poker machines your first incidence of addictive behaviour? I mean, had you ever had any addictive episodes prior to the addiction to poker machines?

**Ms BYRNE** — Smoking. I was a smoker. I think that is an addiction. I find it very funny, too, that smoking gets dealt with completely differently from any other form of addiction. You do not have to stand up and say, 'I am a compulsive smoker, but I haven't had a smoke for 450 days and 13 hours'. With gamblers, it is like you have to classify yourself for the rest of your life with a behaviour, that I believe I learned and I learned to unlearn. Yes, smoking definitely was.

**Mr PAKULA** — Just going to one of the issues Mr Kavanagh raised when he talked about signs indicating that you are unlikely to win in the long run, my instinct tells me that every problem gambler would know that inherently.

**Ms BYRNE** — Yes, every problem gambler must know all that. But I think what would help problem gamblers would be if they could get their hands on the information Tim Falkiner has in regards to a machine, that they actually get cheated, that it is like playing with loaded dice. If I had known then what I know now about poker machines, the set-up, the sense distraction and the manipulation of staff and the environment, I would not have put even a dollar in.

**Mr PAKULA** — If I could direct just one question to you, Mr Falkiner. Your evidence was, that if all the reels had an equal weight, the return to the punter would be 200 per cent. I think that is what you said.

**Mr FALKINER** — That is correct, yes.

**Mr PAKULA** — Obviously no gaming machine company is going to devise a machine where the return to the punter is 200 per cent.

**Mr FALKINER** — It would not stay in business for long, no.

**Mr PAKULA** — Not very long. Instead, the machines are devised so that the return to the punter is in line with government legislation, whether it is 88, or 90 — let us say around 90. Is it your evidence that a machine can be devised where the return to the player remains in that 90 range but loses the addictive qualities that you say that promotes, or is it inherently addictive at that percentage configuration?

**Mr FALKINER** — I will make one comment. I am not aware of a machine which is square, if you like — which does have the same symbols on each reel. I believe it would certainly be less addictive. It could certainly easily be made. I understand that has been done in Canada by Roger Horbay of Gameplanet. That is associated with the Newfoundland class action and Associate Professor Harrigan. I think you have those documents.

**Mr PAKULA** — You think a machine can be devised where there is still a return to the punter in that same vicinity but with less addictive qualities?

**Mr FALKINER** — Most certainly, yes.

**Mr GUY** — Ms Byrne and Mr Falkiner, I think you have achieved one thing this morning that has not been done before, and that is to have this committee in furious agreement. Thank you very much for coming along today, and particularly you, Ms Byrne, for sharing your very personalised experience. I do not have any questions. I just wanted to reiterate the comments you made about middle-aged women and gambling and about a gaming house being a safe house and a safe venue for women to go to. The people I know who are problem gamblers are all in that demographic and are all in that age group, and they go to gambling houses for very similar reasons, so I think it is very important that you made those comments on the record. Thank you both again for coming along today.

**Ms BYRNE** — Thank you.

**Mr FALKINER** — Thank you, Mr Guy.

**Mr DRUM** — Again, I just want to touch on Mr Pakula's point. This is since your time, Gabriela, but there are two technologies that have come in recently with this near-miss technology and also the free-spin technology; how addictive and how problematic are those two progressions in the industry, do you believe?

**Ms BYRNE** — I think especially the free-spin one was one that really was impacting on how I played, because once you got a certain amount of symbols lined up, it gave you a breather. You get 15 free games or something, which I could then use to go and get a coffee or get that feeling of, 'Now I'm going to win money without me actually being actively involved and watching'. It was very strange, but that basically triggered a behaviour where, when I thought I would get them, I would play higher credits and would increase the bet, because I thought, 'Well, then they're going to pay out more'.

For a lot of people that I have seen it is a very dangerous part of the whole game dynamic. What concerns me in all of this is that we as, say, the anti-pokies lobbyists have to always come up with research and whatever we want to have introduced has to be proven to work. Nobody ever asked us about implementing note acceptors — where was the evidence that they did not produce harmful outcomes? The industry has a lot to answer for, and I think it is time that we put it on the industry and not just the people who are damaged, who are its victims already and who get more victimised by getting branded as the stupid ones who get hooked.

**The CHAIR** — I have one final question. Given your knowledge of how the industry works and your background, in your view would you be able to play EGMs now without reverting to your addictive behaviour?



**Ms BYRNE** — I can, yes; I have done so. I was part of a current affairs program where I went into a gaming venue with a hidden camera just to expose some of the traps that I have briefly talked about. I put a \$100 note in that Channel 7 gave me, and I was questioning myself all along. I pushed buttons, and I then pushed a button to get the money back out to demonstrate that even though you push a \$100 note in, you get 95 coins back, which in itself, I think, is rigged.

All along all I could think about was that I did not feel anything, really. It is a bit like when I talk about a love affair — most people can relate to that analogy. It is a little bit like running into the old flame whom you have not seen for a long time, and the image that you carry in your heart and the real thing are different — you thought they had more hair. Sorry, I did not mean to look at you, Chair! All I could think of was, ‘What on earth did I ever see in them?’. It was just not me any more. So, yes, I can. I believe it is different to other addictions as well, because for me there is nothing, really.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. The committee certainly appreciates your testimony and willingness to talk about your own experiences this morning. Mr Falkiner, we appreciate your attendance as well and the written submission. We will have a proof transcript to you in the next couple of days for any corrections. Thank you very much.

**Witnesses withdrew.**