

Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

1st October 2008

Submission: Inquiry into the Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008, the Poker Machine Harm Minimisation Bill 2008 and the ATMs and Cash Facilities in Licensed Venues Bill 2008

Introduction:

Gaming machines are a readily available, addictive device by means of which hundreds of South Australians every year cause grievous harm to themselves and the loved ones around them. The harm is financial, emotional and spiritual. I have seen this in some of the people in my community. Better legislation is required to protect players (and their families and friends) from the impact of addictive gambling.

Terminology:

I ask all honourable Senators and other political and community leaders to be mindful of their language when dealing with this issue. The industry has succeeded in setting the framework for debate. In my view ‘gaming’ machines should be called gambling machines to dispel the lie that using these machines is merely a harmless recreational pursuit. For the same reasons we should call ‘problem’ gambling what it is – addictive gambling.

Current Practice:

In South Australia there is a limitation on the total hours a gaming room can operate, but the current legislation does not specify which hours of the day the gaming room can be open. Therefore, in effect, it is possible for gaming rooms to stagger their closing times so that there are poker machines available 24/7 in many metropolitan areas.

Other current practices in poker machines include such features as ‘near-misses’, which give the gambler the illusion that they have almost won on a particular spin, as all reels apart from one show the same symbol. This gives the illusion that the gambler is close to winning, enticing them to gamble further. This is misleading, as the gambler is no more likely to win at that point than they were with the previous spin, and consistent ‘near misses’ have a ‘bait’ effect.

Recommendation: That corporations, other than licensed casinos, not be permitted to open gaming rooms between the hours of 12 midnight to 12 noon (to ensure that gamblers are given an effective break).

Recommendation: That gaming machines which deliberately produce ‘near miss’ results (due to uneven distribution of symbols among the various ‘reels’) be banned.

Recommendation: That Smart cards be made mandatory for all players, which allow an Independent Gambling Authority to identify problem gamblers and intervene individually with such players.

Recommendation: That, through the use of the Smart card, the player is informed of the exact amount of money, in real dollars, which has been cumulatively lost beyond the current gambling session.

Recommendation: That the ATM proposals in Senator Fielding’s Bill be supported.

Conclusion:

I support the reforms made in the draft Bill, which will help reduce the amount lost through poker machine addiction. There is very strong support in the community for preventing further adverse impacts of poker machines.

Kris Hanna MP
Member for Mitchell