

Chair's Preface

On the occasion of the committee's sixth and final report I take this opportunity to provide a few final comments on the work of the committee over the past almost three years.

First thank you to my fellow committee members. Many of them have been with the committee since its beginning and I wish to thank them all for their spirit of cooperation in this important area. The committee has produced valuable work which I trust will continue to further progress reforms to minimise harm from gambling.

Throughout its reports the committee had the benefit of the work undertaken in 1999 and 2010 by the Productivity Commission and the committee has worked its way through the same areas. The committee has covered most forms of gambling in its six reports.¹

The committee's **first report** covered the design and implementation of a mandatory pre-commitment system for electronic gaming machines. The government response to this is examined in the committee's **fourth report**: National Gambling Reform Bill 2012 and related bills.

My personal view is that I wish the government had gone further and achieved more during the Parliament in the area of poker machine reform. The opportunity for real reform was not fully realised and this is deeply disappointing.

However, the government legislation is a start. It is a modest reform and I have tried my best to improve it. Importantly, it will allow the federal government to progress gambling reform which until now has been the exclusive domain of the states and territories. It puts them on notice that harm minimisation measures must be effective or the federal government will take further action. I hope it serves as a stepping stone to more effective harm minimisation measures such as mandatory pre-commitment and/or \$1 maximum bets.

The committee's **second report** covered interactive and online gambling and gambling advertising and the Interactive Gambling and Broadcasting Amendment (Online Transactions and Other Measures) Bill 2011.

Online gambling was another area the committee reviewed and this encompassed access to casino type games via overseas sites and sports wagering via domestic providers. In this report I originally indicated that the best response to Australians using unregulated overseas websites to access casino-type games would be to allow Australian operators to offer limited gaming options with appropriate harm minimisation and consumer protection measures in place. But having seen more evidence and taken more advice I have decided that the best response is not to

1 Two other bills were referred to the committee but the committee decided not to conduct inquiries into them due to overlapping subject matter: Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008 and Poker Machine (Reduced Losses – Interim Measures) Bill 2010.

liberalise the Australian market, but rather to tighten it up and put in place strategies to deter Australians from accessing the dangerous offshore sites.²

Given the continuing concern over the promotion of gambling services in sport, the committee undertook a short inquiry to update the information on this area in its second report. The committee's **fifth report** covers the advertising and promotion of gambling services in sport and a related bill.

As in the committee's second report I again called for a total ban not only on live odds promotion but all gambling advertising during sport. I believe this is the only sufficiently cautious approach given the level of community concern over the high level of exposure of children to betting promotion.

The committee's **third report** considered the prevention and treatment of problem gambling.

During all its inquiries, but particularly during its third inquiry, the committee has emphasised the importance of a public or population health approach to address problem gambling.³ When applied to gambling this emphasises the importance of preventative measures as well as treatment and emphasises the responsibility of all stakeholders⁴ to minimise harm and not just the individual. In contrast, the industry wants to keep the focus on the individual, on individual responsibility. It wants to keep the focus off poker machines in particular because any change to the machines will threaten the revenue stream from problem gamblers.

This **sixth report** covers the remaining matters referred to the committee:

- Poker Machine Harm Reduction (\$1 Bets and Other Measures) Bill 2012;
- Anti-Money Laundering Amendment (Gaming Machine Venues) Bill 2012; and
- Interactive Gambling Amendment (Virtual Credits) Bill 2013.

During all its inquiries the committee heard about the need for more research, the need to improve the evidence base, fill knowledge and data gaps, improve coordination and develop the national research capacity. These gaps in data collection and inconsistencies across gambling surveys conducted by the states and territories were also highlighted by the Productivity Commission (PC). These shortcomings limit research capacity and policy development. The PC and the committee recommended a national independent gambling research centre to drive and coordinate national research efforts.

2 Mr Andrew Wilkie MP, 'Government online gambling copout', *media release*, 12 March 2013.

3 This considers the health of the entire population, rather than just those already ill or at risk of illness. It emphasises an orientation towards whole groups rather than individuals and complements approaches that seek to treat individuals. It tends to be multi-sectorial and takes into consideration socio-economic as well as clinical factors.

4 For example, government, industry, community and individual.

I note that the Australian Gambling Research Centre (AGRC) within the Australian Institute of Family Studies will be established from July 2013. The government has indicated that many of the committee's recommendations will be relevant to the work of the AGRC and that the committee's work will inform consideration of their forward work agenda. While this does not completely fulfil the committee's recommendation I hope it will be a way of helping to address the current gaps and progressing appropriate and necessary research. However, I remain concerned about the need for a national minimum dataset on gambling in line with the recommendation by the PC and the need for governments to publicly provide a basic level of nationally consistent and timely industry data on gambling. I am also left with concerns about issues around research independence and the need for transparency around the input of industry.

I wish to thank all the people and organisations who contributed to the committee's inquiries. In particular I single out the people who had dealt with or who were dealing with gambling problems who bravely told the committee their stories in order to see changes made. I am sorry the government lost its nerve on the issue of poker machines despite the overwhelming calls for change.

I know it will be up to a future government to implement more effective harm minimisation measures such as mandatory pre-commitment or maximum \$1 bets. The government legislation will ensure the system and machines will be ready and I hope that a strong government with a good heart will take that step. I trust that the work of the committee has and will continue to assist that process.

Mr Andrew Wilkie MP
Chair

