

**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPACTS OF GAMING MACHINES MET IN THE TRAINING ROOM, BURNIE CITY COUNCIL, BURNIE ON THURSDAY 18 APRIL 2002.**

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**MALCOLM RYAN** WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mrs Silvia Smith) - Welcome, Malcolm, again, on a different venue, but nonetheless you have obviously something you wish to bring to the committee. If you would like to talk to the committee about what it is you want to raise with us, and then if committee members ask questions you would be happy to take them as we go through?

**Mr RYAN** - Absolutely.

**CHAIR** - Okay, over to you.

**Mr RYAN** - Well, firstly, thanks for having some time for me today. It is only a very rushed presentation, and I guess this is systematic of the whole of society today. We do not have enough time to do all the things we want to do and the pressure is on all the time, so please forgive me for not being fully prepared.

**CHAIR** - That is quite okay.

**Mr RYAN** - A bit of background. I have been a gambler myself. I still will have a gamble. I still do have a gamble. However, since the introduction of gambling machines into just about every pub and club I have become very concerned, because I have seen some of the effects first hand, not in my immediate family but friends and people I know. To give an example, I have recently seen friends of mine lose a hotel and their house to gambling, clearly 100 per cent to gambling. No other problems, just gambling. I know of many other people around the place that do have gambling problems. None of them admit to having a gambling problem, and that is one thing you must realise, that nobody, whether it is with plantation investments or gambling or horseracing or cards, will admit to losing money. They will soon chirp up if they win, but nobody will admit when they are losing money.

**Mr SQUIBB** - When you refer to your friends that lost their hotel and house to gambling, do we read into that to gaming machine gambling?

**Mr RYAN** - Part of.

**Mr SQUIBB** - So it was more than just gaming machines?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes. Not wholly and solely to gambling machines, but I can give you an example of another gambler where once again I would say 50 per cent of his losses were to gambling machines. That is just from looking outside without asking too many questions, but we are talking several properties with this other one. I am just saying you

cannot get facts and figures as to what each venue is doing, but I know the Top of the Town hotel/motel is in the top three in turnover outside of the two casinos in this State. That is in one of the least affluent parts of the State, and I see extremely serious problems not being identified. What I am saying is I believe we need a full independent inquiry into this issue and the problems, and this is an inquiry but we need on-the-ground investigators, if you like, to put it that way -

**Mr SQUIBB** - Research almost.

**Mr RYAN** - absolutely, where the people need to be going into the gambling rooms for two weeks at a time, every day for two weeks, and identifying the faces that are continually in there and working out how long they are in there and what sort of money they are turning over, because we are not going to get them to come forward and admit that they are doing it. We need to identify them, just like if I go zooming down the road at 130 kph or whatever I am not going to admit it. The only way you are going to get me is by putting a speed trap there.

**CHAIR** - I hope you do not do that sort of thing.

**Mr RYAN** - No, I don't. But you can see what I am trying to get to.

**CHAIR** - Yes. You don't see it as an invasion of people's privacy to do that?

**Mr RYAN** - Absolutely not, when it is a huge problem in society. If it is Kerry Packer or Rupert Murdoch going to the Crown or whatever and blowing whatever, I do not see a problem with that. We are talking a different situation. We are talking family members with children, with low incomes, the very people that should not be gambling in the first place, I believe. However, I do not want to stop people from having a bet or a punt. That has been part of the Australian tradition for centuries, and I don't think we want to kill that tradition off, but I think we have to see that - as I have said, I have gambled on all sorts of issues - I will not go into them all - at times with substantial bets, you know, \$1 000 at a time, I have bet those sorts of bets, but I believe I was always in control. I did it when I was single and did not have any responsibilities. I have a wife and three children, if only just at times, these days but I certainly do not go gambling today because I have responsibilities. I am not saying I am anything special, but not everybody in society has those sorts of controls. I am seeing it and hearing it. There is so much anecdotal stuff. A serious anecdotal I would like to raise is the fact that people do go into a local venue early in the morning through the back door to go in to the poker machines, and once again I say that is anecdotal but it is from very good sources, and I would not raise it unless I believed I was 98 per cent right in saying it.

**Mr SQUIBB** - But you are not suggesting there that they are going in through the back door because the machines are operating outside of their legal operating hours. It is because they do not want to be identified in the community?

**Mr RYAN** - I am saying they are going in before the doors of the hotel are scheduled to be open. I do not know what time the machines are supposed to start ticking over, but I know the people are going through the back door because the front doors are not open.

**CHAIR** - Obviously before legal operating hours, that is what you are saying.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - We do not have any information on the opening hours of the gaming venues, which I do believe in some hotels - I remember I went to meet a friend in Sorell, and that gaming venue was open but the hotel itself was not open, so there is -

**Mr RYAN** - All I am saying is that this is before I would expect people to be going to a gaming room or for a drink.

**CHAIR** - Are you saying there that some consideration should be given to the operating hours of gaming venues?

**Mr RYAN** - Well, in this case it does not matter whether the opening hours are constrained to between eight and nine o'clock at night, because this is happening, as I said, outside of normal operating hours at the moment, so I am saying what is going on is an illegal activity.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - Are you aware that the Burnie City Council actually sent staff out to five premises in Burnie that have gaming machines here, and the club opens at 10 a.m.; hotel A, B and C were open at 10 a.m. and hotel D, at 9 a.m., and there was no indication that any of that was outside the legal hours that they were entitled to open. Are you saying it is before those particular hours?

**Mr RYAN** - That is what I am saying.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - Thank you.

**Mr RYAN** - Another issue I guess more specific to this inquiry is that yesterday I went to see Centacare and Anglicare and asked who is going to do a presentation today. Neither of those facilities knew about this today.

**CHAIR** - We had the State body.

**Mr RYAN** - Absolutely, but what happens at a State level, you have to get the perspective of what is happening on the ground at a local level.

**CHAIR** - They may coordinate that whole thing, though, through into the State submission.

**Mr SQUIBB** - What Malcolm is saying is that the local branch had not been approached by the State in gathering information for their submission.

**Mr RYAN** - Exactly.

**CHAIR** - Oh, okay.

**Mr RYAN** - And what happens in Bellerive cannot be compared to what happens in upper Burnie, for instance. You need to talk to the counsellors that are working on the ground in those areas to get a picture of what is going on, how many they are seeing.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - Do they have the authority, when Anglicare Burnie is linked undoubtedly to Anglicare Tasmania, to be able to come forward and do a regional submission?

**Mr RYAN** - Well, I asked a similar question yesterday, and they said if they were going to do a presentation they would have to get permission from State level. I said in my opinion that is not right, because we need to get the feeling off the ground at a local level. As I said, what happens in Hobart cannot be compared to what happens in Burnie.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - In fairness to Anglicare, I am quite sure if they had asked for permission I could not see any reason why they would not have supported it wholeheartedly in the local area.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, but at the same time what I am saying is the counsellor from Anglicare, for instance, who wants to take his hat off and come as Mr X did not even know about it. Now that is a worry in society when the counsellors do not even know it is on. How is the normal person going to know?

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - I am not quite sure, because after five, six or seven attempts through the media, who have been very supportive, to tell this community, as well as the advertising that we normally do, the community do not come forward, Malcolm. Outside of flying a plane and dropping little leaflets - and I do not think it is allowed - I am not quite sure how you bring it to the attention of communities.

**Mr SQUIBB** - The local member has done very well in the last 24 hours.

*Laughter.*

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - I think I've got about a 300 per cent increased rate.

**CHAIR** - A 300 per cent hit rate in the media.

**Mr RYAN** - I knew months ago that this was coming, but it is just one of those things where I just had not had time to do everything. I have lots of other things on the go, as everybody else has, and just to fit it in. As I say, I am quite happy to take time, but I am going to be scratching now to finish my mail run and pick my boys up at half past three. So I will keep going.

So once again I see this problem as a silent killer. It is happening in the community and we don't even know it is happening. We don't even know the depth of it. I know three or four. I bet you these people here all know three or four in one way, shape or form, a friend of theirs or a friend of a friend or whatever, and I just think this problem is much, much greater than any of us know. I raised this issue here when I did a presentation on Bass Strait air travel, the connection between gambling machines and Bass Strait air travel, with our local airports suffering because people are definitely blowing the money that they would otherwise use to book a flight out of our airport.

**CHAIR** - They are using their dollars in a different way, that is what you are saying.

**Mr RYAN** - Absolutely.

**CHAIR** - But you are also supporting, I guess, in the comments you have made, that there should be a further study than has already been done statewide, a more in-depth local study done of local situations perhaps in all the regions to get a true picture, I guess you are saying.

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, that is right. As I say, you only have to talk to bar staff or people like that, and they will say so-and-so is in here day in, day out. I just think that this is a huge problem, and if it is not checked I think it will be a bigger problem. So what I am saying is that some type of investigation on the ground, with private investigators almost, has to be done to identify it because you can talk to people that are in the pubs and out on the ground that are in amongst these types of people and they tell you horrendous stories.

**CHAIR** - I do not think we could suggest private investigators. A constituted research team would probably be a better idea.

**Mr RYAN** - That is right. I still think that somebody needs to go into a gaming room and spend perhaps a week -

**CHAIR** - We had evidence from a person who had done some sort of study similar to that and made some comments. That was a private person themselves doing it. You mean extend that and getting a bigger picture?

**Mr RYAN** - Yes, exactly. Our businesses are all suffering, families are suffering, children are not getting the care they should be getting because now a lot of that money they should be putting towards care and raising the children is being blown on poker machines. I know you can ask what is the difference between alcohol and smokers. I see a problem with all three. I am someone who has smoked, I don't mind a drink, I don't mind a bet, but what I do say is that it is more than a coincidence, I believe, in the placing of these venues. I can take my wife and three boys for a counter meal or a family meal and have tingaling in the back of my mind, and if you have any inclination at all or weakness, out the back you will go. I think that is more than a coincidence, and that is what I am saying. I think they should be confined to the casinos so you have to make a conscious effort to go. As I say, it is a real trap for some reason. Poker machines seem to have a different effect on people than a pack of cards or a horse race.

**CHAIR** - They would be in a very small group, statistics tell us, of 0.9 per cent of the population. The other 99.1 per cent enjoy the occasional gamble, it is a form of entertainment for them. That is the latest.

**Mr RYAN** - That is the identified figure?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Mr RYAN** - The admitted figures. And I am saying you will not admit. I can sit here and say black and blue I do not have a problem with gambling, and I could be blowing \$300 a week and my family is suffering -

**CHAIR** - Or a night.

**Mr RYAN** - You have to look at it from a couple of perspectives. I am saying you have a marriage breakdown, for instance. If you have 25 per cent of a problem through gambling, pokey gambling for instance, 25 per cent through golf and 25 per cent through drinking and 25 per cent through smoking, you cannot say it is a major problem if it has only been part of the problem, but if that part was not in there then maybe the other parts could hold things together. I am saying you have that sort of situation, and you have the other situation where hotel and house are gone directly 100 per cent to gambling, so you have to look at it in a couple of different ways here. There are people around, responsible people, who know exactly what they are doing and can afford to do what they are doing. It is a hard line, I guess, to work out that. I just see so many people and hear so many stories of people who are not in control of what they are doing.

**CHAIR** - It gives you grave concern.

**Mr RYAN** - It does, because I know that families are suffering. In this region I guess we would be just about at the bottom of the average wage in Australia probably. I know a few years back it was only \$22 500, our average income here.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - Burnie City Council did give us some very good figures this morning to support your -

**Mr RYAN** - As I say, with the one up the hill I know that area. It is not a well-off area, and it has the second or third highest turnover outside of the two casinos. One has to ask some questions, I think. I heard you mention education before. Whether it is this issue or any other issue, it is paramount in educating people, but I would just like to stress on that point that the Government will say, yes, they will be providing *x* amount of income off gambling to rehabilitation and treating problem gamblers. That is fine for the identified ones. It is the unidentified ones that I am concerned about.

**CHAIR** - We do appreciate your thoughts on the matter and some interesting comments you have made there. We also appreciate the time you have taken to rush in here. I am glad we finally had it on time by the time you did arrive and we have given you a five minute extra space here.

**Mr SQUIBB** - You would hate your kids to think you are addicted to giving evidence.

*Laughter.*

**CHAIR** - Thanks, Malcolm.

**Mr RYAN** - No worries.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**