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THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON FUTURE GAMING MARKETS IN TASMANIA MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON WEDNESDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2017.

Ms JULES CARROLL, DIRECTOR, AND Ms ROBIN BLACK, MANAGER, EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES, RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA TASMANIA, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Gaffney) - Welcome. You are protected by parliamentary privilege whilst you are in the hearing today but once you leave the hearing you may not be. Your evidence will be recorded and the *Hansard* will be on our committee website when it becomes available. If you would like to give any evidence in camera, that can be arranged.

Ms CARROLL - We are very grateful for this chance to put our organisation's perspective on this, what we consider to be a crucial social issue. Our stance is that poker machines should be withdrawn from pubs and clubs. This stance is derived from the experiences and opinions of both our clients and practitioners. We believe that poker machines cause serious harm to Tasmanians and we believe the addiction to poker machines is a public health issue, worthy of a public health solution.

My colleague, Robin Black, and I would like to tell you what has led to our organisation holding that opinion. Relationships Australia Tasmania has been operating in this state for more than 65 years. We work with more than 8000 clients on an annual basis across the state every year. Those clients access a very broad range of services including relationship counselling, mental health services, dispute resolution and, perhaps most pertinently to this inquiry, gamblers' health.

This program, which we have offered in conjunction with Anglicare for more than 10 years, offers probably the most evidence for us to our argument. In this program and others we currently have approximately 200 people on our books affected adversely by gambling. They might attend individual counselling sessions, both specifically within Gamblers Help or perhaps within relationship counselling or they might attend our regular support group for gamblers. They might be a person with an addiction or a family member adversely affected by someone else's addiction. We know that they are just the tip of the iceberg. We know these people only come to us for help once they have reached a crisis point, once they have bottomed out and are desperate for a solution. For every person who comes to us, we know there will be many others who have not yet reached that point and who are still clinging to denial and false hope.

Of the clients who come to us because they have a problem with gambling, the majority cite gaming machines in clubs and pubs as part or all of their problem. Many of these clients earn between \$300-\$1000 per week or are on a pension or a benefit. They are not people who can afford to gamble. They are vulnerable and desperate and, as I said, have often reached the very bottom before we get to try to help them. Then there are those who have started gambling from a position of relative financial security and wealth and who have lost everything. Robin will talk - and in our submission we also talk - about some of those examples.

It is not unusual for those addicted to poker machines to have other issues, so it is complex. We see substance abuse, depression and suicidality. For every one of these clients there is a

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partner, a parent, a carer or children whose lives are also adversely affected by the addiction and who are helpless to effect a solution. Robin will talk more about the real impact of addiction.

We believe that the impact of this problem on individuals, families and the community qualifies as a public health issue. We suggest that a key role of government is to ensure that our communities are safe and that the Government can influence the wellbeing of the community through its actions and decisions. Right now we think that there is a prime opportunity for the Government to effect a public health solution to this issue by withdrawing poker machines from the clubs and pubs of Tasmania. We do not believe that the misery and the pain resulting from addiction to these machines should be outweighed by the revenue that they generate. We know that our clients and our practitioners, the ones who work with them directly, are of the same mind.

Ms BLACK - We know that people gamble for many reasons. For us it is helpful to think about gambling as being on a continuum. On the one hand, we have people who come to us who have used a poker machine as part of a night out. They have had a meal at the pub with their friends; then they go and play on the pokies and they spend \$5. In the middle of that continuum we see the people who maybe go out weekly. They spend \$50 to \$100. We know that statistically they do not win on that pokie machine. What we start to see is people not going out with their friends anymore to pubs and clubs. It becomes a socially isolating activity. At the other end of the continuum are those people who are addicted to the machines, who are losing money every day, who are not going to their jobs, who are taking sick leave, who are not disclosing to their family and friends what they doing. They are losing all their pay and money from other sources - probably friends, family, often workplaces - and right at the end of that spectrum are people who end up in prison. We, at Relationships Australia, offer a service at Risdon Prison for people who are affected by gambling.

Why does it happen? There are multiple complex factors that make people gamble. Although it may be because people have experienced trauma and disadvantage and it is a way to escape, we also know this about the average man and woman in the street who have gone to play pokies on a night out, who think it is an easy win and keep going back because of the design of the machines and the design of the venues.

Why don't people just stop? Because the systems around the pokies are designed so you cannot stop. The very things inherent are in the design of those machines so that people who are more vulnerable to them because of a range of psycho-social factors cannot stop what has become an addictive behaviour. This is not accidental. The machines are designed to do that. We know that the graphics, the sounds and the physical environment all combine to deliver what has been likened to the crack cocaine of gambling or the electronic morphine. Any one of us is susceptible if we keep putting money into poker machines.

In our submission we provided three case studies of clients but I might give you one that has come to us in the last week or so. It highlights the number of things that go on for our clients. Because of the nature of the Tasmanian community we have had to change the name of that person. I have had to take out some details because they would be quite easy to identify. It still doesn't take away the power of that person's life and what is going on right now.

This is a story - and it's not a story, we shouldn't use the word 'story'; it's a case study. This is real. This is a young woman who is 29. She first gambled on a poker machine in a pub when she was 13 with her mother and her elder brother. Mum gave her \$20 to put into the pokies. Mum was already a pokie player. This young woman, Susie we will call her, became addicted and she

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lost money, and continued to lose money. She continued to gamble in venues undetected, even though she had a self-exclusion order. From the age of 13 to where she now is at 29 she has become addicted to a drug, which has led her to some criminal behaviour, which has seen her now caught up in the criminal and corrections system. She has three young children who are now in out-of-home care and caught up in the child safety system.

That case study highlights the significant things that are going on for people in the community. First of all, how do people get into pubs and clubs undetected? We know through our venue visits that are part of the service that we provide that many venues find it extremely challenging to monitor the self-exclusions that have been put on by people. People are slipping through the system.

Mr BACON - Can I just ask on that if it works better at the casino, which we've heard from other people; would you agree with that?

Ms BLACK - We do believe that, absolutely, yes. What we're hearing anecdotally from our clients and our practitioners who do venue visits is that in pubs and clubs staff are under immense pressure to do lots of different things. They are serving alcohol, they are providing responsible service of alcohol and gambling and carrying plates of food to people, so it is quite difficult.

The other thing is that you can ask for a self-exclusion from one pub or every pub across the state, so when photos come up for staff in a pub they have to look for everybody, but really only it might be one or two people. It is quite challenging for them.

Ms COURTNEY - Do you know for any given pub or hotel how many people they would have, on average, on an exclusion list?

Ms BLACK - It depends what the customer asks for. At any one time a venue might have 20 or 30 people on their list, but if you've asked to be excluded from everywhere in the state then you will come up on everybody's list. There might be 100 photos or more. You will know your regulars, but if you've got a gambling problem you are not going to necessarily go to the pub where you think you will be recognised. We've highlighted in one of our case studies a professional woman who went to a venue and was detected. She was with a friend and a staff member came up and said, 'Helen, you know that you're not supposed to be here'. We know that it works some of the time, absolutely.

One of the things about that case study is it highlights a whole lot of things about the knock-on effect. We're talking about inter-generational gambling now. We're talking about people in low socio-economic areas. That is in Glenorchy, which is one of the hotspots. We know there are lots of venues in that area. We're talking about time taken up in the court system, in the prison system, in what is already a stretched family safety system in Tasmania. The ripple effect for families and communities is huge. I won't go into the three other case studies that we've already submitted, but if you want to ask us some questions about the services we provide to people, we would be happy to answer.

CHAIR - Our committee hearings are actually based on casinos, keno and gaming machines. I suppose 90-95 per cent of the discussions we've had with groups are with the gaming machines. The groups attending say casinos are there for a purpose that can be better monitored. The one or two comments we have had on keno, they didn't believe it was an addictive behaviour. Do you have any comments to make on the keno aspect, or is your main focus on the gaming machines?

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Ms CARROLL - We don't see a lot of problem gambling associated with keno. You can become addicted to anything, but there seems to be much more attraction from the poker machines; the win is seen to be much more.

CHAIR - Your submission described having provided assistance to 147 individuals with gambling problems in 2015. Do your statistics indicate you are receiving more referrals or requests from problem gamblers? Have you had those statistics over a period of years and is there an increase?

Ms CARROLL - The numbers for 2016 were up from 147 to 200, and we are on the same trajectory for this year. It could be the existence of this committee and some of the other publicity that has gone before that has brought people to us, particularly the family and friends of people with problem gambling.

Ms BLACK - One of the things we see is a huge stigma around this, as there is with any addictive behaviour and mental illness. People don't come to us. It's a hard thing to walk in the door of Relationships Australia and say, 'I've got a gambling problem'. A lot of the time we see people come for some other issue. Say, a husband and wife come for relationship counselling and by the third session you discover the wife has remortgaged the house twice. They say, 'We're having problems in our relationship' and we say, 'We have a Gamblers Help group weekly. Would you like to go to that?'. People are very reluctant to sit in a room with other people in a small community and say they have a problem. Because we work with other agencies and refer in and out all the time, we might see someone will go to the Salvos for rent assistance and they will discover gambling is at the root of that financial hardship and will refer people back, but often we don't get to it. Families do everything they can to support people, and sometimes that is support with gambling. There is the story of the man who cooks for his dad every night to make sure dad gets a meal because he knows dad is gambling every day. They are not necessarily coming to us all the time.

Ms COURTNEY - With those numbers, we had a lot of evidence yesterday about people who have issues or are addicted to gaming machines who also have other substance abuse issues. Are you finding that? In your numbers, in what proportion is an addiction to gaming machines the sole issue, and what proportion would be associated with other things, such as alcohol abuse or other substance abuse?

Ms CARROLL - It would be hard for us to give you those statistics because it would mean going through every file. You are right, there is often another issue such as substance abuse, mental health issues or family breakdown issues. It is often a complex set of things that sit around what may have originally started as the addiction to gambling. As things become more and more difficult for the client, the other issues add on. I can't give you a breakdown.

Ms COURTNEY - No, that's fine, but that is a good answer.

CHAIR - With people who come into your organisation for relationships counselling and you find gambling is part of that problem, is there any difference between those who identify their gambling issue as within the casino compared to the people who identify their gambling occurs in pubs and clubs? I am wondering if there are any obvious differences between the community member who goes to pubs or people who go to the casino and identify - you may not be able to answer that, or it might not have crossed over or been obvious.

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Ms CARROLL - I do not think we can give you a direct answer to that one either, because each individual client has their own set of individual circumstances. People may go from using poker machines in pubs and clubs to using the casino because they think that it is more anonymous, or vice versa. There are a whole lot of dynamics at work here.

CHAIR - How long has Relationships Australia been functioning in Tasmania?

Ms BLACK - Over 65 years.

CHAIR - When the gaming machines came into the pubs and clubs, into that scenario, do you have any research, or is there any indication through past conferences there was an increase? Is there any correlation between pubs and clubs having access to gaming machines and the instance of gambling and addiction in your organisation?

Ms CARROLL - We do not have that research, but then remember we are just one part of a whole range of organisations that address gambling issues with clients. Anglicare is our other partner. I am sure that there has been research in the past, but we just do not have that.

CHAIR - We might pursue this with them. Tanya has some questions. In relation to the case study of Rob, 36, where it indicated Rob sought the services of RA in 2015, although his gambling commenced in his 20s, is it usual that the person with an addiction does not seek help in the early stages? Did you want to expand on that for us?

Ms BLACK - In that particular case study, he came to us because he had stolen money from his employer and he was in the middle of criminal proceedings. It was part of his rehabilitation to engage with that. He had managed to keep well away from us for a long time because people do not see it as a problem until; in that case I think it was \$150 000 worth of someone else's money gone.

CHAIR - In that, was he directed to seek that counselling? It was not his choice to go for counselling, he was directed because of the situation he found himself in?

Ms BLACK - Interestingly, he now comes because he chooses to. We have a weekly canvass group session and for some people that is the only thing that stops them walking into a pub to gamble. Some people have been coming to group for years. I liken it to alcoholism. You have not had a drink, you have not had a bet for years, but you still identify as a gambler.

Mr BACON - What percentage of people that come to the group and other sessions would be referred because they are part of the justice system?

Ms BLACK - A relatively low percentage, but we do work directly in the prison, so those people have been referred.

Mr BACON - The people in the prison, are they part of the 200 that you talk about? How many people in the prison would you be working with at any one time?

Ms CARROLL - It varies.

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Ms BLACK - I know the number, but I am reluctant to put a number on it because everyone - we have a presence there.

CHAIR - That is okay. We know that you have a presence there. That is fine. To the recommendation on page 4; to review the messaging of Gamble Responsibly. Can you expand on that? Do you have a view on whether that campaign has been effective or not, or is it hard to measure?

Ms CARROLL - I do not think we have seen much evidence of it being effective on the people that have an addiction. I think as Robin was outlining, there is a whole period of time where people think they have control of the issue and they are gambling responsibly, but that does not stop the addiction from getting them.

Ms DAWKINS - You are talking about people who feel they do not have an issue, so maybe they are in the low-risk or moderate-risk group? Could it be a life event or something affects them that pushes them into the high-risk group, or do you think they were already there, they just did not think they were because they thought they were in control?

Ms CARROLL - It will vary. As Robin was saying, there are people who come to gambling as a solution - 'It makes me feel better or this way I could win all that money that I need and then I won't have any problems'. Or there are those people that may have been enjoying it at the bottom of the continuum, as Robin talked about, and then something happens, some crisis in their lives, and they find solace in it.

Ms DAWKINS - We have obviously focused a lot of our attention on the high risk players, the 2000 or whatever that number is, but clearly there are a large number of people in those other two groups that can slip in and out of that continuum, as you suggested.

Ms BLACK - I think it is important that, yes, there are people with very complex lives but cause and effect go both ways. You might start gambling and because you are losing, you start drinking in that venue because it dulls the sensation of your continually losing. Then you have an alcohol problem, but it can be the other way. You might have a drug problem first, but I think it is an oversimplification to say that those people with chronic addictions already had difficult, complicated lives. It goes both ways.

CHAIR - I am aware of the time but one last question. We have been presented information from a lot of groups so far - yesterday and last week, and will be later today. It seems as though there are quite a lot of community sector groups within Tasmania that have some responsibility for addictions whether it be gambling, alcohol, whatever. As a sector, is there a difference between the counselling professions or the knowledge that are needed for gambling to something like alcoholism and, if so, do your professionals who counsel in that area across sectors get together to talk about - I hate to use the words 'best practice' but you know what I am talking about - what works and what doesn't? In Relationships Australia, once you find out, because you have developed a rapport with that person, are you best to follow through with that person or do you think you are better off to go because they might not go to a group counselling session, you are better off to channel those? How is that networking facilitated? How does that work?

Ms CARROLL - We have very close relationships with Anglicare, who are our gamblers' help partners and work with them across the state to make sure our practitioners come together and compare notes and things like that. We have strong referral partnerships with other

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organisations. Robin has mentioned the Salvos. Our aim is to ensure that our clients are getting everything they need. We have strong relationships with the Partners in Recovery program, et cetera, so we are always reaching out to other organisations where we think that is in the client's interest and where the client wants that to happen.

Part of the other question that you were alluding to, is it the same as dealing with an alcohol addiction? I think the big thing for us with addiction to poker machines is the fact that the poker machines themselves engender that addiction. They encourage you to keep on pumping the money in and that is a really hard thing to negate in a person's life. It is not necessarily the same way with alcohol et cetera, but addiction and the remedies for addiction are fairly generic. I think it is just that our practitioners in that area need to develop a really specialist understanding of the environment. It is the only form of addiction where they have to go out into the venues and talk with the owners and the employees. There are differences.

Ms BLACK - In terms of best practice, we also belong to a national organisation that comes together informally but formally once a year for a conference around best practice to help people with gambling.

CHAIR - As to relationships with GPs - I taught on the west coast for a while - a lot of families have good relationships with GPs because they know the history of the father, the mother, whoever. Do you get many referrals coming from the GP who says 'You need to get some help and this is where you need to go'?

Ms CARROLL - We actually run a program which functions only on referrals from GPs, the community-based mental health service and we often get referrals from GPs where this is one of the issues.

CHAIR - That is good because I just went to a function last week where there were 54 rural medical students at the university's Burnie campus doing fourth and fifth year. I was wondering, when do you start using your work and knowledge to assist those young health professionals coming through about understanding communities?

Ms CARROLL - As soon as they invite us in to talk to them.

CHAIR - Thank you so much for your submission and your presentation.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

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Ms JEN VAN ACHTEREN, HEALTH WORKER, **Ms GLYNIS FLOWER**, EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WOMEN'S HEALTH TASMANIA, AND **Ms ALINA THOMAS**, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SUPPORT HELP AND EMPOWERMENT, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Welcome. I will ask you to make the statutory declaration.

Ms FLOWER - I have done this before and we have with us some case studies that we might use to answer your questions. They have been de-identified because Tasmania is a small place and some of the details of where they live or whatever have been changed, so the statutory declaration is taken on the basis that it is essentially the truth, but for professional reasons obviously some things have been changed. Is that acceptable?

CHAIR - That is fine. Thanks for pointing that out. All evidence taken at the hearing has parliamentary privilege, except when you step outside of parliament. The evidence is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee's website when it becomes available. If there is something you want to be taken in camera, that can be arranged. Usually it is not necessary but please feel free to seek that.

Ms FLOWER - Jen and I work for one organisation and Alina works for SHE, which is very much a sister partner organisation in a number of ways. Family violence is a priority for us, but we're not a specialist service so we've asked Alina to come along and support some of the discussion.

Women's Health Tasmania is very pleased that the parliament is considering community attitudes and concerns regarding the future of gaming markets in this state and we are grateful for the opportunity to present today. Women's Health Tasmania is a statewide community-based health promotion charity. We recognise the World Health Organisation's definition of health. That is, a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. For that reason we have an ongoing interest and our practice is informed by the notion that it is not just how your body works, but it is about what is going on in your life - that those social attitudes and social influences are going to make a difference. If you are not in a respectful relationship, if you are living in poverty, if you lack a good education, if you don't have work or employment, all those things will impact on your health. In the social determinants of health, which guides us, the poor outcomes for women are recognised because gender itself is a social determinant of health and affects women adversely. We acknowledge the impact of those influences on health and seek to reduce the negative factors which affect individual women as well as women as a community.

We are part of a national network of women's health services so we are constantly in touch with our colleagues in other states. We provide a safe and supportive environment for women. Our service is run by women for women and aims to promote positive health outcomes by taking a holistic approach. That is why we are here today. This is very much our business.

Our vision for Tasmanian women is to be informed, supported and active decision makers in their own health and wellbeing and we consistently advocate on behalf of women to both state and commonwealth governments on legislation and policy work. Our knowledge and expertise is based on 28 years of experience.

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In the last financial year, 2015-16 - for which we have full figures - the total number of occasions of service for women attending our North Hobart site was 7332. Additionally, outreach programs and partnered projects extended our reach a further 1837. General inquiries by telephone and information line combined were 5883. We provided services to women in 74 different postcodes across the state. We are very proud of the older women who consistently use our services - regular classes and other activities. These include measurable outcomes in lowering their blood pressure, reduced medication, eased pain, increased mobility and fitness. Some of the women who live alone and suffer from lack of social interaction benefit enormously in their 50s-80s with our service. But there are younger women who attend.

Ms FLOWER - Women's Health Tasmania wrote the submission to the joint select committee and is here today because we are deeply concerned about the impact gambling has on women and their children. We recently joined other organisations across Tasmania and also became a member of Community Voice on Poker Reform.

Women's Health Tasmania believes there are too many easily accessible poker machines in this state and that these should be reduced in number and confined to casinos through a transition plan for the gambling industry. Women's Health Tasmania cannot support an activity in which private businesses and government profit from machines deliberately designed to addict people, potentially causing a great deal of financial suffering which impacts on both their physical and mental health, particularly when a large proportion of up to 40 per cent of the profits government and industry receive come from people who are harmed by poker machines. The State Government's support for gambling contradicts many of the other government goals and priorities such as child safety, family violence and suicide. It is our view that the cost to individuals and the community far outweighs the money collected by state government.

Women request information about gambling problems. Whether it is for themselves, a partner, friend or family member is sometimes unclear. We do not intrude if they are clearly looking for basic information. There is still a lot of shame and stigma around problem gambling. These women who do make contact, whether by phone or in person, are extremely reluctant to talk. In general, they just want a brochure, a referral and retreat as soon as possible. Women using our services generally feel comfortable discussing many other issues they find very difficult, including intimate and personal issues such as family violence and sexual assault. Women's Health Tasmania collects statistics on women's presenting issues. It is only often during counselling sessions, once trust is established, where it is revealed gambling is impacting on their relationships, finances, physical and/or mental health. This evidence shows that the stigma and shame associated with problem gambling would prevent many women from seeking the support they need.

We can provide some case studies, based on our contact with women, which illustrate the complex issues impacting on women's lives. We have got a couple we can use during the questions but I have got one now I would like to read out.

A woman who migrated to Australia after suffering many horrors in her home country, then endured years of family violence before finding safety. To distract her thoughts of the past, reduce her isolation and in the vain hope a win on the pokies would change her life, this woman regularly gambles her pension away. The guilt and shame at losing her money and the stress at being without funds impact negatively on her mental health. More often than not the woman goes without food to keep the lights on or is forced to ask her now adult children for help. Gambling has destroyed the relationship with one of her children and the inevitable conflict she has with

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others over her problem, cause the woman a great deal of distress and sadly exacerbates the woman's mental health problems.

Easy, local access to electronic gaming machines which are deliberately designed to cause addiction, the lack of real intervention by staff or management in venues, the unfairness of the machines and the high bet limits, mean this woman is quickly relieved of her weekly income.

This case study illustrates how, in trying to escape from the issues impacting on her life and reducing isolation through gambling on the pokies, this can easily become a destructive problem. Like addictions to drug and alcohol, problem gambling can bring with it a whole host of other problems including mental illness.

Ms THOMAS - SHE has operated as a family violence service for nearly 30 years in Hobart and we are now operating across Tasmania.

One of our primary roles is to provide counselling to people, typically women, who live with the impact of family violence. SHE has a high level skill, knowledge and expertise and experience of working with women and children and families impacted by violence. We deliver community education, produce resources, and advocate for systemic change to gender inequity with the aim of reducing violence against women and children.

We have had a recent increase in our capacity to deliver services and we expect that that increase will enable us to see about 800 people a year across the state. Mostly this will be in our counselling rooms, providing a tailored and personal service to support people who are struggling with the impacts of intimate partner abuse.

The nature of the abuse is unique. Each case that comes before us is completely unique so the circumstances that have led to that abuse are very nuanced in particular to each individual. There are also common themes across each of the stories. These themes are about misuse of power, about controlling behaviour, about an insidious and ongoing abuse of the intimacy and the trust that people are investing into relationships. These themes lead to long-term psychological impairment for the majority of our clients.

Men are much more likely to be problem gamblers, so it is the female partners who we are most likely to meet in our offices. Problem gambling is regarded as a contributing factor to family violence. It results in financial abuse. It reduces women's options and it is a significant contributor to the loss of agency that is typical of abusive relationships.

We know very well, it is documented widely now, that having no access to financial means, keeps women in abusive relationships. To be able to leave an abusive relationship it is crucial to have access to money, even if it is to get emergency accommodation, a night in a hotel, your taxi fare away from the home. Primary things that can be, in short term, but also long term as well. We know that women do suffer dramatic financial challenges after leaving abusive relationships.

Our concern is for the women, the men and the parents who are trapped in cycles of dependence on gaming machines. That is for a sense of hope. They are good reasons - a sense of a perceived or misperceived opportunity for a better life. I talked to my colleague, Janet Saunders, the CEO of the Hobart Women's Shelter, who wanted to bring attention to some of the issues she witnesses in her role at the shelter when women are made homeless. She sees people ending up in her service as a result of problem gambling. She has witnessed first-hand that

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reduction in security and stability in women's lives, withdrawal from the family unit, as Jen described, the isolation that happens when relationships are impaired, and social exclusion.

We are also very concerned about the significant others of problem gamblers, the partners, the family members and the children of people. These are the victims of violence perpetrated by people with gambling problems. It is the people who are scrambling week after week to try and keep the families going. Janet described for this cohort the high levels of anger and arguments that people have experienced, which include violence and financial and emotional deprivation. We know that financial abuse is a crime under Tasmania's Family Violence Act and it is a common consequence of problem gambling. There is also inappropriate role modelling to children about parental neglect and abuse. We know very well that we learn our financial skills from our parents, so there is an intergenerational and cyclical way of learned behaviour.

This Government, which has introduced significant family violence initiatives, really needs to acknowledge that research indicates that people who have gambling problems are more likely than people without gambling problems to both be victims and perpetrators of violence. I also have a bit of a case study; it is really quite brief so I will read it quickly. This woman shared her story after trying everything to keep herself and her family together:

After 13 years of marriage, I have decided to leave. Over the last 12 months the penny has dropped on all the lies, the deceit and the manipulator my husband is. I have spent the last 13 years managing money worries, the bank constantly ringing, struggling to pay bills, and so it goes on. We would fight about money and I could never figure out where we were going wrong. I would ask questions and always be fed answers that would constantly end up with the problem being laid with me. Before I knew the full extent of his gambling, he would accuse me of needing help because apparently I didn't know how to be happy and apparently I set out to constantly sabotage the marriage. This was usually thrown when I would question him about money. Everyone loves my husband and tells me how lucky I was to meet him. If only they knew he was a wolf in sheep's clothing.

CHAIR - You mentioned men are more likely than women to be problem gamblers. Interestingly, when I go to conferences at the casino or whatever, you walk through and I think the percentage of women was higher in front of the gaming machines. It looks sometimes like there are more women playing the machines, so I am just wondering where you got that information. Perhaps you could provide that at a later date.

Ms THOMAS - I have my resources here, but I would have to fiddle through them to get the information.

CHAIR - If you could provide us with that, that would be great.

Ms COURTNEY - I am looking at page 3 of your submission where you talk about gaming as a form of escapism, which paralleled with a case study we heard in terms of some kind of trauma being a precursor to an abusive relationship with gaming. Do you think because of the trauma a person has gone through or the circumstances, that if gaming is not available to them they will choose another form of escapism, whether it is alcohol or drugs or any other form of unsafe activity in which they could escape the trauma or the circumstances they have?

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Ms VAN ACHTEREN - We can't really answer that. I guess it is up to each individual, but the easy access to poker machines in pubs in your local community that you often have to walk past to get to the bus makes it very easy for people to use that form of escapism. We can't know where individuals would go if that wasn't available but I think it's the easy access that makes it a problem.

Ms COURTNEY - In your submission you talk about some of the venues going to great lengths to keep patrons absorbed in the machines in rooms without natural light or clocks. It is my understanding that the Responsible Gambling Mandatory Code of Practice says that if natural light is available venues can't block it and clocks have to be able to be seen from any gaming machine. Are there venues you are aware of that are not complying with the code?

Ms VAN ACHTEREN - I don't frequent them but it is my understanding that that is the case. Recently where I live nearby over at Risdon Vale, the Willows Tavern was basically pulled down and rebuilt and the new Risdon Brook Dam Hotel has windows but they're really high up so you're not looking out, whereas the windows in the old building were almost to the ground and looked out on beautiful parkland. It is a very different venue now and I understand it has more gambling machines than it did previously, although I'm not 100 per cent sure of that.

Ms COURTNEY - Okay, I was interested in that because I think it would be important to make sure the venues are complying with the responsible code.

On your last page, as you outlined at the beginning of your submission, you say you would like to see poker machines removed, not increase the machine numbers in the casinos and make them safe and fair. What do you mean by making them safe and fair?

Ms VAN ACHTEREN - Programming the machines so that people win more often rather than losing as much as they do. Also reducing the speed of the spin rates - and I believe the Tasmanian Licensing and Gaming Commission suggested that it be reduced - as well as reducing the bet limit to \$1.

Ms COURTNEY - On the last page of your submission, you say, 'We ask the Government to continue to fund counselling'. I would like to understand a bit more about I guess the revenue side and where that money would be sourced from, because if we removed pokies from pubs and clubs we would remove the gambling support levy. I want to understand whether you think that the community support levy we currently have is sufficiently high and broad and are there any comments around the CSL?

Ms VAN ACHTEREN - We would like to see the casino have to contribute to the community support levy as well and if the Government sees fit to increase that amount that the casinos have to pay to support people who have problem gambling that would be great.

Ms COURTNEY - I was really interested in your citing of the Institute of Criminology study of incarcerated female offenders, which found that gambling debts were associated exclusively with fraud and theft offences. In my mind that does not really conclude anything because gambling debts are not going to be associated with a drink driving offence or a murder offence. I want to understand why you have put it in there because I was so interested I went back and read the report. It seems like a little bit of red herring within the submission and I say that with all due respect from where you are coming from. That is why I went back and read because I found it

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really interesting. The actual report says that for incarcerated women gambling debts is quite a low reason for their primary reason for incarceration.

Ms VAN ACHTEREN - The way I saw it was that for people who had committed fraud, that was more likely to be related to having had a gambling debt, and that is why they committed the fraud.

Ms COURTNEY - My interpretation of it is around the other way. When we're looking at the statistics of the people who were involved in a gambling debt, I think it was only around 8 per cent or less of incarcerated women. Compared to other factors, such as buying money for drugs, lifestyle reasons, doing it because their friends did it were all quite high primary reasons. I am trying to pick it apart a bit. When I read it I was quite surprised by that.

Ms VAN ACHTEREN - I guess the thing is, if they didn't have a gambling debt would they have committed fraud or stole money from their workplace? Would they have ended up in prison if they didn't have debts as a result of gambling?

CHAIR - You are focused on the 8 per cent of women who were there for those reasons.

Ms VAN ACHTEREN - If they hadn't accrued a debt and needed to pay it back they possibly would not have committed fraud or theft. It is a desperate situation that ended with them being incarcerated in prison.

Ms COURTNEY - It is still a small percentage, which is fine. I wanted to tease that one out a bit, because the way it was written made me think something quite different until going back to the source document.

Mr ARMSTRONG - How many contacts do you have a year, of walk-ins and calls?

Ms FLOWER - Occasions of service - 7332 in our North Hobart site; our Outreach Program is 1837 and our general inquiries by phone and our Women's Health Information Line combined in 5883, and we have four and a half staff.

Mr ARMSTRONG - What percentage relates specifically to poker machine gambling?

Ms FLOWER - I can't tell you that. We collect presenting issues for our funding body, which is the government. The presenting issues are usually one or two things they have said that they want to see the counsellor about. We have a very part-time counselling service. Those issues vary enormously, but they don't name often the gambling side of the problem until they are within counselling. I would have to go through confidential files to look at that. We record presenting. They are more likely to present saying that they are having a relationship problem or that they are having trouble with money or some other aspect of their life than the gambling issue. We do note presents, but we don't know how often it is gambling, because that's not the way we collect information.

We have been doing some counselling in the prison and we have discovered again it is a back-story to a lot of things. Often it is complicated, too, by family violence. Family violence is normalised with women who are in prison. They just think that is what everybody has. It is a normal life. It is the same with a lot of other issues to do with their partners or their family. Mostly the issues we collect are the ones the women have identified, and therefore that is the issue

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we account. If it were a problem with their husband's gambling, then we wouldn't count that. It is just the way we collect the statistics. Interestingly, coming here today I thought it is annoying we don't have those sorts of figures to give.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. You said something regarding if the gaming machines were out of pubs and clubs, just at the casinos, you wouldn't want to see any more gaming machines in the casinos. If we accept that gaming is a legitimate activity and some people do in our community, and if it is being well monitored and supervised - as it would be in both casino venues - does it really matter how many machines there are if it is responsible gambling? I understand getting them out, but why restrict a place that is open for gambling? That is what it is there for.

Ms FLOWER - It's the point that pokies are not responsible. Pokies are not a fair bet in that they are set up in order for people to lose, and in large ways at the moment.

CHAIR - If that is your premise, you should then be saying no gaming machines in casinos either.

Ms FLOWER - That would be our preference.

CHAIR - But there is realism to that.

Ms FLOWER - We wouldn't like to see the numbers of pokies out there now suddenly all appear in the casino - take them out of one place and put them all in a big building at the casino. We wouldn't like to see that happen. The more machines there are, the more people can go in. If there are a limited number of machines you have to wait your turn.

CHAIR - So it's the easy access, that's the issue?

Ms FLOWER - Yes.

Ms VAN ACHTEREN - Some of the latest figures, I believe, are that 20 per cent of the world's machines are in Australia. We have so many per capita compared to anywhere else. It is just ludicrous.

Ms FLOWER - I am hoping you have all seen the Social Action Research Centre website with the map, with how much people are losing in each local government area and how much individuals are losing per year. When I came across those figures I was staggered at the amount of money, which could be being spent in our local communities at the local shops. People, who are problem gambling on a low income, spend all their income. They don't have any spare money, so that money would be spent in local communities in local businesses.

CHAIR - Thank you all very much.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

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Mr JOHN STUBLEY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HOBART CITY MISSION; AND **Ms JULIE HOMER**, OPERATIONS MANAGER, LIFELINE WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED; AND **Ms MEG WEBB**, MANAGER, SOCIAL ACTION AND RESEARCH CENTRE, ANGLICARE TASMANIA, WAS RECALLED AND EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Gaffney) - Welcome, everyone. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege but once you step outside parliament that is not the case. This is being recorded by Hansard and will go on to our website when it becomes available. If there is any evidence you would like to give in camera, that can be arranged.

Ms WEBB - I am here today as the spokesperson for the Community Voice on Pokies Reform coalition. I am involved in this capacity through my role at Anglicare Tasmania, which is a member of that coalition. Joining me today and available to answer questions shortly, Julie Homer, who is the operations manager at Lifeline Tasmania, and John Stubley, Chief Executive Officer at Hobart City Mission.

We know that you are hearing from many other members of our coalition who made individual submissions and are coming to speak to you. We commend their comments to you. Today, we will talk about the coalition as a whole. Julie and John will be able to talk about why their organisations are members and the perspective they have to bring to that.

Community Voice on Pokies Reform was formed in November 2015 in response to the re-emergence of a public debate about the future of poker machines in Tasmania. It was initially established with 15 organisations. We now number 44, and we will continue to grow. Our membership includes community groups, professional associations, peak bodies, service organisations and local councils. Our members are connected to virtually every city, township and small community in the state. Together our 44 members are directly connected to tens of thousands of Tasmanians. This coalition cannot be dismissed as just the usual suspects. It is a diverse range of groups that have never before come together around a common cause.

In our diversity we all care about the impact of poker machines on the Tasmanian people and communities. We care because we are inherently part of those communities. Community Voice on Pokies Reform has a really clear and straightforward message. When the current deed expires we want the Tasmanian Parliament to remove poker machines from hotels and clubs in local communities, and have them located only in casino environments where better consumer protection can be put in place around them. Implementing this approach to poker machines is a reasonable and responsible public health measure. This approach is in keeping with efforts the Government is making in a whole range of social policy issues. Those things are all connected. It would support those measures. It is good public policy and it will be supported by the Tasmanian community. The terms of reference for this committee, specifically tasked it to inquire into and report on community attitudes to gambling, with a particular focus on the location, the number and the type of poker machines in the state.

The inclusion of community views in the terms of reference is a first. It is a very positive move to good governance on this issue. Our coalition has provided evidence to the committee in two submissions. The first - and we are providing evidence in support specifically of that term of reference around community views. The first aspect of that evidence I would speak about is the accumulated data that we present, which is available to you from research and polling.

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I know that you are aware of the surveys and polls that have been taken in the Tasmanian community from 1994, before poker machines were introduced in pubs and clubs, through to 2016, most recently, last year. They have been conducted both independently and, crucially, also as part of government social and economic impact studies. Clearly, when it comes to the committee's terms of reference on community views, these surveys and polls provide you as a committee with direct evidence.

The social and economic impact studies were, in fact, undertaken specifically to provide an evidence base to inform public policy on this issue in the state. Thus far, they have not been used for that purpose, but now is a fantastic time to start. These studies and polls contribute substantially to measuring community views on exactly this issue that your committee is looking into, and have done so for more than two decades. They have provided consistent results across those two decades.

More than 80 per cent of Tasmanians do not believe their communities benefited from having poker machines in their local communities. More than 80 per cent of Tasmanians want to see poker machines reduced or removed from their local communities. Notably, the results are consistent across all regions of our state, across all age groups and across gender. The numbers are in. They are overwhelming and they always have been. In them, this committee has clear, consistent evidence of Tasmanian community view.

The second aspect of the evidence provided by our coalition to assist you in achieving your term of reference relating to community views is the opportunity we have assisted to provide in hearing directly from Tasmanian people. We set up an online open letter to provide people with an opportunity to make their views heard. The open letter has attracted 3000 signatures or so, so far, and continues to attract more. Over 600 people to date have taken the trouble to make personal comments alongside signing that letter. We provided a supplementary submission to you, which includes and presents some of those comments left by people on the open letter. They are comments from people who deal directly with the impact of poker machines. People such as GPs, teachers, hospitality workers, people who work in prisons, in social services and in employment services. There are also comments from people who have personal experience of poker machine addiction, from family members and friends and co-workers of such people.

Further to that, nearly 100 of the signatories to our open letter were further motivated to take the comments that they had attached to the letter and turned them into a submission directly to you, the committee. You were encouraged last week by industry to dismiss these submissions. Yet they constitute the most direct input into your term of reference on community views that you have in front of you. They are not pro forma responses. The people who made those submissions didn't just tick a box. Every single one was unique. They are genuine comments from Tasmanian people who wanted to share their concerns with you, the committee, because you asked them to.

If the committee has concerns about the genuine intent of these individual submissions that were made, I really urge you to contact each submitter and ask them further questions, treat them as genuine stakeholders in this committee process. They are exactly who you were tasked to hear from by that term of reference given to you.

The members of Community Voice have a strong view on what community is and what sits at the heart of communities. Our members know that part of community is people and the connections between them. You will see in our submission that we have people from all over the

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state challenging the idea that poker machines in pubs are the heart of their local community. You will hear in our submissions from people who believe that putting poker machines in local pubs has changed them for the worse. It has made them less family friendly and diminished other recreation activities available to them in their local communities. These comments to you come from every region of the state. They are valid community views and they are being directly shared with the committee as requested.

In our submission we talk about industry transition. John is going to make some brief comments about that.

CHAIR - I want to be make very clear, because I have had a few people who have made submissions before 9 December, that all submissions that came to us were accepted, read and discussed by the committee. They were all accepted as valid. That is the information we received. I want to make it very clear that whilst people last week may have thought differently, the committee has not that view. Otherwise, we would not have accepted them as submissions.

Ms WEBB - Excellent, we are very pleased to hear that.

CHAIR - We are responding to those people who have questioned their validity by saying that they were very valuable. We took them on as an important documents.

Ms WEBB - Very pleased to hear that.

Mr STUBLEY - Hobart City Mission sees about 4000 people a year, largely around our emergency relief services, but other services. I wanted to go off on a bit of a tangent, because I'm aware that it is a particular concern. That is around where Community Voice is wanting to see this go; is what we actually do for pubs. There is only, I gather, a handful of clubs so we're really talking about the impact of removing poker machines from pubs.

I was an accountant in practice for over 20 years. A lot of the clients I dealt with were pub owners as well as various other businesses in the community. They are a fairly resilient lot. Pub owners have gone through changes in awards, smoking bans and so on. They have been able to adapt through that process. I have a concern that there seems to be an undertone whether pubs really viable without poker machines. That worries me because if a pub is not a viable enterprise without poker machines, it is a bit like subsidising the car industry. They need to be viable businesses in their own right otherwise why should they be propped up by possibly the most disadvantaged group in the community?

We're going through a stage in the state with a tourism boom at the moment. We're seeing the extension of the Hobart runway that will see flights coming directly in from Asia. There will be six years for pubs to transition away from reliance on poker machines if a licence isn't extended. With the tourism boom and the worldwide reputation we are getting for wineries, experiential food journeys and so on, I think it is an ideal opportunity probably unlike any other time in our history for pubs to transition away from their reliance on poker machines and look to other avenues of how they can continue to be viable in the future in a brave new world without poker machines.

I personally have never put a coin in a poker machine. I find them quite offensive and I avoid venues that have poker machines. When the data is showing that the vast majority of Tasmanians want poker machines removed from pubs, I wonder whether you would have the reverse effect

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and that if pubs started to look to other services and other ways of connecting with the community whether you wouldn't in fact find that their patronage would increase rather than decrease as a result of poker machines. The reality is if money isn't going in to poker machines it's going into other businesses in the community and we all know that in the economy money goes around. The more the money goes around, the more everyone prospers, not just the people who own the poker machines.

Mr BACON - You said you now have now 44 members. You have I think 42 listed here. Who are the final two?

Ms WEBB - We just had two more members join - Women's Health, who you just heard from -

Ms DAWKINS - Not the Young Liberals?

Ms WEBB - They apparently support what we are calling for.

Mr BACON - I thought that was interesting from the Young Liberals as well. When you talk about the transition fund and you have funding there of \$1 million per venue and effectively \$23 million a year over four years and you have some suggestions on what that money could be spent on in terms of business plans and renovations and things like that, do you think there is an opportunity to effectively buy the licences back even though it does expire? Is that almost what you are suggesting there?

Mr STUBLEY - My view with the licences is that pubs went into this environment knowing that there was a finite time frame on gambling machine licences and they've always known that there was a risk that this licence would come to an end. My view is that six years out is a pretty good amount of time for them to get used to the idea of how they're going to transition away from that environment. It is giving them a lot more time than taxi drivers are getting to learn to live with Uber entering the market when they have paid good money for licences as well.

Ms WEBB - The comment I would make on that is that we've put some suggestions in there about the kind of things that could be considered in a transition plan. It's not our place to suggest a full model for a transition plan. We see this as a two-stage process. The first instance is to make a good public policy decision based on evidence, and that would be to take pokies out of pubs and clubs and put them only in casinos. All the evidence tells you that is good public policy. The second step is how would that happen? We know we have a time frame in which it can happen, so we can have a process that involves all stakeholders in that discussion and plan how it is going work out so that the industry is well placed to move forward into that future. We see it as two steps. The decision is one step and developing a plan is the other step. We would have some thoughts to contribute to that but we would be just one of the stakeholders in that discussion.

Mr BACON - So it's not a final position.

Ms WEBB - Absolutely not; we've just put some thoughts there about the kind of things that could be considered.

CHAIR - You mentioned policy. When the Government introduced this in the lower House it was to help them gauge opinion about their post-2023 proposed structural reform. We as a committee can make recommendations and hopefully those recommendations will inform public

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policy or government policy, which is what you are thinking. We will be inviting the Premier and the Treasurer to this committee because we want to ask some questions. They are clearly saying this is a community conversation. We are clearly saying that as a parliamentary committee we have the responsibility to come back with recommendations and as the Government did not provide a written submission addressing the terms of reference, would you say in your opinion that the recommendations from this committee should really help the Government make some decisions about their policy position?

Ms WEBB - We would expect that the recommendations from this committee would be well considered by everybody - the government of the day and other leaders of our state - around a position to take forward on this to inform their public policy, absolutely. What we have seen in the history of public policy around poker machines in this state is that there have been other committees held and those recommendations haven't informed subsequent public policy. There has been government-generated research and studies that were intended to inform government policy that then didn't inform government policy. We really hope this is a turning point where what you have heard across the balance of all evidence presented to you provides some good recommendations from this committee that then becomes information that is drawn on to develop public policy by the Government and others in the Parliament going forward.

CHAIR - I think you made the point yesterday, Meg, about the terms of reference not only focusing on the economic side of it but also on the social impacts. Julie, with that and your role with Lifeline, would you like to make a comment about what your organisation sees with people addicted to gambling, and what impact it has in your view? You are working at the coalface, so could you make some sort of comment on that?

Ms HOMER - Absolutely. Although Lifeline can work at the catastrophic end of dealing with suicide, we are working very hard to move into the sphere of really understanding what contributes to people's health and wellbeing. Lifeline Australia has done some fantastic research through their social research centre and what has become very clear to them is that there are a number of things which contribute to suicide, which is a complex issue and never straightforward. Gambling comes up in the top six issues of the reasons people would use our 13 11 14 phone line to call for assistance. The phone line is not specifically used necessarily for suicide crisis emergencies, but gambling comes up after suicide in the top five issues where people are needing support and encouragement 24 hours a day around the impact it is having on their mental health and their family and taking people to the point where they are thinking suicide is perhaps an option.

Ms DAWKINS - We have heard from Relationships Australia that sometimes people will seek services and come for a specific issue and then underlying that issue is a gambling issue. Do you find that at Lifeline as well?

Ms HOMER - Absolutely. One of the difficulties around researching is that the issues don't separate themselves out like that. In Tasmania at this point we don't have what is known as a suicide register, but we get information from other states that do have one. The point of the suicide register is being able to take a suicide and track back all the social issues, assistance and points of impact you can have on somebody's entire life and their demographic. What we find is that if you're looking at the statistics which say currently Australia looks at eight suicides a day, in Victoria over a 10-year period they were looking at one suicide a month specifically connected to gambling. If you break that down even further, 90 per cent of the gambling activity happened on poker machines as opposed to other forms of gambling. We can translate that information across

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to the Tasmanian community but we're not able to get the statistics because we're not quite there with the register yet.

Mr BACON - Should we have a register in Tasmania?

Ms HOMER - That's up for debate. Hopefully that's where we're going to end up. There is some discomfort for some people around it but I think it's a very valuable tool because it gives us information like this to make decisions.

Mr BACON - As to funding, would it cost much?

Ms HOMER - I couldn't tell you that without making it up to give you a reasonable figure.

Ms WEBB - I would just add a reminder that when we're talking about people who are at the point of suicide, and a gambling issue is part of the mix of reasons that bring them to that point, we're talking about the very extreme end of the harm that is caused. There is a spectrum coming back from that in which many people are being impacted and having their lives made very difficult by the gambling issue in their lives before they get to that point. Numbers we collect around that are very pertinent and tragic. But they are not the measure of harm when it comes to poker machines.

Mr ARMSTRONG - I was interested in your comments that you don't go into hotels and pubs that have poker machines.

Mr STUBLEY - I try to avoid them.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You are commenting on those establishments, but you have never been into them. I am just curious how do you know how things operate in there if you have never been in one?

Mr STUBLEY - I wouldn't say I've never gone into them. It is hard to go to a conference at the casino without walking past the forest of poker machines.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Typically pubs and clubs I am speaking to.

Mr STUBLEY - I guess I am relying on the evidence that is presented. I am relying on what we see come through our front door of Hobart City Mission as to the impact of poker machines. I have spoken to people who do casually play poker machines and the comments they have made is they can see how it could be very addictive. The tinkle of the coins going into a tin tray and they don't come in a gush they come in a trickle that goes on, so you get the noise of winners around the room. I guess I don't feel I need to have gone in there and put money into a machine to understand it.

Mr ARMSTRONG - I am curious of that, because when I am looking at something and something is in front of me I usually go and look at it. I am curious you made the comment that you don't go into those establishments and yet you are commenting on them. I find that very -

Mr STUBLEY - There is a lot of evidence that has been presented, there are studies, there are surveys of people's opinions that I am relying on.

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Ms WEBB - It is clients that we hear from.

Mr ARMSTRONG - As I said, I go in and have a look when I'm speaking on it.

Ms COURTNEY - I have a question for you Julie, but before I do though, I just want to clarify. There are some comments being made about the Young Liberals. I think you are referring to the student Liberals that aren't affiliated with the Liberal Party, just for clarification.

I am really interested about the evidence that you receive from people that call Lifeline and where gaming was - number 6 did you say? Could you tell me what those other ones are just for context so we have an understanding please?

Ms HOMER - I have them right here: relationships; mental health concerns; suicide as an issue in and of itself; depression, separate from mental health; gambling; and domestic abuse. That's the language that is used.

Ms COURTNEY - That is fine. That is helpful I wanted to make sure because I think it is really interesting so I wanted the context around it.

CHAIR - In light of that in Relationships Australia, I was interested this morning, they said that when you start peeling back the onions about the relationship that sometimes gambling or financial issues featured very highly in that relationship conflict.

Ms HOMER - Yes, and that is the difficulty with collecting that kind of data. If somebody rings up it's 'do we tick the box that says this, or do we tick the box that says it's that?', which is why the suicide register is actually limited in itself anyway, as it depends on how the Coroner names it. The research was done around the Coroner writing specifically that it was gambling as an indirect cause of death. It really is in the way that the numbers are counted, but we're really clear that it is there and it is something that we need to work with.

CHAIR - Going back to the question I alluded to. Yesterday it was mentioned in the local government section that a referendum on this issue might be a strategy, a way of getting polling in Tasmania. Personally I have some reservations, but I would like to hear how you see that as an option or comment on that from your point of view?

Ms WEBB - We don't see that as a necessary or an effective option for taking this issue forward. What we have is this committee process and one of its terms of reference is to seek and monitor community view. We already have a sound evidence base on which to do that from the data, even if we just look at the SEIS studies that have been done in this state. What we also have is the difficulty around a referendum. There are questions about how you set up the questions, how do you inform the community, as well as about the referendum process so that they engage with it in a genuine way?

I think that it is a distraction. I think you as a committee are being presented with clear information about the community view. The sort of surveying and polling that has been done is quite thorough. Those SEIS studies involve thousands and thousands of Tasmanians being surveyed extensively with very detailed questions. The evidence is there. We have got pretty clear messages from it, and a referendum is not an effective or necessary path to go forward.

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CHAIR - Thank you for those points. Just for the people listening, there are some other studies that are also happening this year. We will be mentioning these a bit further, the fourth social and economic impact study, number 4 of 2017. That is required by legislation. That is also being undertaken. That has gone out to tender at the end of January.

The Auditor-General is also managing the collection of gambling revenue, effective management of community support levy, effectiveness and enforcement of harm minimisation measures, and they are reporting by June. We will be having the Auditor-General in on the 28th to talk about the process. As we have already heard, the TGC, the Gaming Commission, is also undertaking a review of responsible gambling. Then there is this review. That came as a bit of a surprise to me that there were so many reviews going on. This is probably a crunch year for that information to help Government understand a direction to go in.

Ms WEBB - Can I just mention one thing about that, the degree to which all of that raft of different reviews being done includes an indication of community view. I guess it may be limited. Those other things happening may not include examining community view. It is, in fact, my understanding that the terms of reference for the SEIS that is going to be done this year will not necessarily include the same sort of surveying of community view that we have seen in past SEISs. That would be a shame. It would be good to have an updated version of that. We believe there is a solid evidence base there anyway.

We note in the discussions that you have had with some of our other Community Voice on Pokie Reform coalition members, there have been some common issues raised. One of those is around evidence. We are prepared, and our members are prepared, to provide evidence for the assertions that we make. We welcome you interrogating that evidence. We hope to see you do the same with any assertions that are made by the industry or other stakeholders in this matter.

It is our observation that there could be perhaps greater scrutiny of some of the assertions made from industry, for example, claims about employment, claims about viability of venues. When assertions are made, we would like to see this committee and we would implore you to interrogate that evidence if it is presented. We would also just like to say that there is a clear mandate for this committee to examine community view.

We have got clear stakeholders here, people who have financial vested interests in this industry, and we have the community. We know we have evidence about harm that happens within the community as a result of these products. You as representatives of the Government and the recommendations you make to government on public policy are there to arbitrate between the interests represented in those two sides of the equation. It is an important task and we hope that you are going to rectify the imbalance that has been there in looking at those two interests in the past.

CHAIR - Thanks for that, Meg. I have to say, when we sat down as a group to go through the submissions, 150 submissions, we were very careful to make sure that we had a wide gambit of interest. I think we ended up with 19 groups presenting to us today that were specifically looking at terms of reference 1 and 2, which is the social impacts, and I think 9 more garnered on the other four or five, or more closely on the economic.

I think from the committee's point of view, we did look at the submissions and took on board the importance of those, because we want to make sure that we do have good balance. We do want to hear from the wider community. There was some comment about should we have had individual people come in and the feeling from the committee was that we knew the groups would

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raise case studies, we knew the groups would do that within their five days of submissions. Thank you for your comments and thank you for your presence today.

THE **WITNESSES** **WITHDREW.**

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Mr STUART FOSTER, DIVISIONAL SOCIAL PROGRAM SECRETARY, **Mr TERENCE HOWARD** AND **Mr ROBERT KRESHL**, CLIENT, THE SALVATION ARMY - TASMANIA DIVISION, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Welcome. You are afforded parliamentary privilege when you are in here, but once you leave this meeting, that may not be the case. All evidence will be recorded and will go onto our committee website at an appropriate time. If there is anything that you would like to take in camera that can be organised, but usually with this sort of committee it is not necessary.

Mr FOSTER - The Salvation Army is coming to this committee from the point of view that we see and we assist families and individuals that, as a result of their addictions and their poker machine addictions, come to us with financial difficulties. For us, it is about helping them through those processes and helping the families.

The one thing we do know and we find very difficult, and I will say to the committee, is that we don't find out about, especially in addictions in terms of gambling addictions that it is a real issue until the very last moment. People don't come to us initially with a financial problem and say they have a gambling addiction. They don't reveal that to us because of the shame, the feelings that go with that addiction in not being able to deal with it.

Often we journey with people for years before we find out they have a poker machine addiction. We can surmise, we can make educated guesses, but we cannot force people into telling us it is the case. It is very different to an alcohol and drug addiction in that manner. For us, it is about that journey with the family, journey with the individuals affected by addictions to get to the point where they are able to get back on their feet.

What I have done today is present to you, especially in our witness, in Robert, who has firsthand experience of the issues. As outlined in our submissions and other NGO submissions, the issues around poker machines, the attractions, the way in which people play expecting to win when the system is designed for them not to win, and how that can affect a person and their family. I would like to throw to Robert for him to give you his story.

Mr KRESHL - My journey into poker machine addiction started about 17-18 years ago. I had finished a mature-age degree at the University of Tasmania - a Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in painting and ceramics. I was unemployed and had a severe knee injury, trying to manage pain - I don't believe in taking drugs.

After finishing the university degree I wanted to make artwork, which costs money. At the time I was on unemployment benefits and had a very limited budget. I can remember very clearly walking past a hotel in Elizabeth Street - the Midcity Hotel - seeing the machines, seeing the wins and all the big jackpots. I could see all the lights and hear the clack, clack, clacking of the machines. I needed \$28 to start my project and I only had \$7, and my viewpoint at the time was I only had \$7 and couldn't start my project so I would risk the \$7. I won \$35 and took that, got my art materials and that was the end of me for the next 12-15 years. I was immediately addicted to the poker machines. I believed what was on offer on the jackpots and I was totally seduced by the amount of money I saw dropping into the machines and believed I would win. I believed what was being said on the machines, how it was touted, and off I went.

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Fortunately, my knee injury healed and I found work in the gaming industry, in that same hotel I first started in. I was a night manager there for a total of seven years and was earning \$850 a week and being paid every week and that was literally going straight out the door. No matter how much commonsense I used to have, how much rationale I used to have, how much intelligence I supposedly had, I could not stop myself from doing it every week. The last eight months I was there I was living on the street and maintaining a full-time job as well and convinced that any moment I was going to win big and get myself out of trouble. I believed I was going to win, and the machines told me so.

Eventually, I got to the point where I could see moments of truth and I knew I was in trouble. I knew how helpless and powerless I was over it but my pride would not allow me to ask for help. As the night manager, one of my responsibilities on a nightly basis was to go to the safe and get the tills out for the cafeteria and gaming room and put them in ready for the staff in the morning, who I would let in. Just before I resigned, I could clearly see I was being tempted to borrow a couple of hundred dollars in the vain belief I was going to win it back that day and put it back that night, which terrified me. On seeing that and knowing how powerless I was over the poker machines I was very fortunate in that I could see that, so I resigned that morning and left. Then I was still on the streets but without any income or support whatsoever.

I lasted a fortnight and I can remember very clearly standing at the bus stop right outside the Midcity not knowing what to do. I was extremely sick. This was June-July of 2012, and I was later diagnosed with pneumonia, pleurisy and hypothermia and that's what really scared me. I knew I was very likely going to expire and I prayed; I asked God to help me. Thirty seconds later this woman who was just standing at the bus stop who I didn't know and never saw again, with her daughter just walked up to me and said, 'Jesus loves you and you will find a bed in Bethlehem House'. Because I had lost everything within me I made the decision to go there. It's a 15-minute walk from where I was and it took me an hour and 40 minutes to get there to overcome the pride that was still wanting to hold on to me.

That was four years and eight months ago. I did ask them for help, which I knew I had to do, and they allowed me to enter Bethlehem House where I stayed for about 12 months. I was very, very fortunate that at the time they had a counsellor who was very savvy with the 12-step program and as a result I slowly and surely recovered. Bethlehem House took me to the doctors, they helped me, they fed me and I see myself as a very fortunate man today. My children at that time knew there was something wrong but they couldn't speak to me. They didn't know what to ask me, they both lived on the mainland, they couldn't communicate with me and I couldn't communicate with them for fear of lying to them or deceiving them. I just avoided them. I can genuinely say that I was insane. I was absolutely insane with all the tricks I was trying to come up with to manage how I was and what I was doing. I was insane. I can genuinely and gratefully say that I'm not insane any more. I will say again that I have been extremely fortunate that I don't gamble today. I don't have to play the poker machines. The desire has been withdrawn from me. Thank you for listening.

CHAIR - Robert, thank you for that. Did you have any other forms of gambling before? Did you bet on the horses, for example?

Mr KRESHL - I grew in a household where my father was an SP bookmaker in Sydney. I was in denial about that, but the truth is he lost the house, there were forever arguments about money and I'm well aware, because I greeted the two detectives that came to the door, he had stolen £50 000 from his employer. Fortunately in my recovery in the last four-and-a-half years

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that has come back to memory and I can see it for what it was and what it is. Apparently my parents had changed their names. They didn't get me to change mine, but they had changed their names to hide themselves away from the police. I can remember coming home from work on a Saturday afternoon all of about 17 and my mother had just an argument with my father and he had driven off to escape the drama. When I walked in I sat down, turned on the TV, and I can remember my mother walking straight into the kitchen, rustling around in the drawer, pulling out a large chef's knife and slitting her wrists in front of me, all as a result of gambling.

CHAIR - Have you reconnected with the family since?

Mr KRESHL - I have a son and a daughter. My son was just here this very weekend with his wife and my two grandchildren and all is good.

CHAIR - Who conducted the 12-step program, was that the counsellor at Bethlehem House?

Mr KRESHL - The counsellor was well aware of the program. He is well-versed and he practices the program. That 12-step program basically saved my life. It helped me to be real and true about what was going on. It helped undo all the denial that I was in. When I went into Beth House I owed \$17 000, \$10 000 of which was to the Housing department for failure to pay rent. I can very gladly say that that has all been repaid and I owe no money.

CHAIR - Thank you for your willingness to share in this committee hearing. I appreciate that.

Mr ARMSTRONG - We hear about problem gambling all the time. What is your definition of a problem gambler? Everybody refers to it.

Mr FOSTER - Personally, I would say for a problem gambler it is anybody who can't control their gambling addiction or can't afford their gambling addiction. It's as simple as that.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You talk about spin rates on page 4 of your submission. Are you aware that we have been told that the spin rate in Tasmania is the slowest in the world? It is three seconds, but they say it will take between five or six seconds for a person to play a game. I was just wondering whether you are aware of that?

Mr FOSTER - No, I'm not.

Mr ARMSTRONG - The Western Australian model you also mention - 'investigate the Western Australian poker machine model'. They are only in the casino in Western Australia.

Mr FOSTER - They are in the casino. Our understanding of the Western Australian model is that the machines are quite different to the machines we run here. I can leave you with some articles from the newspapers over the years that talk about the Western Australian model. It is certainly worth considering looking at that model and understanding it for what it is. My information is that Western Australia has the lowest or the second-lowest problem gambling rate in Australia. There are obvious reasons for that in the way they manage their poker machines there. They are only in the casino at Burswood and in a room that is less inviting than poker machine venues in Tasmania, and the machines are vastly different.

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Mr ARMSTRONG - We have read some information on it actually, it is quite interesting. If poker machines went out of clubs and pubs, as you are advocating, I was just reading from a website the government department of social services which I am sure said online gambling this year grew by 15 per cent. At the moment people are playing poker machines in regulated areas such as hotels, clubs and casinos, whereas if they move away from the poker machines and go to online gambling where they put their credit card in and they can lose whatever their limit is, do you see that as a problem if they are removed from clubs and pubs?

Mr FOSTER - I think if we look at the Western Australian model that might help inform that, because without poker machines in pubs and clubs over there they still have a very low instance of problem gambling. I think that is the first thing. The second thing is that the gambling industry make themselves very attractive to the people they want to get into their venues or into their online gaming services. It is no surprise that online gambling is increasing because the amount of advertising that is on television and sports aims very strongly at young men. I would say that it would not be young men that are the total aim of gaming venues; it is all ages. Honestly, I don't have any information about what would transfer if people would transfer. That is something that would need to be researched further.

From my perspective, it is the gaming machines we should be treating in isolation at the moment. It is damaging our communities. It is damaging people in our communities. We need to do something about it. The transfer between different services may occur, but we don't know. That is very much a crystal ball at the moment. We are dealing with a very real issue now and I think we should deal with that.

Mr ARMSTRONG - You might not want to answer this question but the previous presenters here said that they believed that males were bigger gamblers than females with poker machines. Is that what you find through your organisation? Do you have more males knocking on your door than females?

Mr FOSTER - Yes, that would be the case, more males. Females, are generally older females -

Mr ARMSTRONG - Retired?

Mr FOSTER - Retired, with time on their hands looking for a place to socialise to connect with people. The real paradox of gaming machines to me is that it is drawn out as a socialisation. You can come and be social at the venue. There is nothing social about sitting in front of a machine pressing buttons all day and putting in your money.

Mr ARMSTRONG - It is interesting that you are touching on the social part of it. I said this earlier on in the hearings. On this weekend just gone, I was in Strahan. I met an elderly lady who was meeting a group of her friends. They were having a meal. They go and play their \$20 worth of pokies every week, or twice a week, whenever they meet for a meal. It is her social outing for the week. If poker machines were removed from pubs and clubs, particularly in that area, the West Coast, she couldn't drive to Burnie. How do you feel that is going to affect those people, because that is their entertainment for the week. Are we looking at the lowest common denominator?

Mr FOSTER - That is very true. There are people who utilise poker machines for entertainment. However, there is a very fine line between entertainment and addiction. You

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would find that there are stories of people who would be playing poker machines for entertainment value, but who very quickly fall into that addiction process because of the nature of addiction.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Do you believe that most people, when they play a poker machine, believe they are going to win or lose?

Mr FOSTER - From the evidence that Robert has just given, problem gamblers believe they are going to win.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Problem gamblers?

Mr KRESHL - It is people who are susceptible to the form of gambling in poker machines. In listening to what you have been asking and looking back to my experience with it, I was hypnotised. I was in a trance every time I sat down in front of the poker machine, unconscious.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Oblivious of what was going on?

Mr KRESHL - Oblivious of everything that was troubling me, that was hassling me, every relationship that I was having problems with, that I had no answers for, every problem that I was facing on a daily basis just disappeared in a trance until the money ran out. Then I was faced with the same thing again.

Ms COURTNEY - We touched in that personal story on different types of issues with gambling, whether it's a pokie machine or whether it is involved in other forms of gambling or betting. Of the people who come and see you and seek your support is it predominantly around gaming machines? Do you see many people coming in with addictions to other forms of gambling presenting and seeking your help?

Mr FOSTER - Predominantly for us it will be poker machines. We are dealing with people who are in areas of disadvantage especially. Because the locations of the larger venues and the concentration of poker machines in this state are generally around areas of disadvantage, poker machines would be the main area we would see.

Ms DAWKINS - Robert, I think you said you left your workplace in 2012, is that correct?

Mr KRESHL - Correct.

Ms DAWKINS - Why was there no intervention? Where was the responsible gambling?

Mr KRESHL - None.

Ms DAWKINS - None whatsoever, none from any of your co-workers, bosses or anybody else there?

Mr KRESHL - Not one person. Occasionally somebody would say, 'How are the pokies going?'. I would say, 'Really good.'

Ms DAWKINS - So you would say you were encouraged rather than discouraged?

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Mr KRESHL - I wasn't encouraged, but I wasn't discouraged either. I was left to my own devices.

Ms DAWKINS - And your immediate superiors were aware of how much money you were putting through the machines?

Mr KRESHL - The gaming room is under surveillance. I would think so.

Ms DAWKINS - That is very disturbing.

Mr KRESHL - Yes.

Mr FOSTER - It might be helpful, Robert, to talk about the self-exclusion process for you.

Mr KRESHL - I was well aware, because I worked in that industry, of the self-exclusion process. I can genuinely and honestly tell you I didn't bother because I knew the desire to play the pokies was so strong that I would have circumvented it. I would have disguised my overall appearance so I could go and play. I know that; I have no doubt whatsoever I would have done that. I have gone to Relationships Australia in looking for help; I have been in a group with them. I heard people self-excluding but I knew it wouldn't work for me.

Mr FOSTER - I guess you have heard from a lot of the NGOs and organisations that deal in this space. My concern, and especially for the industry, is around the commodification of this product. They see it purely as a form of entertainment. Unfortunately, our communities see it as a form of addiction and a no-win situation where people have no chance of winning, especially if they play over a period of time. They lose their family, their homes, their assets and they lose their minds in dealing with this issue. The damage within our community is quite hidden. We don't see it, especially in terms of a gambling addiction. My concern is primarily that they are addictive. They are dangerous. The other thing that is really clear for us as a Tasmanian community is that the polls say that our communities do not want these machines in their communities. We have the ability to do be able to do something about that now. The people who we deal with need protection from these machines because, as Robert has said, the nature of them is addictive and is designed to take all their money.

The Salvation Army deals with people in this area of disadvantage. Not only do we see the individuals but we also see the families, wives and the children trying to keep food on the table because of an addiction within the family. We can relieve some of that pressure, especially in organisations like ours that deliver a very scarce resource of emergency relief in this state, but that money is going basically into the pockets of our gaming providers within the state. That is where the Salvation Army sits on this issue. There is an opportunity to do something about it now. We would like our Parliament to do something about it.

Mr KRESHL - In Bethlehem House there was a part-time or temporary counsellor who was there under a government grant for his presence, which ran out half way through 2013. After that, there was no counsellor and there has not been one since. If it wasn't for him I do not know where I would be today. I cannot say one way or another, but I know that he did help me extremely effectively and efficiently.

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CHAIR - Do you know if Bethlehem House has a conduit? Although they may not have a counsellor on site, do they have access to other organisations around when they come across somebody in your situation or not?

Mr KRESHL - It is not promoted, it is not offered. There are leaflets to tell you where you can go.

CHAIR - It is different than having someone on hand.

Mr KRESHL - Yes. When you come in and out of the house they will say Gerard is in today. It pricks your conscience and you think you could do with some help today.

Mr FOSTER - All the NGOs would utilise the services and referral processes of Relationships Australia and Anglicare, especially in that space.

CHAIR - Men's Resources Tasmania highlighted that within the sector there seems to be a lot more female counsellors than there are male counsellors. Sometimes men at Bethlehem House may be more open to have a relationship with another male to talk about their problems than they would a female. Men's Resources Tasmania mentioned that as a door opener. Loss of face, loss of -

Mr KRESHL - In my experience and what I witnessed in Bethlehem House it was the other way around. Men were more open to talking to females than they were other males. With other males there is a tendency for the bravado to be there rather than any real truth.

CHAIR - But your counsellor was a male?

Mr KRESHL - He was a male and I was the only person out of 30 men that was going to see him. I was desperate enough, and I could see enough that I needed help, whereas male pride doesn't want you to ask for help.

CHAIR - Stuart, you mentioned 'the polls have indicated'. If you cannot say those verbatim, are you able to send us the polls that you are referring to?

Mr FOSTER - Yes, I think Anglicare would have submitted that. They did an EMRS poll and found that 80 per cent of Tasmanians felt gaming machines had no contribution to make to the communities.

CHAIR - You are referring to the Anglicare submission.

Mr FOSTER - Yes, Anglicare.

CHAIR - Thank you for clearing that up. Gentlemen, thank you very much for your involvement today.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

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Ms ALLYSON SMITH, VICE-PRESIDENT, AND **Ms CHRISTINE HILTNER**, MEMBER, AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS, TASMANIAN BRANCH, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Welcome. Whatever evidence you provide to the committee today attracts parliamentary privilege in here, but once you are outside that does not occur. The *Hansard* will go onto our website when it is available. We can go in camera if you need to, but usually that is not the case in this situation.

Ms SMITH - I have been a social worker for about 14 years. The Australian Association of Social Workers is a professional body representing more than 10 000 social workers throughout Australia. We set the benchmark for professional education and practice in social work, and have a strong voice on matters of social inclusion, social justice, human rights and issues that impact on the quality of life of all Australians.

Many Tasmanian social workers are involved in the delivery of problem gambling services in a range of contexts including community health, counselling services, emergency relief and legal services, to name a few. We are therefore grateful for the opportunity to give evidence to the committee. The AASW recognises that gambling carries a significant human and financial cost for up to five million Australians.

We concur with the view of the International Federation of Social Workers that gambling constitutes a significant threat to family and community cohesion. Disadvantaged and marginalised Australians are particularly vulnerable to the development of gambling problems and the effects include divorce, family breakdown, job loss, homelessness, poverty, depression and even suicide.

The AASW observes that research demonstrates that the main causes of problem gambling and systematic and structural and do not lie with individual problem gamblers alone. Most problem gambling relates to the use of electronic gaming machines and other forms of gambling that are easily accessible and enable continuous staking. We believe they are inherently unsafe and known to induce gambling problems.

Furthermore, the AASW is concerned with the rapid expansion of commercial gambling in Australia over the past two decades and the increasing accessibility of internet and mobile gambling in the digital age. We urge the Government to pursue a comprehensive public health approach to gambling. Such an approach seeks to protect and promote health, and prevent and minimise the harms associated in gambling.

In order to assure its success, these strategies require adequate and continuous funding and a significant focus on community engagement and the provision of services to rural and remote areas. In conclusion, given the AASW's position, we believe a path of greater regulation, education and support would be in the best interests of the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians. Thank you.

CHAIR - How long has the AASW been in Tasmania?

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Ms SMITH - We have been in existence for 70 years. We are one of the oldest professional bodies in Australia, and in Tasmania just under 70 years. We celebrated our seventieth birthday last year.

CHAIR - We know that the pubs and clubs gained access to gaming machines in 1997. Do you have any studies to show or know that there has been an observable spike or differences in the problems that are being presented within the community regarding gaming that you can attribute to the gaming machine?

Ms SMITH - That is a really good question, but I don't have that information available to me. I can go back to our national association and see if there is any information and forward it on to the committee. Probably most of our information we are going to be talking about today is more current information around Christine's experience in working one-to-one with clients.

CHAIR - It has been pointed out to us from a number of the other organisations within your sector that evidential information is a priority. So any evidence you could give us along those lines would be helpful. I note your submission does not call, as some others have, for EGMs to be removed from all pubs and clubs but rather a reduction in the number of new licences granted and provide transition support. Was this stance taken because AASW viewed a request of this nature would be unachievable or does AASW believe the suggestions made would be sufficient to mitigate the future damage caused by EGMs? Out of all the submissions yours was slightly different.

Ms SMITH - We know. We are a member-based organisation and we didn't have time to consult membership to get an opinion from them. We reviewed a document that was created in 2012 which provided a gambling position statement for the association, and that's what we based our submission to you on. At that stage also there has been no blanket survey of members. One of the things I have talked to Christine about is the fact we may need to go back and do a bit of a blanket survey of members to see their stance on that issue. Because we have over 2000 members there will be varied views, hence the reason we have put forward the view we have.

CHAIR - Are you able to provide that document and table it at a later date?

Ms SMITH - Sure. It is the Gambling Position Statement, December 2012.

CHAIR - Somebody commented on the effects of problem gambling on children and extended family. Do you have any comments on the potential dangers to children growing up going to the pokies and being part of the family outing? About normalisation. I would be interested to hear your comments on that.

Ms HILTNER - I have worked in the industry for nearly seven years and I work at Anglicare as a counsellor and community educator.

In Victoria, Gamblers Help Service Southern put out a paper entitled 'A Child's Best Interest Framework, Interface with Problem Gambling within the Family'. I might just read the headlines, and if you want to go even a little bit further, that would be great. In Child's Age and Stage, there are elements there about attachment, financial neglect, primary needs not being met, language development, trust, medical neglect, lack of money could result in malnutrition. The next point is Child's Culture and Gender, a child's sense of valuing money, work versus gambling as an income source - and I certainly see that in the north-west region and I see it play out through the ages

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from young children to teenagers to people who have that culture as adults. There is Role Modelling, family views can shape the behaviour and culture of the child. The culture of embracing gambling raises risk children. They have to disengage with a particular culture. I see that with some people moving from other cultures here that either adapt to the Australian culture - maybe they don't have alcohol or something but they move into gambling because they think that's safe. Shame for the Child, family secrets. Moving into Child Safety, being left at home alone or in the care of siblings, being left in vehicles in car parks, children being forgotten, lack of supervision, teenagers running the streets, higher risk of physical and psychological abuse, risks associated with a criminal activity, domestic violence. Moving onto Child Stability, that is the physical stability, financial impacts, moving house, having to change schools, and homelessness. We see that a lot. Emotional unpredictability of parents, how they won or lost. As we know, there is a lot of shame so a lot of people who have gambling issues don't come home and share wins or losses; they have to keep that to themselves. The impact of holding that back - and as we know it's generally losses - is going to impact on children of any age. Unreliability, when a parent is coming home, finances affecting stability, emotional turmoil for the child loving the parent/hating the parent. I have a recent example of that if you want to go a bit further of quite an adult child. Impacts if the parent is incarcerated for criminal activities. I think we all know that happens more often than we would like to see. Family breakdown, grief and loss.

A child's development, children learning gambling behaviour, all areas of child development are impacted, as we know with neglect or trauma. Normalising the gambling, some anti-social behaviour from children, worry for the child could lead to mental health issues, anxiety and whatnot. Parent/carer capability - a gambling parent physically and emotionally unavailable to the children. Depression, anger, violence from the maybe non-gambling parent seeing how it is affecting the family. Co-morbidity with alcohol and drug issues and mental health issue that is going to exacerbate the parent's capacity to meet those child's needs. Domestic violence, we have covered that. Family composition and dynamics, a child's access and positive relationships with other extended family. We see that a lot because as you know there are 10 or so people around a problem gambler that are adversely affected. It really comes into the aunty or the uncle or especially if there is a family business involved, inheritance involved or tremendous family breakdown. It does impact on the other supports in their extended family. A single parent who is over-gambling. That is the nightmare scenario for obvious reasons. Very much the child is left alone and all of those other things I have read out are very much exacerbated if they don't have anyone else to really care for them or take some positive role modelling from. A family relying on limited income or welfare benefits, absent parent.

The last one is community participation, social and economic environment. School uniform, lunches, not being able to join the football club or not having the football shoes they need because the money has been spent somewhere else. That impacts on the child with respect to social inclusion. Getting children to school and other activities can be impacted upon, because parents are preoccupied, forgetting or unwilling, but just cannot tell the child the reason's why. If they were physically disabled they would be able to go, 'my leg is going to be out of plaster and I will be able to take you'. When it is a disability from having an addiction to gambling it is very much silenced and not spoken about. That is going to impact on a child's resilience. If the child is young and this is a family situation and it doesn't get resolved the impacts are very, very dynamic throughout the child's life and hinders their opportunities.

CHAIR - This morning we heard of a case study of a now 29-year-old, three children, as a 13-year-old, mum gave her \$20 to go and gamble, which they allege started it. It is an interesting time to give a child \$20 because it is not only this is quality time together, but it is sometimes seen

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as a rite of passage into adulthood because that is what the adults do. That is the behaviour. It really concerns me that what can be seen as, 'yes, we had some quality gambling time together,' that the child sees that as an adult passage and then is subsumed by that because it is accepted by adults around? Would you like to expand further?

Ms HILTNER - Absolutely. I do hear a lot of younger children saying, 'I can't wait until I'm 18 so I can go to the pokies'. That is really foreign to me because I grew up in Western Australia and they are only in the casinos there and these problems are unheard of.

I also have an example of a 40-something and that was the norm that at 18 that is what we'll go and do. This person has struggled on and off, on and off, still seeing the service at 40 from this happening at 18. It was a cultural norm in the family. He went at 18 and it has been ongoing and there has been all the obvious loss of relationships, loss of income, loss of jobs with the income. That is fairly sad for a 40-year-old person that has had support to just not be able to beat that addiction, I think, for two reasons: because of the vulnerability of that particular person and their life circumstances and also just the exposure. They live in a regional area, they're kind of on every corner in some places. People in Ulverstone can barely go to the supermarket without seeing an Oasis sign between the two big supermarkets, so that is very sad. Sometimes we transport people for shopping who are having so much difficulty, because they see the sign and they're triggered.

CHAIR - It is interesting you raised the point about when I'm 18 I can gamble. As we heard from the Youth Network, young people tend to like risky, challenging behaviour and if they can be seen to be 18 when they are 13 or 14, all the better. I am pleased that you have said that you are from WA because we have some questions there. How long have you been here or how long were you in WA?

Ms HILTNER - All my life. I have spent 20 years and the other time I was overseas.

CHAIR - I am assuming that you have travelled back to WA in that time.

Ms HILTNER - Yes.

CHAIR - I travelled there recently and people were sort of, 'Oh, you have pokies in Tasmania? We don't need them here.' Can you elaborate on how you perceive the WA community functioning without poker machines in pubs and clubs and what their stance is?

Ms HILTNER - I don't know if that was your feeling but it was kind of on your face that it was like they are sort of tainted and why would they want them there. Obviously Western Australians come to the east coast and see what is happening in New South Wales and it is massive and on such a grand scale that for people who are not exposed to that it is really kind of in your face. Any conversations around that is that people like to go to the casino. To me the people who seem to play the pokies in the casino are elderly and the younger people either don't seem to be interested. When I go back to family and friends and we talk about the work I do, it is odd to them and, yes, there are those comments that it would be a terrible thing for them to come into hotels. Also WA has quite a strong music industry because we are so far the other side of Melbourne and Sydney to be able to do that. There are strong feelings about that too, about keeping the culture of what I call the English pub where the family went and there was something life-affirming to do there.

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CHAIR - We heard from a lady yesterday who spoke about her experience as an MP in Victoria. She was struggling for finances, she said she was broke, so she went down the gaming path. We have also heard from other people saying that in WA because of the mining boom they did not need to have revenue for the government coffers. Tasmania was struggling 20 or 30 years so that is where Wrest Point and the casino became a boon for the government. It was also put forward today that now there has been a greater focus worldwide on coming to Tasmania for what it has to show with its experiences there may not be a need to have gaming machines in every pub and club. How would your organisation relate all that together? I know it is a big mix right at once but I am trying to understand if you believe that there is still a need because your submission was so different.

Ms SMITH - I can only speak as a member. I can't speak on behalf of the association at this point but as a member I have seen first-hand the impact of problem gambling on clients I have worked with. I had a colleague contact me because they knew I was speaking here to talk about the fact, and I won't mention the area because Tasmania is so small but they have managed staff who were problem gamblers, so you could imagine the problems.

Mr BACON - Were these social workers?

Ms SMITH - Social workers and community welfare staff who had problem gambling issues themselves. Imagine in Tasmania being a problem gambler if you're actually helping people in this area. It is quite difficult. For myself personally as a member, I think it would be great if they weren't available to people because it removes that temptation, that problem, that people experience, but from an association viewpoint obviously because we haven't solicited our members to find out their particular view we can't. That is the reason our submission is the way it is.

We talk a lot about the concept of harm minimisation in our submission. The other area that we have concern about is the recent loss of positions in the north of the state in the mental health sector. We have lost social workers at Deloraine, Scottsdale and Swansea particularly. Those are vulnerable communities and those mental health social workers have gone. Normally someone who may have been experiencing the effects of problem gambling would have talked to a local worker and got assistance but they can't access those services now because they have gone.

CHAIR - We react as a society to problems; we react to ice addiction and community domestic violence. It has been put to us that this is something that could be proactive in the fact we cut it off at the source. If you can't go to a pub or club, that would create a much better avenue for healing and for people to be worked through their addiction because they wouldn't have access directly to the thing that causes them to be addicted. How would the social worker organisations see that type of approach?

Ms SMITH - We may have slightly different views personally about that.

Ms HILTNER - A lot of the vulnerable people in the lower socioeconomic areas are in those regional areas and we have many regional areas in Tasmania. A significant factor leading towards problem gambling is the proliferation in those areas. If it were prevalent, at least it would be somewhat contained - perhaps they would still be in the casinos. At least 97 per cent of people say to me, completely unsolicited at some point during the time in the office with me, that they should never have brought them into the pubs and clubs. They say 'They're everywhere and you can't escape them'. That is certainly my experience as an outsider coming in. Unfortunately,

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where I live in Devonport, we have nearly twice as many machines than the state average per 1000 people.

In the last two weeks I said to clients who walked in that I was going to be appearing before this committee and asked if they had anything to say to send me an email, and one of them did. If you want to hear directly from one of my clients, I can relate that now.

CHAIR - Yes, that is fine.

Ms SMITH - I think it is that dilemma between self-determination. We are all adults and are able to make decisions and people would like to be able to make choices, so if we removed every single machine available there would of course be problems with that because we need to be able to self-determine, but we know with any addiction, by having it readily and easily available, we are not just impacting on the person with the addiction, we are impacting on the family and also impacting on future people. You mentioned young people. When we think of someone at 13 and how they and their brain is developing, there is a lot of information around particularly drugs and alcohol that a lot of addictions start with teenagers, and gambling is no different. We have that issue that as your brain is developing the impact of developing an addiction at such young age is even more difficult then as they become adults.

Ms HILTNER - The email reads:

To whom it may concern

So much for the new 'living city' of Devonport. With a population of 30 000 people so far, all you have managed to create is a mini Las Vegas Sin City. Devonport is inundated with gambling venues. Every club and pub is fully loaded with pokie machines which were designed for addiction, as we all know, and money-raising revenue for the government. So you bring in gambling exclusions as an avenue for people to take, which is only an excuse to put the blame back onto the poor souls addicted to a machine that is designed to do just that. Once you have excluded yourself, it is not monitored anyway. I know eight people who have gone through this exclusion process, including myself, and these people can still walk into these places and gamble. So that theory doesn't work, does it? But of course the Government knew that all along. Yet you want to put another 300 machines into Tasmania. We all know why - revenue.

How about going back to the beginning and leave the gambling and pokies in the damn casinos where they belong? You cannot even go out for a meal in the Devonport venues without hearing the pokie machines constantly. It is a damn disgrace to the government, councils and local authorities who allow them into all these places. Do something about it so all these people can get back on their feet and lead a fair and normal life.

Ms DAWKINS - That email is fantastic. That highlights that issue of the machines being the problem, not the people. We have heard that as a bit of a thread running all the way through it. We've heard from people representing hotels to say that they are very concerned that regional hotels will not survive without pokies. Some of those individuals have stated that they bought the hotels when they were failing and the only reason they are not succeeding is because they put

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pokies in them. Listening to you talk, people who are now visiting those pubs don't want to be there because there are pokies there. We could fit that, couldn't we, in a sense and say that if we removed the pokies from the pubs and clubs that perhaps there would be a large cohort of people who would attend who are now not. Would you agree with that statement?

Ms HILTNER - Absolutely. As a local example there used to be spirituality in a pub. It was run by a local - he wasn't a minister, but he'd been a chaplain in a school, a teacher and whatnot in one of the Catholic schools.

Ms DAWKINS - Philosophy in a pub?

Ms HILTNER - That is exactly. That was his kind of bent. It was really quite wonderful. Then the conversation came up: actually, we are bringing people into this area. It was the pokies, it was never about alcohol. People could sit there and just have a single drink but some people would then go and use the pokies. It was decided not to go there and it never opened up anywhere else. I have always thought I would have liked some of the money to go into pubs that don't have pokies, build up theatre, poetry, and whatever people do, whether it is music. I think some of you might know that they talk about the third place. It used to be the home, the work and some other avenue that was safe, but there was the reality that there are not too many places to go to.

Ms DAWKINS - Yesterday, the good folk from Holyoake introduced the idea that this is also a moral and ethical issue. We've heard a lot about the economic issues. We've heard a lot about the public health issue, but they stated fervently that this was a moral and ethical issue and that they believe the Government should participate in resolving. Do you have anything to say to that?

Ms SMITH - I am going to speak as myself, as a member. I think the moral issue is because we are aware that the pokies then fund the government and other events. That is where that moral and ethical issue comes from, because government is getting a kickback from the poker machines. Obviously, the attitude you see is that the government then wants the poker machines to stay, as do the Federal Group or whoever has them, because it is a revenue source. It is about thinking about Tasmania. I think that is something that we've been shifting. If we think about ourselves in Tasmania - I have been here for 20 years; I'm not from Tassie, I'm from Queensland - and the shift I have noticed is around tourism, for example, starting to recognise that there are alternatives to having to cut down trees to earn an income; that we can pay people to see trees and they'll pay us money to look at them. That is a really great example of ecotourism that has been successful in Tasmania. There are lots of alternatives. There are hotels around that don't have poker machines. The Forth Hotel pub is a good example. People will go there for that reason.

Ms HILTNER - I have had clients move to WA to get away from pokies. They leave family. It is the only way. They have tried unsuccessfully. The two I am thinking of - one for about 12 years who had other addiction issues and had been able to get over all of them except the pokies.

Ms DAWKINS - I lived in Western Australia too and it was an absolute delight. Clearly, the music scene, as you said, was fantastic in Perth. It's a real credit to them.

Ms COURTNEY - You mentioned external signage on venues. We haven't had anyone else talk about that yet that I can recall, can you please expand on that a little?

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Ms HILTNER - Yes, when you go to the car parks for Woolworths and Coles there are venues there where you can see the Oasis signs, and you are triggered.

Ms COURTNEY - Do you think that has an added impact on your clients?

Ms HILTNER - They state that. It does. That will trigger someone. If someone with an addiction - for some people it will be a sound, they might hear something. But that, of course, is going to bring it to mind immediately and they are tempted to go. Let us say that they are in a car park and the only one left was the one right close up there. It does not take much if you are addicted to that. Or something has just happened at home, you know what I mean? It is when the vulnerability hits that people reach out to whatever that sort of self-medication is. This is all people; it is not just some vulnerable people. You hear things like that from white-collar professionals.

Ms COURTNEY - The other thing you mentioned was the self-exclusion program. We have heard a lot of evidence over the last couple of days that perhaps in some circumstances it has not worked as well as it could have. Do you think that if that program were improved to be able to be more effective that it would be a useful mechanism to strengthen?

Ms HILTNER - Yes, if all parties did what needed to be done. It takes a lot more effort from the venues and the staff and the training, and maybe something more rigorous from the other side, from Liquor and Gaming.

CHAIR - In your harm-minimisation strategies in your submission, the last dot point says, 'Fund research on the effectiveness and efficiency of support services.' I am interested in how you would see that would work. What would you be actually assessing within the sector? If that were the case, would your organisation be the right vehicle, prepared to undertake that research? Could you expand on that?

Ms SMITH - Yes, sure. I think you will find that is often a standard statement in most submissions, where if we continue to fund research, we can work out where the gaps are. We talked a bit about some of the regional gaps we are aware of at the moment. Our organisation does not tend to be an organisation that sits down and leads research in a particular area. I am not saying that we do not put together submission papers and gather information from our members and try to identify through members, client's issues, to bring those to the attention of Governments. We are not set up to be a researching body, at this stage.

CHAIR - It seems to me a number of the sectors said that they deal with gambling problems. Say, Relationships Australia: a couple come in with problems with the relationship - the underlying reason is financial; therefore, it could be gambling. It seems a little nefarious about where the money is actually coming from. How effective is that money being spent in different areas? You mentioned regional. I am from the north-west coast, so I understand clearly what you are talking about with Devonport. How could it be more effective to fund the addictive practices that you see on a regular basis in the Devonport area or the north-west coast?

Ms HILTNER - How could it be utilised?

CHAIR - Yes, that is right.

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Ms HILTNER - Community education; I work in that field. I think it has worked quite well because I now see younger children identifying and being able to speak to me about problem gambling, understanding that it is a business and they are trying to make money, and that over the long term you do lose in games of chance. Unfortunately, that is getting younger and younger.

I also feel that the industry has done me a great service in community education. Since there has been so much advertising with sports betting, people come up to me if I am doing a community event or an expo. I have my sign and people see I am to do with gambling. Five years ago they would just shy away and walk the other way. Now they come up and they say that they've got strong feelings about it. When I talk to them, that is where it has come from. They talk about sports betting because it has been so prolific, so swiftly that it has been brought to their attention. Then it makes them think about other forms of gambling.

CHAIR - It is quite scary, isn't it? Australia, the great sporting nation and you can bet on it as well.

Ms HILTNER - This is my personal feeling about the pokies too. This is such an easy one we can control right now. You can nip this in the bud. We have given it a whirl and this is what has happened. There will always be gambling and there are other ways for people to gamble if that is their self-determination. This is known to cause such harm, these electronic gaming machines.

You said there has been a lot of talk about what it is doing to the economy so I do not need to go into individual examples of all the businesses that break down that I personally know about. In a small area like Devonport I then cannot see the client but I do see that business go down and I know why. We have to get psychologists over from the mainland or whatever because it is a small region. I don't see them because I know them, all or our children go to the same school, but then I see the business closes.

CHAIR - I did see you made a comment regarding the public interest test being applied to licences when they re-apply for licences for venues. We have heard about the transition, we have heard about a gradual - part of me thinks, aren't you better off to knock it on the head and say every venue, at this stage? Some places, when the licence may come up for renewal but it is not going to happen for another competing venue in that same town for another 18 months. There are some issues with how you would do that. You have raised it in your submission, would you like to make comment on how compensation would be distributed, how would you manage that? We have to give the Government some recommendations about any issue raised with us.

Ms SMITH - Once again, we have taken that stance because we have not been able to solicit members. We have taken a broader stance in that particular area of the submission. I agree with you, it is fraught with problems. The easiest option would be to stop and hopefully if we have that opportunity to survey our members we can come back with some more information for you about that.

CHAIR - That would be appreciated.

Ms HILTNER - In my experience of that, from a community sentiment, problem gamblers definitely want them out. People that are social gamblers, because they go in there every now and again, they see the harm. They too say get rid of them, it is going to be okay. Then the other elements of community that do not have anything to do with it are still aware of the issues it causes. When I give community education to maybe a service provider or a bunch of networks

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and there are six people around the table, come the end of it at a minimum two, three people have come up and out it comes; they tell their story. It seems like everybody does know someone that has been. Yes, this idea of being able to really nip it in the bud and take them out, I think there would be incredible joy and gratitude that finally we can have some trust back in the people we vote for to care for us. The harms are much greater.

The last thing I want to say is it really is like a silent killer. Everyone suffers in shame. All those family members around them suffer and they don't tell their friends about, 'my dad lost the business through gambling'.

CHAIR - Thank you.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW

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Mr PETER HOULT, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Welcome. The evidence being taken today attracts parliamentary privilege in this building. It is on *Hansard* and will go onto the website when available. I think it would be very helpful for those listening to know of your past relationship within this sphere, and speaking from a lot of experience.

Mr HOULT - My career has primarily been in social policy in government and for five years I ran my own consulting business in the second half of the 1990s, where again I was primarily working in social policy, although at the slightly pointier end, usually around public health and tendering of government services, et cetera.

I came back into government in 2001 as the deputy secretary of Justice and then became the Secretary of the Department of Justice, and I was Director of Corrective Services for a few years. My last job in government, as a public servant, was as Secretary to the Department of Health and Human Services. When I quit public service I was asked by the then Treasurer to chair the then Tasmanian Gaming Commission, now the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission. I did that up until February last year, for eight years.

CHAIR - You might like to make an opening statement or comment on your submission.

Mr HOULT - My observations are that the debate around gaming and its primary focus is on electronic gaming machines in Tasmania, the electronic modalities, including keno. I think it has been awfully diverted by the focus on the revenues going to government, which I tried to articulate are almost irrelevant in the Tasmanian context. We're talking about amounts of funding going to government from problems gamblers, which is within the error factor Treasury has every day about the state's financial position. It is not that. It is, since 1993, one large enterprise and a number of small to medium enterprises have developed business models which depend on the revenue stream from electronic gaming. That is the difficulty we have here in Tasmania.

The government, from its perspective, could walk away from the revenues from gambling and it would not be as bad as what happened a year ago - a little more shifts from commonwealth revenues. In a \$5 billion total economy government revenue streams this is not fundamental amounts of money. We now have about 100-odd businesses of varying sizes that have developed business models depending on cashflows, to a greater or lesser extent, from gaming machines.

From the other perspective, it is undoubtedly true there are significant and increasing numbers of people as a proportion of people who use these machines who are suffering harm. There is no question about that. The best estimates when you look at the Productivity Commission, and I've heard it from the mouths of industry people themselves, probably somewhere between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of the revenues come from people who lack a degree of control over what they are doing when playing the machines. On that argument you can say that without problem gamblers this industry would cease to exist. I do not know any industry that would take a knock of 30 per cent to 50 per cent of its revenue stream and continue to be viable.

I think the industry itself and the arguments they put forward are quite understandable from their perspective, but are relatively facile in the sense they argue that somewhere between 1 per

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cent and 2 per cent of people are damaged by exposure to electronic gaming. It is a bit like the airline industry saying a very small proportion of people die in airline crashes, but then again, in two-thirds of the world people never get on an aeroplane. They measure it by flying miles, which is the proper way to do it.

If we look at the number of people who use electronic gaming machines in the time period of say a week, we're looking at 4-5 per cent of the population. If you take that into account, of those people somewhere between 20-40 per cent of them suffer harm. I have tried to make the point in my submission that would we allow any other kind of machine to exist whereby 20-40 per cent of the people who used it suffered harm? The arguments on both sides have been a bit diversionary at times and a lot of the emotion about government being addicted to gaming revenues, while it might be a better argument in Victoria and New South Wales, is not a particularly good one for Tasmania. The government does, however, confront a significant number of businesses that are substantially dependent on the revenues from these machines.

My other point is I found the terms of reference of the committee somewhat confusing. You have probably noticed that what most people want to talk about is not the minutiae of tenders and things like that, it is the machines and their effect on people. I think there are some distortions in the industry around the CSL and who pays it, trying to make some points about that. I also have some opinions about the nature of any tender that should go on. I would certainly be uncomfortable about a tender which saw a plethora of small players independently owning licences for gaming machines. I have observed that reasonably closely in other jurisdictions and seen the major problems with compliance that generates and the major problems with intervening competition for gamblers, some of which is basic and at the bottom level. I am sure Tasmanians would not want to see pubs and clubs competing openly with each other to try to attract people to gaming machines.

My other point was that, having been a regulator, I was slightly concerned about the statements in the Hodgman Government document that seemed to imply the regulator should have some concern with the ongoing viability of the industry. I find that very concerning and would argue that much of what we were able to do as a gaming commission during my period on the commission would have been much more difficult if we had a requirement we were to concern ourselves with the sustainability of the industry. As chairman, I made the repeated point that any successive harm minimisation would result in reduced revenues to the industry and to government and if it didn't reduce revenue it probably wasn't doing any good at all. With my ex-regulator hat on I would like to see this committee carefully come out and say that is not a role for the regulator. It may be a role for the regulator in an essential industry such as electricity or water, because failure of those industries would be traumatic, but it's a very different kind of industry we are talking about here.

Ms COURTNEY - You start off talking about online sports betting, the declining EGM industry and the growing online industries. You refer to a strategist who talks about the new market generating replacement growth. Do you know of any evidence of substitution between EGMs and other types of gaming or activity from the user perspective?

Mr HOULT - The evidence on gaming machines is probably to the contrary, that people who are addicted to gaming machines don't do online gambling as a substitution. It's a different kind of addiction to the machine environment. They don't say, 'If I can't get to a machine I'll go online and bet on the football or the cricket'. The industry absolutely grasped that - and I am talking nine years ago when I spoke to these people. The industry clearly grasped that the EGM

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industry was in decline and would continue to decline and that it was very probably a demographic thing. Young people are not particularly impressed with flashing lights and dolphins; they have grown up with far more sophisticated forms of interaction with electronic equipment, at least my kids certainly did - thank God they can make the TV work, because I can't.

I don't think there is an automatic substitution. Talking to people who have done research on addiction to EGMs they say that people who come off being addicted to EGMs or lose access to them don't do one-for-one shifts to another kind of gaming. It's not that simple. That reinforces some of the psychologist arguments that in fact the machines themselves are the issue, not primarily the desire to gamble. We are talking about a subset of the people who use them, not everybody of course. We are talking about those with the greatest risk. May I say that with internet gambling, the influence of state and territory regulators is in rapid decline because we had no control and continue to have no control over internet gambling.

Ms COURTNEY - You mentioned in your opening that it can be argued that revenue from EGMs has become integral to the business models of pubs and clubs across the state. If EGMs were to be removed from pubs and clubs, do you have a sense of the economic impact that would possibly have in areas in Tasmania?

Mr HOULT - To go back one step, 100 per cent of the money spent on EGMs in Tasmania - or so close to 100 per cent it's irrelevant - is Tasmanian money, so in the broader economic sense of your statement I don't believe it would have a dramatic effect at all because the money would still very probably expended locally on other things, other forms of entertainment, or maybe paying their rent. I used to be in public housing. In a global sense, I do not think the absence or otherwise of EGMs or keno or whatever would have a very dramatic effect on the cycle of money through a community, but it would change where the money was spent and it would impact a significant number of pubs and clubs. You would have a period of great difficulty for those businesses and I think some of them would fail. From my conversations with a number of hoteliers and people like that when they have been honest and off the record, they have said that without that revenue stream they would probably either downsize significantly or close their doors.

Ms COURTNEY - Thank you for that. You mentioned the public interest test and you have some comments around that. You talk about evidence from interstate, particularly Victoria, and say how fraught that process can be. We have had a lot of positive comments broadly about having public interest tests; there seems to be a sense that people quite like the idea of them. Can you have some suggestions on how public interest tests can achieve the goals they set out?

Mr HOULT - With the greatest respect, I think those people are using this as another avenue to try to have less poker machines. They have gone to the public interest test because of the general failure to be successful in other ways of limiting the impacts of EGMs. The Victorian experience for communities is that they have done a hell of a lot of work, an enormous amount of public work. They end up in a process which is like the VCAT, the Victorian Corporate Affairs Tribunal, and several of them have lost at that point in time because they get into incredibly difficult arguments about what public interest is et cetera.

My personal belief is that it would be much simpler to set a density limit. You could say that for a certain population in a local government area you could not have more than x number of machines. Therefore you would drop the quite apparent drift of machines to the highest revenue areas, which in Tasmania are low socio-economic areas. That has no argument about it and does

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not involve a lot of lawyers appearing in a lot of tribunals or courts. You could introduce it over time. You could say there is a five- to 10-year lead time that this is balanced out. Certainly you could put it as part of tender process if you wanted to do that and say that is what was going to happen over the life of the licence even.

I believe you have to give people time because people have bought existing licences, made trading decisions and done other things based on the expected revenue streams from venues. Just to cut that off would be unfair. You could do it and you could talk to the taxi drivers in Melbourne about loss of their value in a very short time, but it would be a fairly brutal process for a significant number of businesses.

Ms COURTNEY - You comment for the SEIS that extending to a five-year study would be more beneficial than having a three-year cycle; we have had similar comments from several people. We also had someone provide evidence yesterday they thought it would be appropriate to get more input into the terms of reference around it. Someone who obviously had intimate knowledge of them. Are you comfortable with the breadth of what the social and economic impact studies address?

Mr HOULT - You have got to remember that the studies really are looking at the industry as it is, and that is what they were designed to do. When they make assessments of the viability of the industry, whether the industry is an economic plus or negative for the state, they do so within the envelope of the industry constructed by the 1993 Gaming Control Act. A lot of people would like them to ask questions like should we have gaming machines? The Government can do that if they want. They have shown no interest in doing that and might I say the Gaming Commission have no control over the SEIS frequency or its terms of reference. We were merely another stakeholder who got a conversation with the consultants who did it.

I think it happens too quickly for anybody to review it and see if there is any changes possible, having negotiations and discussions and then do legislative change and the next one is on you before you know what you are doing by the time it is done. I think it is probably a slight waste of money that maybe could be spent better doing other things to do it that frequently.

Then when you are talking about the gaming industry it is not changing that quickly. It is a mature or semi-mature industry in economic terms. Nothing changes particularly quickly and I guess people in this room will tell you they have been saying the same things about this industry for longer than I have been around probably.

Ms COURTNEY - I am particularly interested about your thoughts around terms of reference (d), around the market-based mechanisms and the tenders, teasing out some of the things that you have discussed. We have had people offer opinions around appropriateness of the tender but not many have looked into the mechanisms that could possibly be available. You say it would not be difficult to design a tender evaluation process that gave real weight, say a third in the selection criteria, to offers to change the operation of the machines. Could you expand that concept a little bit more for us and talk about any other jurisdictions that have looked at tenders that are formulated that way please?

Mr HOULT - As I said, having been involved in a lot of tenders you can write tender specs however you want to write them. Most jurisdictions have not been involved in that kind of tender process before but it would be relatively simple to write tender documentation which clearly gave weight to a bidder saying: 'These are the harm minimisation efforts, package, we would be willing

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to put as part of our tender'. Certainly you could say to them things like number of lines on a machine, spin rates and things like that and they might say that if it is a 10 or 15-year licence or something like that we would be willing after the first five years to arrive at this point in time and different kind of machine operation, access as of the other areas you could clearly do it. They may be willing to look at something like density of machines.

Any smart operator who is coming to bid will put a dollar amount value on every one of those things that you don't get as a government. What they would say is the less controls you put on me the more money I will pay you for this licence or these licences, depending on how you have structured your tender. Everything about this will have a cost. Some people might argue you would still get a better return than the Government has got from basically having one partner for the last - when did Wrest Point open, 1972? That is an arguable case. As I said before I am not a proponent of open slather. Every organisation, every pub, club can put in a bid and buy their own licence for their own 20, 30, 50 machines. I think that is a compliance nightmare. I think it has huge potential risks for problem gamblers being attracted and bargained for to try to get them in the door. I think anybody who sees what happens in Melbourne or in Sydney would think that is not a place I want to go. We don't particularly want minivans parked outside old aged homes with free trips to venues.

While Federal has been criticised, I also say in my submission that Federal has largely been good corporate citizens once the rules of the game have been established. They didn't like the establishment of the rules per se, but once the government or the commission had established the rules they have been fairly good corporate citizens about it. They have been good corporate citizens.

It is much easier to deal with a limited number of licence holders and make them comply with a set of rules than it is to deal with 100 and try to make them comply with a set of rules. I know the Hospitality Association has another point of view, because they see this as an opportunity for their members to get a larger amount of the dollars coming through the door staying with them. I would flag that there are very significant risks to government and individuals on those diverse models.

Ms COURTNEY - You are suggesting that the single operator offer, or potentially licences on a regional basis with different -

Mr HOULT - You could put the three regions up and tender them out. I am not sure what that would get you. I think you would probably find that certainly the Network Gaming business itself would be very attractive. You all understand what network gaming is? It is the infrastructure that runs the machines in the pubs and clubs. It is the business owned by Federal. That in itself could be tendered. Somebody would love that. I am certain there are people on the mainland who already run quite large similar operations who might come and say we can run this as a side-door effort out of our mainland network online, et cetera. You could do things like that. Or you could just do regional base tenders and people could bid for the north, north-west and south.

Ms COURTNEY - What about having models where, whether it was regional or not, because if you had a regional one then there is the headline tender with the government for the licence, but then the pubs and clubs that are operating within that area effectively still only have one person that they are dealing with. Would a model work where you have a few big operators managing that, where pubs and clubs will effectively have choice?

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Mr HOULT - You could, but it would be a very difficult tender to run, because the larger tendering party, the overseeing entity, would depend on its price it would offer for the licence to the number of people who had already signed up to them. It is a bit chicken and egg: who is going to sign up before they know who they are and what deal they might be offering? I think you might end up with such a complex process.

Let me say that talking to pubs and clubs Network Gaming has a good reputation. They do training well, they do maintenance et cetera well. The whole focus that I have heard, and it has not been so much from the pubs and clubs, but their representative organisation, has been that they don't get enough of the dollar that goes into the machine. They don't get a big enough proportion in their hand. You could run a tender that had in it how much per dollar will you give the pubs and clubs who have the machines.

Ms COURTNEY - Thank you, it is a really interesting area to explore.

Mr HOULT - It's not rocket science. There are people in Treasury who could design this off the side of a desk in their lunch hour. It is about the political will to structure the tender and whether the balance of the tender structure is the maximum return to government or an opportunity to make sure you do as little harm as possible in the community and that is the trick.

Ms COURTNEY - In terms of your comments around terms of reference and around future taxation and licensing agreements, you say you are cautious about using other jurisdictions because they largely have their structure as a result of historical factors. If you had a clean slate, effectively, which in some ways is what this scenario has been described as in Tasmania how would you look at and structure a tax system not just around EGMs, we haven't had much of a discussion around Keno and licensing of casinos as well. Do you have any views from a high level perspective what things should be taken into consideration around a tax regime around the entire industry?

Mr HOULT - Tasmania is a hermitically sealed market for keno and pokies. You might look at what people have done in other places to see if it's of interest but it won't tell you anything particularly about what somebody is bidding for the licence or licences in Tasmania. The process itself will drive that and the kind of rules you put around the process will drive the offer of return to government. A government might say, 'We want more money out of this - we want one-third of all profits', but what you will get back is a series of bids. People will say, 'We have to generate all our profits and run our operation off 66 per cent or two-thirds of what comes through the door'. That is what they will do in their tender. They certainly won't be offering up harm minimisation, lower spin rates, less lines or less access hours because that again will cut the amount of money they have left.

You can arbitrarily put a tax rate in or you could go to the market and say, 'One of the things we're going to assess you on is the tax rate and the tax modality you offer up to us will be a significant part of the evaluation'. They know their business and in the assessment of that government can decide if it is going to balance off the rate of return revenues as against other things that might be offered up. You might even say that if you go to a preferred tenderer you would have negotiations between government on harm-minimisation balances against revenue return to government. You could do that if you wanted.

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Other states and territories are all over the place on this. They have offered up deals in the past. They have offered things to the Crown Casino in Victoria. Unbelievably, they have legislated there to say should a government at any time in the future during the life of the licence take any harm-minimisation measures that reduces their profitability they have to give them that amount of money back from general revenue. You could do that if you wanted.

Ms COURTNEY - You talk in general terms that licensing arrangements should be as robust as necessary and put the least burden possible in terms of compliance and enforcement. You reflect that the Gaming Control Act is in need of revision. Are there any headline principles or particular parts of how the licensing arrangements are now that are particularly onerous and creating unreasonably high levels of compliance and enforcement costs or, conversely, are not robust enough?

Mr HOULT - People who have sat in this chair will tell you the compliance isn't robust enough. I heard comments made about the exclusion scheme. If you want to make an exclusion scheme more robust, you're very likely to put a higher compliance cost on operators. We looked at the exclusion issue twice during my time as chair. It is certainly better than anything that is running around Australia but it is by no means perfect. Businesses, particularly during summer periods, have high turnovers of part-time temporary staff who might work a four-hour shift, and to expect them to understand the operation of an exclusion scheme and to recognise the faces - I have seen the CCTV on how those faces change when they want to get into a pub - is very difficult indeed.

The Liquor and Gaming Branch at Treasury has done a good job in trying to get some rationality into their compliance relationship with the venues and making the venues understand their obligations. It has been made easier by working through Network Gaming, a single entity, which incorporates all that into the training they do for every venue. When I talked to my fellow regulators in other states they said, 'You lucky bastard' - seriously, they thought it was so functional and quick that you got Network Gaming to understand a change in the rules governing the business and they trained it and rolled it out. They could do it because they were in the pubs doing maintenance and they had specialised trainers. Something you should be loath to lose in any tender process would be that kind of rollout.

The act itself is a dog's breakfast. It is awful. I was a public servant for a long time and I struggle to understand it. Trying to find anything in it, never mind anything else - it has been added to ad nauseam. It has had Betfair in and Betfair out. Because of the nature of the act, which is an omnibus act, everything has to go in. Every year the Treasurer will bring into the House two or three little bills saying, 'Change clause 1(9)Z(e)' or whatever, and that gets written in again. It is just awful to try to understand.

I don't believe anybody who works in or owns a pub or club has any concept of that act and I don't blame them. It should become a simple umbrella act with some subordinate legislation and the powers of direction given to the Liquor and Gaming Commission to do that so it can be done simply and the changes are clear. Then somebody might write it in English while they are doing it.

Ms COURTNEY - We have had a few people talk about the merit possibly of having effectively more responsibility around the responsible service of gaming, like we have with the responsible service of alcohol and the onus on both the individual and the pub or the club with

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actual real penalties. Do you feel that has merit, particularly when we are talking about compliance, enforcement and the appropriateness of it? What are your views on that?

Mr HOULT - Very mixed. I can understand where people are coming from and you can always find examples of exclusion schemes and people gambling while they are affected by alcohol, people who are demonstrating signs of distress while gaming, things like that. They should be acted upon by the licence holder. In reality, we are talking about a very significant number of small businesses running on casual and part-time staff.

In rural and regional Australia some of these people said to me it's really hard for a 19-year old to go up to a 60-year old who is a friend of their mum's and say, 'I think you've got a gambling problem'. Do you want to get into an adversarial civil or criminal penalty model, and would it make a difference? I suspect not. I suspect if you are going to do that, you had better pay for more inspectors to spend more time in pubs and clubs, and you don't want to do that because your compliance costs will go through the roof. I have very mixed feelings. I understand the motivator of those statements, but I don't think there is a simple answer and I don't think penalising people is the simple answer.

Ms COURTNEY - You have also said that the training Federal have provided throughout the state has been good.

Mr HOULT - Yes, and the responsible conduct of gaming is now an online course from the Liquor and Gaming Branch. I don't know why we license all of the people. I don't know why emptying a poker machine of money requires you to do an online gambling course. Maybe we have to focus more on smaller numbers of individuals who have a more engaged role in these premises rather than trying to have the thousands of people holding a liquor and gaming licence, because some of them do stuff like hand over tickets for keno in venues and you go, 'Is it worth the investment there?' I don't know but I think the question is worth asking.

Mr BACON - Peter, you talk in your submission a little bit about the plateauing and then the decline in revenue from EGMs. We have had quite a few establishments say that they think 30 years is the time frame for the industry effectively. Under the current set of circumstances that are there at the moment, do you think -

Mr HOULT - They might have information I have never seen before, but I certainly think that what you have seen is a decline. I think what you are seeing is a loss of an audience who are not particularly attracted to that kind of environment. I don't think it means you're going to have per se less problem gamblers. I think those problem gamblers will emerge in the online environment, particularly sports betting. I think you are already seeing that. That is going to be even harder for anybody to see and control because they physically don't turn up anywhere. You do not see them. I think the industry has very cleverly embedded itself in the sporting world. You look at Crown Bets relationship with the AFL, with tens of millions of dollars. They know exactly what they are doing. They look at it as a process that we all call normalisation. It is so blatantly obvious that what they have decided to do is make online sports betting appear to be an utterly normal part of the sporting experience.

There was research done in Victoria only last year that showed that kids as young as 10 can tell you the name of three sports betting companies. The can list Luxbet, CrownBet; they can do it. These are primary school kids. That is clever marketing. Say what you will about the morality of it; it is very, very clever marketing. I go to the football in Melbourne a few times a

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year. I sit behind people sitting there with their mobile phones, on their accounts, betting at the footy - not necessarily even on the footy on another event - and screaming and yelling at each other when they win or lose. It has just become part of the experience. Very clever. Certainly, that has caught a different market to the EGM market, to the pokies.

Mr BACON - You do not see the EGM market just going into a terminal decline?

Mr HOULT - I think it will wither over a long period of time. I think its real problem is going to be the proportion that income streams are going to be more and more from problem gamblers as that happens. They are the one who cannot walk away from it.

Mr BACON - You said at the moment it is thought to be between 30 and 50 per cent?

Mr HOULT - If you talk to the industry here they will say it is 2 per cent or 5 per cent are the problem gamblers. I have heard people in the industry in more unguarded moments - Certainly, the Productivity Commission put a number around 40 per cent. They do not usually throw around unsubstantiated numbers.

Mr BACON - Do you have a position then on a lot of the conversations over the past two days about whether or not the EGMs should be in pubs and clubs at all or whether they should just be in the casinos?

Mr HOULT - My opinion on that is worth no more than any other Tasmanian. I do not go to pubs where there are pokies. I go to a pub where there aren't screens on the walls and bells and whistles. I go to pubs to have a beer and chat to friends and listen to music. But that is just me - my middle-class boring view of the world. A lot of other people I know like to occasionally have a flutter and play on an EGM but they are not the industry, let's be honest. If the industry had to depend on mates of mine who go once every three months and blow \$50, there ain't an industry.

I think the emphasis and the money is going towards online sports betting. That's an indication that nobody thinks there is a huge future in EGMs or they would have been putting the money into that part of the market. There was a push a few years ago to try to get server-based EGMs so you could gamble at a distance from the EGM. There was talk about having your hotel rooms where a wireless device in the hotel room would let you gamble. It has not happened. Nobody is willing to put the investment in, I think, because they do not think the long-term market is there. I think it might be a bit of a sad demise over an extended period of time.

Mr BACON - You have no thoughts on what time might be?

Mr HOULT - I reckon if you look at the numbers over the last decade, you are seeing smaller clubs and pubs getting out of them and losing them altogether. That has been two things. As a member of the Gaming Commission, I saw the revenue figures for every pub in club. Some of them earn several hundreds of dollars a day per machine and some of them earn several dollars a day per machine. Those at the bottom end, the small isolated rural clubs particularly, are not going to survive. The maintenance costs will be greater than the revenue before you know it.

Mr ARMSTRONG - We saw some of them remove them not long after they came out.

Mr HOULT - Yes. I tried to reflect in my submission about why they went into pubs and clubs in 1993. This was not an argument about whether it was good or bad, social, or anything

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else. I was there. I was Peter McKay's departmental advisor in 1993 when he introduced the bill in the upper House. I am sorry to have to admit that. It was quite clear in the conversation about it. They were scraping the bottom of the barrel to try to find some money to keep the state from turning the lights out. That was it. Nobody was going, 'It's going to be wonderful'. Nobody thought that Tasmanians were going over on the ferry to gamble on the pokies. That was just rubbish said at the time. It was solely a revenue raising exercise.

CHAIR - Peter, the Government didn't provide a submission on many of the terms of reference. The Premier supplied us with a letter saying that because the Hodgman Liberal Government had a post-2023 gaming structural framework that that was their contribution and wanted to hear the community conversation to help the committee. As a committee chair I see that as that conversation is good because we will be able to provide some recommendations to the Government. They should take those on board to help guide government policy. I want to pull apart that framework a little bit and get your impression on some of what that contains. I know you mentioned it in your submission.

Furthermore, in the guiding principles to the framework that the Government has put down, it is clear that they see that there is a continued position for EGMs within the state. The guiding principles say that. People have come up to us and said, 'Isn't this wonderful? We have an opportunity to change, we have an opportunity for different things to happen within this space' but the framework clearly states that they see it as an expectation that there will be further EGMs, not just in casinos; but they are saying it will be in pubs and clubs. Is that how you read it?

Mr HOULT - Absolutely. I think I said at the start I thought you had weird terms of reference. I think they are even weirder, given the fact that the Government came out with a policy statement, which basically, in broad terms, said the status quo will continue. It said a few little things about high roller casinos and stuff like that but that is almost by the by. Basically, the principles say that there will continue to be an electronic gaming industry in Tasmania which involves pubs and clubs.

CHAIR - Interestingly enough, the members of the Government at the moment are saying, 'Yes, we want the committee to have a community conversation.' My understanding of the committee's work is that we come back with recommendations, which will help government policy. The conversations we have reflects in our recommendations. You mentioned the MONA issue in your document. It was interesting that they said, 'MONA is for high rollers.' In their framework the Government is saying that it would be open to the suggestion that a similar high roller licence could be available in the north of the state. It was made very clear to us that the MONA experience is to attract that high-end market. We could not figure out where in the north of the state you would have a MONA that would potentially have that same impact, or that same attraction?

Mr HOULT - My opinion would be that they put that in just so it didn't seem a southern-centric thing. Somebody said, what about the north and the north-west? Essentially, if somebody wants to establish a high roller there, of course, but in reality? I had peripheral involvement in the original conversations with MONA - and I say peripheral as that's what it was. This is entirely dependent on David Walsh's ability to attract his mates and people down as high rollers. No high rollers come to Tasmanian casinos - none. High rollers are organised by junket organisations - a lovely word.

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Junket organisations require the permission of the Tasmanian Gaming Commission to come to Tasmania. In eight years as the chairman of the Gaming Commission I didn't sign off on one junket to Tasmania. We do not get whales in Tasmania other than the kind that occasionally swim around in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. It doesn't happen. No whales are going to fly past Crown. They are not going to fly past Barangaroo in Sydney when Crown gets it up. They are not going to fly past Macau or Manila or anywhere else where there is extremely large wealthy casinos and organisations designed to attract them. The only way whales or high rollers will ever come to Tasmania is David Walsh. That's it.

Is there ever going to be one in the north? Unless David Walsh wants to open a subsidiary venue - why would a high roller come to Tasmania? Have you seen the rooms at Crown? Have you seen the private gaming suites they are given, the jets that they are flown in on by Crown? It is just fantasy.

CHAIR - I was also surprised in that framework - I would have thought with national competition policy and the idea of a free market - the statement in the framework says, 'In the first instance, the opportunity to apply for such a licence should be afforded to Mr Walsh, given he first came up with the idea'. I am not sure how you feel about that. I would be interested to hear how you feel about that, the person who comes up with the idea is the person that is first offered the licence, regardless of whatever specs they put into it. Is that -

Mr HOULT - I think as long as the Tasmanian Parliament legislates it, the Tasmanian Parliament is sovereign, and they can say whatever they damn well like. ACCC would tend to shy away from that. You might have known recently that Victoria had given some infrastructure development to a company that came up with the idea not that long ago, and the ACC did not seem to be phased by that. It is a one-off thing and they do not - the ACCC does not tend to worry too much about one-off things. It is about the structure of things within the economy.

CHAIR - In framework B, hotels and club EGMs, the Government has no fixed view as to alternative structural options for the ownership of EGMs in hotels and clubs post-2023, but they have made a decision they will cap at 150 less. You rightly made the observation, well, what is 150, because most of those have not been taken up anyway? It is saying again they are going to be there in whatever guise regardless of the community conversation. We have clearly heard over the last two days groups saying the community does not want EGMs in pubs and clubs.

Mr HOULT - Absolutely. I think the Government position is that the status quo will remain, minus 150 machines. Ownership models aside, and that will be an argument held in Government with Treasury advisors and others saying, 'Do we want to go for the maximum return? Let us devise a model that gets us the maximum return, or do we want to take opportunities to embed harm minimisation into the process as well?'. Is there any chance the Government is going to say 'no' to EGMs in pubs and clubs? In my opinion, absolutely not, for the very reasons I said. One is that I suspect that no government of any persuasion wants to take it on as an issue. You are going to have an outcry from rural and regional Tasmania - 100-plus small businesses, or small and medium enterprises, are going to go broke. In the end, will the Government go down to a model that is individually owned? Personally, I think probably not, because imagine you are dealing with 100 of them, and every politician is going to have five pubs and clubs going broke at any one time in their own electorate. They probably wouldn't want that.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Peter, on the Australian Government's Department of Social Services website - where you are talking about online gambling, it says:

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The Commonwealth Government understands that most Australians gamble responsibly; however gambling is a major social problem for some people.

Digital technologies are rapidly changing Australia's gambling industry.

Online gambling is the fastest growing gambling segment, growing at 15% per annum, with over \$1.4 billion gambled online each year. Digital technology is also enabling illegal operators to reach our phones, our televisions, our home computers at any time of the day or night.

Australians are losing between \$64 million and \$400 million every year betting in illegal offshore sites, and this means tax revenue is also lost. In the online world, the proportion of problem gambling is three times higher than in other forms of gambling.

It goes on. Is that is particularly what you are saying in your - do you agree with that statement?

Mr HOULT - I think that is probably understating the issue, if anything. It does not mention the fact that a couple of major operators online have gone broke over the last few years and everybody has lost all the money that was in them, included in their accounts. The government has shown little or no interest, and I'm talking about governments - certainly the eight years I was there. The state and territory regulators have written on a number of occasions to the relevant federal minister to say they think they should set up Australian websites, because the game is lost. People are going to do this.

The Howard government was very close to setting up - and I think it was Federal, I 'm not sure - an Australian online casino-type gaming website. The arguments were exactly then as they are now. You can stop people getting sucked in by overseas operators you know nothing about and who care nothing about your wellbeing and harm maintenance. You can stop people sending their financial details off to servers in the Ukraine and Azerbaijan, you can stop people getting done when these people close down their operation and your account has suddenly disappeared, and you can get the revenue for Australia rather than it leaking to wherever it's going. At the last minute the Howard government decided not to go with that. No federal government since has seriously addressed this issue.

People say that people will still gamble offshore or overseas, of course they will, but you can disrupt that. There are technologies to disrupt access to those websites. You cannot stop it but you can disrupt it. If there were a functional Australian well run, well-regulated online gambling industry, why would people go offshore to risky, dodgy people anyway? You might say we're introducing another form of gambling. No, we're not the boat has gone, finish, forget it. You have your head stuck somewhere if you believe that it's not going to go on, then we should regulate it in Australia. The federal government should do it, but the federal governments have repeatedly run a mile from anything to do with proper regulation of any kind of gaming in this country, and they will continue to do so.

Mr ARMSTRONG - It goes on to give the government's response. It says in the online world, the proportion of problem gambling is three times higher than any other forms of gambling.

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Mr HOULT - I think they are probably right, but their evidence for that is very thin. I would like to see the evidence base they got that off, because I've never seen it expressed like that before.

CHAIR - Peter, is there anything else you would like to leave us with that we haven't covered?

Mr HOULT - I think we've covered it. I will leave you with the submission. Pardon my cynicism, but I've been a long time wandering around in this space.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.