

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPACTS OF GAMING MACHINES MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON MONDAY 15 APRIL 2002.

Mr BOB HOLDERNESS-RODDAM, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mrs Silvia Smith) - Welcome. Can I call you Bob?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - You certainly may.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for your submission. We have all read the submission and I will just open it up for you to speak to that submission. So far the members of the committee have intervened on a couple of occasions to ask questions and if that is all right with you, we will continue that process and hear what you have to say. So it is over to you.

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - I guess my submission really is a qualitative submission as opposed to the quantitative one which you will probably receive from places like TasCOSS and Anglicare who will clearly give you very detailed submissions with dates and stats. But I thought I ought to put this on the record because I think it is important for the committee to recognise the extent to which this situation affects people. These have only effected me minimally but in the first situation, as I say, I lent this character a couple of hundred dollars - I think \$150 the first time and then \$50 a few days later when he said he had run out of money and his car had broken down and he could not get to work. So I said, 'Okay, I will expect repayments when the dole comes in a couple of weeks', sort of thing. When the repayments did not materialise I phoned up and spoke to his wife and explained that I was phoning to ask where the money was and she said, 'As far as I know the car is quite okay and has been and did you know I have kicked him out because he is a chronic gambler?' So I thought goodbye to \$200 which it was, it was \$200; it was not going to break the bank. But to other people that could have been a lot of money and might have made the difference between whether they ate or their children ate on that week.

The second situation concerned a former son-in-law. He, his wife - my daughter - and their young child moved up to Canberra and the relationship turned bad as it were and the situation was that they had two houses, one down here and one in Canberra. So one received one house and one received the other and he sold the house up in Canberra and the contents. My granddaughter was spending time with him at the weekend that he was clearing out the contents and he started putting things in a pile that were hers and she said, 'Oh, daddy, you can't sell those. Those are mine'. She was only six at the time, and he said, 'Well, look, I'm sorry, I've got to have all the money. I've got debts and things.' Anyway, it transpired that that night he went and blew \$7 000 at a casino in Canberra, so whilst it may not be strictly related to gaming machines, I think it does come back to gaming machines. You recall in the early 1970s there was a very hard-fought referendum in Tasmania before they could introduce a casino - I think the result was something like 52 per cent to 48 per cent in favour of a casino - and a lot of people at that stage said this could be the start of bad things, foot in the door and that kind of thing.

Clearly since then we have had a massive increase in the opportunities for people to gamble, without any real attempt to assess the public views, and I think it has just gone overboard.

I am not anti-gambling. I have been known to put money on a horse, though not very much. I have been known to buy a Tatts ticket or a quickie lottery ticket occasionally, a scratchie, or to put some money on a roulette table at the casino, but I am lucky I do not let it control my life. But clearly there are people who, maybe for the same reason as some people become alcoholics or drug addicts, cannot control the thing, and I have also heard anecdotal evidence - in fact I think I have read it in a TasCOSS or Anglicare document - where people have actually been so desperate they do not have money to feed their kids, so they put their last \$10 on a lottery ticket or something in the hopes - I am probably getting off the subject.

CHAIR - So your experience with the gaming machine issue itself, people that you have talked about were not actually using gaming machines themselves?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - I am not sure about the fellow that borrowed money off me to pay for his car, but it is possible, but I think there is a broader issue than just the gaming machine per se in that it has sort of made gambling - I do not know, it has legitimised or it has certainly made it a lot easier for people to gamble. In the old days you had to go to the casino or a racetrack or the TAB, whereas now you can go to any pub, feed 20 cent coins into the thing or whatever you put into them - I do not honestly know what it costs - pull a lever and you can throw a small fortune away. I think it just too easy for people now.

CHAIR - You mention in your submission the serious social and economic effect on the community. Have you, anecdotally obviously, seen any other effects on, say, your local community that you think could be attributed to this gambling problem?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - I could not say in my local community, but clearly the reports that I have read that have been put out by Anglicare and other people indicate that there is a problem, but I could not say that I have personally observed it. On the other hand, you see people down and out. You do not sort of go up and say, 'Hey, why are you begging on the street?' or this kind of thing. Maybe they have drunk it or maybe they have gambled it or maybe it has been stolen. I think that is probably more for Anglicare and the Salvation Army and people to comment on.

CHAIR - But you believe that there is the potential for a problem in this area similar to, as you mentioned, alcohol and some other ones?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - Oh, yes. I think it is just as invidious as alcoholism. Again I am not against alcohol in reason. I think it is probably too easily available in the community in the sense that youngsters can obtain cans laced with spirits in sufficiently small quantities for them to be able to afford it, but sufficiently large quantities for them to become inebriated and commit vandalism.

CHAIR - Knowing the services that are in place to assist persons with alcohol problems, for example, have you any thoughts on what sort of appropriate programs or facilities could

be put into place to assist people like your friend and your son-in-law with gambling problems?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - Look, to be honest, I am a bit cynical about programs there to help people once they have got into problems. I personally feel that we have to seriously look at reducing the number and ease of ability to have access to gambling machines. I really think that is a real problem otherwise you're just putting on a bandaid. We've got a bleeding artery here, a spurting artery. You can't put a bandaid on it; you've got to do something more severe.

Mr SQUIBB - So in your former son-in-law's case was gambling a problem before the break-up?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - He had been a gambler and I have to be honest, he occasionally won sufficient money to help him. He built their house himself virtually single-handed and he certainly financed some of that through his gambling ability. Now that was presumably luck as much as judgment.

Mr SQUIBB - And that was gambling via gaming machines or other points?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - I think that was gambling at the casino down here. He'd go to the casino but I don't know whether it was on the gaming machines at the casino or in other parts of the casino.

Mr SQUIBB - I understand that when he was in Canberra - and you say in your submission it was a casino he would've gone to -

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - A casino, yes. But I don't know -

Mr SQUIBB - You don't know whether it was the machines or the tables?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - No, I didn't inquire. In fact I heard this back from my daughter he had that night gone to the casino and lost, I think it was \$7 000, it may have been only \$6 000 but whatever it was it was a fairly substantial amount.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Considering that gaming machines are here with us as part of an entertainment process in the community, if you could do three things to assist the percentage that do have problems in this arena what would those three things be?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - Considerably reduce the availability of gambling machines. I really think it's a bit like a cancer in society. Your first option really is to try and cut it out so it doesn't come back rather than giving medication and stuff which might control it for some people. The analogy may be a bit odd but I think you've got to be fairly drastic.

I think the Government has got to recognise that it and previous governments made mistakes when they permitted gambling to become so widespread. So that's the first thing but then obviously you've got to help people who've got the problems.

I'm not a sociologist, I have no medical qualifications and it's probably not appropriate for me to suggest what's appropriate there. I would suggest that maybe again Anglicare,

TasCOSS, the Salvation Army and others who've spent a lot of time, energy and resources in investigating these issues are the appropriate ones to speak to on that. I really came here just to tell you my personal story so you could get some idea of the breadth of it in the community.

CHAIR - Yes, but with that personal story, of course, we would perhaps get some ideas from you and I think this is what we're attempting to do here.

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - I'm afraid my main idea is to reduce the accessibility of these things.

Mr SQUIBB - By reducing the numbers per venue?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - By reducing numbers. I question whether they should be in pubs where people go to drink. I don't know what the situation is whether some people have too much to drink and then go and try their luck on the machines. I'm not a mind-reader but, again, there's possibly been some research done by someone on that.

I really think the main problem is that there's just too many of these machines and they're far too accessible to people who might have a problem.

CHAIR - We've had it suggested to us that the types of advertising that are around actually stimulate people to want to come and try the machines. Have you got an opinion on whether that might be the case?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - I don't know. I suppose it's -

CHAIR - Advertising sells basically, doesn't it.

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - That's right and people wouldn't bother advertising if it wasn't working for them. It's a bit like advertising cigarettes and grog. If you're in the market with a product you want to sell, you are going to look at the most effective way of doing it. I guess we cut out a lot of cigarette advertising. Yes, maybe.

CHAIR - I wonder if that's reduced the number of smokers though.

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - Well, no because I suspect peer group pressure has a lot to do with it. I think the statistics are that it tends to be more women that are smoking now, not so much young males. That is purely a vibe that I get. I am not quoting figures.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Hotels would tell us that they are no longer pubs where you go for a drink; they are places of entertainment. They have had to readjust what they facilitate because of drink-driving laws and so on where people do not tend to go to the pub as much.

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - Definitely. Yes.

Mrs SUE SMITH - In fact, these days there would be people who would go to a hotel for entertainment that may even be teetotallers.

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - For sure.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Thus they see gaming machines as a form of entertainment within their area to help them compete with other forms of entertainment.

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - I can quite understand that perspective. I think one of the things that we have to accept in society is that change is ongoing. It is a much faster rate of change these days than it used to be. I was reading somewhere the other day that in 1500 there were something like 30 printing presses in England and by 1600 it had become 100. We all know that things do not go that slowly these days.

We have seen deregulation of service stations over the last few years and I am certainly familiar with a number which have appeared to have closed, some of which have subsequently reopened under a different guise. It may just be that the hotels have to consider that if they cannot compete they may have to close. It might sound a bit drastic but I am sure there are hotels out there who have managed to reinvent themselves without resorting to the extensive use of gaming machines.

CHAIR - Hence the advent of the very plausible theme hotels. There are quite a few of those around, including English pubs.

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - I do not spend a lot of time in hotels. I have a family.

CHAIR - Would you like to round off your submission to us in any shape or form with a statement?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - I think my statement would be along the lines of: clearly there may be a lot of people affected by gambling who you would not know in the street if you passed them, probably from all walks of life. Although I suspect, clearly, Kerry Packer can afford to lose a few million dollars every now and then whereas if you are Joe Bloggs from Bridgewater you are probably losing the family food for the week or the fortnight or whatever. I think it has a more serious effect on the lower socioeconomic groups obviously. Perhaps they are the ones who, because of desperation, turn to it more. There are certainly examples that I have heard of people who have turned to gambling because they have felt that that was a possibility of getting some food into their family's mouths. Sadly, it does not work like that.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for giving us the anecdotal evidence that you have given us there. It is certainly something to take into consideration.

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - If it is one more drop in the bucket that you are going to end up with at the end of the inquiry -

CHAIR - A few more drops will make a full bucket, won't they?

Mr HOLDERNESS-RODDAM - Thank you very much.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.