

**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPACTS OF GAMING MACHINES MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON WEDNESDAY 17 APRIL 2002.**

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**Mr DAVID OWEN**, ACTING DIRECTOR, TasCOSS, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mrs Silvia Smith) - Welcome, David. Thank you for your submission. I presume you wish to talk to that submission and various members of the committee would like to ask you questions as we go through if that is all right with you as a process.

**Mr OWEN** - Thank you, Madam Chair, yes I would and thank you for your time. Can I start by offering the apologies of Lis de Vries, our executive director, who would normally be speaking on behalf of TasCOSS on this issue. Lis is swanning around the Northern Hemisphere on a Churchill Fellowship at the moment collecting information about employment options and we have great expectations of her on her return being able to make use of that information.

**CHAIR** - Very useful.

**Mr OWEN** - I am afraid you have the monkey rather than the organ grinder today so I will do my best.

**CHAIR** - I would not say that, David, knowing you as I do.

**Mr OWEN** - Thank you. Rather than repeat information that is already in the written submission, I would like to just make some brief comments that hopefully compliment that information, although of course I am happy to go back over the small amount of fine detail that is in the written submission should committee members wish. I would like to focus firstly on the first term of reference in terms of the social and economic impact of gaming and then spend a little bit of time if I may on the term of reference number five that relates to the undertakings given during the early days of the bill. But if I could start on the term of reference one. I know you are aware of the role of TasCOSS but can I, just for the record, state that our reason for being is to attempt to represent the interests of low-income households and other households who are structurally disadvantaged. That term that covers anything from location to disability, to any number of other structural features.

We are not a service-providing organisation so I am not here today to talk, as the previous witnesses were able to, about experiences of direct contact with people who are having problems with gambling. That is not to say we do not have direct contact but we would not claim to have expertise arising from large amounts of contact. What we do have is an overview of the range of community service organisations that in turn have contacts with this issue and/or that have an interest in related issues. As part of the council social service network across the country we have access to information about what is occurring in other States on these and related issues and are in a position we feel

to perform an overview of some of those issues. It was those two starting points that led us to make a submission to the committee on this issue.

As you are aware, TasCOSS has had a continuing interest in the role of gaming machines and gambling more generally and we would anticipate staying a public competitor on these issues for some time yet. We see it as quite central to the wellbeing of Tasmanians, especially at that low-income end of the spectrum. Can I indicate that our attempt to frame up the gambling and gaming machine issue leads us to focus on issues of low income and especially unemployment in this State, and if I may I just want to spend a couple of minutes perhaps seeming to go around the houses a bit, but I promise to get back to the terms of reference.

We have been attempting for some time now to make the point to the Tasmanian Government that we have in this State a rather different labour market than exists elsewhere in the Commonwealth, that we have a long-term unemployment context that needs to be foregrounded in a wide range of public policy discussions and decisions. And again I know you are aware of the figures but, again for the record, of our 20 000 unemployed persons in this State, 12 000 of them, 60 per cent now, have been unemployed for over a year. Of those, 8 000 for more than two years. That is quite different from other States. We are becoming experts in long-term unemployment, I am afraid, and I think we have become complacent about it. It has become too difficult for us. As TasCOSS we can understand that. We are short on positive suggestions as to what to do about it as well. It is easy for us to say the Government should do something about it at whatever level of government, and we will continue to do that, but we acknowledge it is one of those wicked problems.

The point we have been attempting to make to government, though, is that that creates potentially a series of what we are describing as unfunded liabilities into the future. That is to say that for every month or year that we leave that long-term unemployed sector unattended, we not only do not create jobs but do not inject those jobs into jobless households and we will bear the cost for future years, future generations. We as governments already have quite a lot of information that links long-term unemployment to a range of other social problems. This is not news any more. We have the research base not just in this country but elsewhere that gives us some confidence in saying that if we do not attend to long-term unemployed households, especially those households that have essentially a number of long-term unemployed members, perhaps both parents and teenage kids, we are going to pay for it through our correctional justice system, our drug and alcohol system, our mental health system, all State-funded for the most part, by the way, not Commonwealth. In other words, as a State government and as State taxpayers we are going to bear those costs. Moreover, other issues come into sharper focus as they impact on those households. Long-term unemployment is not just about having a low income, it is about running down the reserves that households have. It is about running down economic reserves, it is about running down psychological reserves and it is about running down social reserves, and our own work with long-term unemployed people, published most recently in our *Dead Man's Shoes* report that some of you will be aware of, focuses on what happens when those reserves run out, when people reach a point of despair.

One of the individuals that we spoke to made the point that unemployment would be fine if it was not for the poverty, the isolation and the despair. It is that context of despair

when people are giving up on hope in terms of more conventional ways out of their predicament that gambling comes into sharper focus. It is in that context that we are especially concerned about the impact of the availability of gambling generally and gaming machines specifically to those households where gambling is seen as one way out of the predicament, and where moreover any participation in gambling to the extent that it does not result in unexpected wins, unexpected from an aggregate perspective, will have a disproportionately large impact on those households. That is to say that small losses, however sporadic they might be, will have a very substantial impact on the viability of those households to continue with their rents, to continue with appropriate payments in other contexts, to feed their kids properly, to make it possible for those kids to participate fully in the schools, and you have already had access to Anglicare's information in that regard. So we're particularly concerned to make the point that in terms of that very Tasmanian sector of long-term unemployed households the impacts of gaming and gambling more generally are especially important.

We echo what's been said in other submissions in acknowledging that we still need more research. While there has been a number of studies - and I was pleased to have caught the end of the Salvation Army's testimony to you and the issues that were discussed there - we still don't really have a fine-grained understanding of how gambling is impacting on a wide range of households.

We still have a focus on what's called problem gambling with all the various definitions that that has for different groups in the community but not yet much of an understanding of how it's impacting across the board. But to the extent that we have information, it appears to be suggesting that its impact is disproportionately high at that low-income end of the spectrum for all of the reasons that I've mentioned in terms of the quite understandable despair that confronts households without work for long periods of time.

What we're saying, therefore, is that governments have to be especially careful with those aspects of public policy that compound the impacts of long-term unemployment whatever that might be and TasCOSS is making submissions to government on the areas of concessions and the disarray that our concession system is in but equally we feel that it's important to make the point about gaming machines because of that disproportional impact.

Can I turn briefly to term of reference four in terms of the broader role of gaming revenue in the State as one of the issues that was discussed in debate about the Gaming Control Bill.

We made the point in our submission that we don't believe that there was any understanding at that time of the likely increases in both gaming activity or the revenue that would flow, that the debate, especially in the second reading speech in the lower House, suggests that not a lot of thought had been given to that issue, that yes, it would be a welcome source of revenue but the projections at that stage, to the extent that there were projections, were not in line with what's happened since.

TasCOSS wants to make the point that in terms of the role of gaming machine revenue in the broader context of State government revenue it's easy to disregard it as a relatively small proportion of that overall revenue, especially in the current context where we are so dependent on Commonwealth sources of revenue.

We want to try and turn that argument around and make the point that for governments to be governments rather than simply managers within the parameters set by the Commonwealth it's especially important that the Tasmanian Government keep some control over its own taxation tools and levers, that it recognise the opportunities that are there and that it be responsible in every possible sense for the operation of those taxation measures. We see gaming revenue as one of those remaining areas of revenue that State governments generally have some control over.

What we know is that around the Commonwealth, indeed around the western world, there isn't much stomach for raising taxes or for running budget deficits. We will continue to argue to the Tasmanian Government probably until we are blue in the face that that's a shame, that with that long-term unemployment context and other social problems that face the State this is actually a time for some rather old-fashioned pump priming, that it's a time to look back at the days of Cosgrove, Reece and Neilsen and realise that those weren't necessarily bad governments and that they were indeed popular governments and that they found it necessary to from time to time raise taxes and run budget deficits.

However, we're not making much headway, it has to be said, in getting that argument across. Governments these days are given a tick of approval by ratings agencies and we understand how those kinds of things operate and we have the irony now that governments are given AAA ratings which would allow them to borrow at lower interest rates, except they won't use those borrowing capacities because they don't want to lose the ratings. That kind of a vicious cycle concerns us greatly.

What we are saying about gaming revenue is that it has become an increased tax without the formal decision being made but it has grown as a proportion of State-generated revenues. I think our submission suggests that this financial year it is up to about 13.3 per cent or something like that. We will wait to see what happens at the end of the financial year. We were a little surprised last year and, if you like, would not be surprised if we are surprised again. But of that order anyway, so that as a proportion of the State-generated revenues rather than the total revenues, that is to say of the revenues that the State Government has its hands on the lever of, it is of increasing importance.

The Salvation Army in its testimony earlier made the point that there is a direct parallel between individual addiction and government addiction. We have been trying to make that analogy as well. We believe the Tasmanian Government is in some form of denial with regard to that addiction. We are wanting them to take decisions about how much is enough in terms of the role of gaming revenue within the overall finances of the State. To tell us up front that okay they may not be concerned if it is 13.3 per cent, when will they be concerned? When will they put a stop to that increase? Because we are prepared to accept that it is likely to increase. Again, we have not been successful in eliciting a response on that issue. The response is generally about that broader picture rather than just the State-generated revenues. But we are concerned the Tasmanian Government, as I say, have as much control as possible over those State-generated revenues because it is very clear, especially after the recent Premiers' Conference and COAG meetings that it has relatively little control over what the Commonwealth is likely to do in terms of revenue. So to be a government it has to, as much as possible, keep control over those other revenue measures.

To that end, we are concerned about gaming revenue as a tax in itself but as an increasingly dominant component of the taxation picture. We are concerned about it as a tax in itself because essentially we see it as both inefficient and inequitable. It is inefficient in the sense that basically to raise a dollar of revenue a Tasmanian has to lose a dollar through the system. That is to say, the amount of revenue is roughly equivalent to the amount that each year Tasmania's gamblers lose through gaming machines, not wager, but lose. We know that the revenue is not set as a proportion of losses, that is a coincidence in a sense, that it is about turnover and so forth, but nevertheless, we have that rather stark equation that to make a dollar of revenue, a generally low-income Tasmanian has to lose it and if there are ways of raising revenue for State purposes, we would make the argument that there must be both more efficient and more equitable ways of doing it.

Again, the research base is not strong enough for us to be absolutely confident about this but the evidence that is available suggests that the tax is in a sense being levied, for the most part, on lower-income households, that we are not talking about high rollers coming in from Hong Kong to use gaming machines at Wrest Point, we are talking essentially about low and moderate-income households playing those machines and forgoing the revenue that turns up as tax for government use. To that end we see it as regressive tax, that if we are serious about equitable forms of taxation to raise that sort of revenue, there are other better ways of doing it. We are not suggesting that there should not be taxes on gaming. This is not an argument about reducing those tax levels. That would seem to us to benefit nobody. Our argument in our submission is to try to find ways within the agreements already set with the industry of winding back access to gaming machines. We make particular suggestions there about a moratorium on the future issue of machines but also if it is at all possible of not reissuing licences when they have not been relinquished from time to time. Our understanding, and it is a lay understanding, is that would not necessarily contravene the sorts of agreements in the deed that relates to this issue, and we hope we are right on that particular matter at least. So we are certainly not suggesting that there be some kind of an attempt to overturn the agreements that are already in place, simply that within those the State Government look to find ways of lessening the actual turnover and therefore the amount of revenue, and we point to what is happening in other States, most especially in New South Wales, as you are aware, where that point has been reached where the State Government recognises that it has to do something. We acknowledge that the point they reached is well in advance of where we are in Tasmania in terms of the hours of opening and so forth. But we would also make the point that, as a proportion of their State revenues, gaming machines revenues are smaller than they are in Tasmania.

So, that being the case, we think it is surely time for the Tasmanian Government to publicly indicate at what point it is going to call a stop to this, not simply to let the existing agreements running through to the middle of next year run their course and then see if something turns up. That is not government as far as we are concerned. That is not taking decisions on an important public policy issue.

**Mr SQUIBB** - The existing agreements also relate to expansion in the numbers rather than new premises.

**Mr OWEN** - Sorry, yes. We accept there are contractual understandings there and we are not seeking to overturn those, but I think it is appropriate for governments to signal their intent that at the end of that period they will take a particular stance, and that is what we are not seeing at the moment, and where we would hope that this select committee would be able to assist the Government in understanding the importance that it act like a government, not sit in the background accepting the revenues but not taking on a full responsibility for some of the outcomes there.

So in those two aspects of any taxation system, efficiency and equity, we feel that gaming fails the test, that it is not a good tax, and yet it is an increasingly important tax. For what it is worth, we have made suggestions to the Government about using things like stamp duties and land tax as potentially more equitable forms of taxation. It is not my intent to try to initiate a dialogue on those options, and I know it is beyond the brief of the committee, but all I am saying is that we are not having in this State a debate about those taxation options. Nobody talks about increasing taxes anymore, and yet we are increasing taxes, in the sense that revenue from gaming continues to increase, but it is happening without a decision and without a political accountability on the part of the Government saying, 'We intend to increase gaming revenue next year by  $x$  per cent'. Instead they are saying, 'We project that it will increase', as though it is sort of happening without any kind of government role in that. We are saying that they have to take some responsibility for that, and wherever possible find ways of reducing that reliance.

**Mr SQUIBB** - What about the argument that we hear quite often that it is a voluntary form of taxation?

**Mr OWEN** - Yes, and we accept that participation in gaming is voluntary for most people. The whole notion of addiction starts to make that notion of voluntarism a little cloudy, and I do not come here as an expert in addiction, simply to say that the organisations that are members of TasCOSS or that we work with in other contexts, such as the Salvation Army who spoke to you earlier, are of a mind that increasingly there are people for whom the notion of voluntary participation in that activity has become a bit meaningless. Again we take seriously their views on that, but we do not have any additional information to add for the committee's benefit on that. Can we just say, though, that the notion that gaming participation is a form of entertainment like any other form of entertainment concerns us. It is not the case that we seek to extract revenues from other forms of entertainment. There is something different about gaming that has led governments worldwide to realise that it is something that should be both regulated and perhaps taxed as a means of keeping some cap on that activity. I think within the notion that it is a taxable activity there is an acceptance that there is some qualitative difference between that activity and other forms of entertainment.

I have to confess that TasCOSS struggles with the notion about not wanting to restrict the rights of people to participate in activities like gaming and not wanting to in a patronising, benevolent despot way say, 'This is not good for you. Stop it immediately' and yet on the other hand to find ways of at least ensuring that people are genuinely informed about the activity that they're participating in.

I guess that goes to the issue of ensuring that the returns on participation and the actual chance levels that apply are made clear, that the relativities between gaming and other kinds of gambling in terms of those likely returns are abundantly clear and so on. But

we accept that even that is sort of tip-toeing around the issue as to what collective responsibility we take as a community to assist people not to engage in any activity that is potentially addictive and where through that addictive behaviour there may be deleterious impacts on households and most especially obviously on children in households. It is awkward I think for all of us and TasCOSS is in no different position in that regard.

We would love to have a light-touch government in terms of these kinds of issues and yet we are faced with increasing evidence that issues like gambling are having such an impact on households that some other kind of approach will be required.

We note, though we didn't mention it in the submission I believe, that the Commonwealth Government has funded in the last Federal budget a series of research projects looking at the links between problem gambling, again that phrase, and homelessness in the supported accommodation sector and some other areas that they fund. They too have been getting feedback, largely anecdotal, from funded organisations that in every area of social enterprise gambling and gaming are coming up as an issue, that people are queuing for supported accommodation where they once were not for the reason that they're simply unable to afford participation not simply in the private rental market perhaps even in public housing, having lost their money through gambling.

**CHAIR** - So is there a need for that national type of survey to be actually conducted on a State level?

**Mr OWEN** - I'm not sure of the details, Madam Chair, of what the Commonwealth are doing.

**CHAIR** - No.

**Mr OWEN** - We paid attention to it when it was announced last May but I have to say we haven't follow up as to what DEFACS are doing with that particular work and intend to do so now to find out where that research is up to. My guess is, as a former researcher, that it's a fairly slow process.

**CHAIR** - Added to that then, you've probably heard other people say that we should be doing some sort of research here in Tasmania, do you think that's appropriate at this stage or should we wait until the national research is done and let the problem go on for a bit longer or the perceived problem?

**Mr OWEN** - Again, declaring an interest as a former university researcher -

**CHAIR** - You might be somebody we could use.

**Mr OWEN** - who was also likely to say that we need more research I will still say that we need more research. This time I think with the TasCOSS hat on. Again, I don't think we have that generalised understanding of what gambling is doing in Tasmania.

Specifically while the DHHS studies - and the Anglicare study that has not been publicly released will no doubt provide information - do provide information of value, the DHHS studies at least are focusing on that problem gambling aspect of it. Again, we simply

don't know what's happening in the broader community. It would be so much easier from a public policy perspective if we were able to say with confidence that this is a low-income issue or this is generally across the spectrum, as my colleagues from the Salvation Army were saying. I don't know if they're right; I'm not able to add data to your picture in that regard. I do feel we need to have better data on that.

Having said that, I do want to see what's happening in those other surveys that the Commonwealth and other people are running. My understanding is that they're likely to be national in focus and while I don't want to encourage the parochialism that sometimes happens in Tasmania, you'd be surprised to hear -

**CHAIR** - I hadn't heard that.

**Mr OWEN** - There perhaps are arguments on this occasion for Tasmania's specific research that focuses on some of the issues that may not be as prevalent at least elsewhere. We are the least urbanised State. As I say, we have much higher levels of long-term unemployment than other States. We have lower, in general, levels of income than other States and in particular a much higher dependency on Commonwealth transfer payments, much higher than other States.

**CHAIR** - Yes, I think your paper comments on the fact that the Tasmanian average income is 25 per cent lower than national or roughly?

**Mr OWEN** - I'm not sure about that exact figure but it is consistently lower, not just in the national average but of any other State, and we're aware of why that's the case. We know it's about the level of unemployment - always a 2 per cent higher unemployment rate than the national average - and that seems to now be a fixture, we fear - again one that we've become complacent about. So that background of low income, lower wage structures, a different demographic structure as well, we acknowledge that some of that is an older population but we also make the point that simply having an older population is by no means an explanation of that generalised lower income level. So those factors in combination lead us to believe that probably Tasmania's specific research is warranted to see what impact it's having. But as to who should carry out the research and how it should mesh with the other research that's occurring nationally, we offer no particular comments at this stage.

They are the generalised points I wanted to make, Madam Chair. Obviously there are other issues that we've raised in the submission but again I didn't want to come here and simply repeat information that we'd already provided.

**CHAIR** - There was some very detailed information and I know Sue has some questions because she indicated earlier she was going to question TasCOSS. I think it was the lower funding in one particular year on the community service levy, wasn't it - it came up in the Salvation Army discussions?

**Mr OWEN** - Is it under term of reference four, Madam Chair?

**CHAIR** - I think it could be to do with term of reference four.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - I have found the answers to it.



**CHAIR** - That is all right then.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - The one question I would like to ask concerns the consultative committee that was set up by the minister - Responsible Gaming Consultative Committee - was TasCOSS a member of that committee at that time?

**Mr OWEN** - I believe it was but I would have to check that to confirm that. I know that our executive director has participated in a range of the committees that have occurred in recent years as part of our continuing involvement and my understanding is that she was a member of that committee.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - I found it a very good submission. At the end it put recommendations and I find it very good.

**CHAIR** - It was excellent.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - The Community Development Board was disbanded, and one of your recommendations is that it be reintroduced. At the moment it sits within the Health department. Where would you see that particular board sitting - an independent board, a commission under the Gaming Commission auspices?

**Mr OWEN** - I don't think there's so much a problem about which particular department it sits with. It's certainly not a criticism of the Department of Health and Human Services that the administration of the levy is their's rather than somebody else's. On the contrary, our relationship with that department is by and large a supportive and good one. The issue for us is that it be an active and meaningful process that is representative of the range of interests and can play a role of overseeing what happens with levy funds so that some of the imbalances that occurred in some years aren't allowed to occur.

There has been a continuing frustration even this year with expenditure from that levy with initial recommendations since overturned with a request for a different kind of a funding approach and it has led some of the participating community organisations, including ourselves, to throw our hands up in some level of despair about what's occurring there. We will continue to participate because it's an important source of funds that's going to important projects but we do believe that it requires a different kind of oversight with a broader range of people being able to make input to decisions.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - You don't have a particular problem with the transparency to the community of where this funding is coming from? There is a raft of sporting facilities, for instance, who have achieved funding under the sport and recreation area of it. The publicity does not appear to me to say this has come out of the community service levy that has been paid for by the hoteliers and clubs in the State. It tends to be a politician waving their hand and saying, 'The Government has made a contribution'.

**Mr OWEN** - That is true. We would prefer that transparency; we would prefer the transparency made it clear that it was paid for by the gamblers of Tasmania and forwarded via the hoteliers and so on. They are the collection agencies in that sense. As I say, it is the punters themselves who are in fact paying those dollars. Yes, I think especially in the contemporary times where people are talking about sponsorship of

important events and concerns about the source of sponsorship that there is probably an especially important role to be played for that kind of transparency and we would favour that. However, I believe that many, if not most, of the organisations that actually apply for funds are pretty aware of where the dollars are coming from. The issue is whether there might be a different mix of organisations that seek funds that come from the levy. If there was more information about its source, I am not sure if that would be the case. We have no problem though with sport and recreation organisations being funded through those dollars. Our concerns have been about particular mix and the departure from what had been the proposed mix of funding over three of the four years that are documented in that table at least. We understand that there has been an improvement in that regard and we would hope that the mix continue to be as was originally proposed.

I guess what we are trying to say though is that there needs to be a process that ensures that whatever kind of organisation, whether it is a charitable organisation or a sport and recreation organisation that receives funding, there is a clear link between the funding and means of addressing the underlying issues arising from gaming and gambling and it has not always been clear to us that that link is apparent. The funding of sport and recreation organisations on the basis that sport and recreation activities are of themselves healthy, generative, developmental is a difficult one to oppose. How you measure that up against some of the direct interventions that a Salvation Army might make or an Anglicare might make or some quite different sort of organisation at a local level that is seeking to foreground gambling and gaming within their other activities, that is when it becomes more difficult. We do not offer any constructive suggestions, I'm afraid; we are simply indicating a concern that in whatever category of funding an attempt be made to ensure that the dollars are used wherever possible to redress or to ameliorate some of the impacts of gambling on some households.

**CHAIR** - I would like to ask a question - and I do not know whether you are able to answer it, David, knowing that his has made this submission, but I guess you are aware of what's in it - you talk about the evidence that TasCOSS has discovered showing that young people are gambling at a rate never seen before in Tasmania. I just wonder if you would like to broaden on that statement and give us some detail of where that evidence came from. A lot of evidence points to the lower socioeconomic group and the unemployed and then other evidence points to the retired generation of a particular group. This is one that has not come up very much so could you broaden that statement?

**Mr OWEN** - What we were picking up from there was the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures on the use of gaming machines. That focused upon both ends of the age spectrum, that while there was a substantial activity right across the age spectrum, there appeared to be a particular loading in that 18 to 24, I forget what the actual category was -

**CHAIR** - Yes, 18 to 24.

**Mr OWEN** - That was of particular concern to us because part of the picture that we were attempting to convey in terms of long-term unemployment is an intergenerationalisation one and we continue to try to focus on those jobless households where it is very clear that there is a culture developing that is about not having hope of significant employment in those households and where that despair, or that lack of optimism at least, about employment appears to be crossing generational boundaries. And so it's of concern to us

if people in younger age groups, as the ABS figures seem to suggest, are spending more time, either more occasions or more hours in total, using gaming machines because we believe that those younger people are not yet able to take some of the decisions to make the balance in terms of the role of gaming machines in their lives versus other kinds of activities and are by definition on very low incomes if they are on Youth Allowance or if they are dependent on income from their families or something similar. We know that Youth Allowance and Austudy, the likely sources of income for people in that age group, are well and truly under any accepted poverty line, considerably less than the 25 per cent of average weekly earnings or average male weekly earnings that are regarded as an acceptable poverty line.

Our concerns are that to the extent that those ABS figures show a disproportionate number of younger people using the gaming machines then we need to pay particular attention to what's happening there. That again is a kind of a justification for further research. The ABS figures were indicative but not something that we could disaggregate to regions or that we could break further down by the income of those individuals. We sought that from the ABS but the data simply doesn't permit it. It would only be a different kind of a research approach based on rather different research questions that would allow us to lend into that sort of information

**CHAIR** - The other thing you did show concern about in the submission was the question of betting limits that had gone out on 1 January 1999 is the date here - 'The lifting of limits on betting was reviewed widely as a grab for cash by the State Government to increase gambling revenue' - and I guess I can see where you are coming from there. A limit of some sort should be reintroduced, is this where this is going to?

**Mr OWEN** - It is one of those means of winding back both the reliance on revenue from that aggregate perspective and the potential impact on the participants themselves. Again, I have already indicated our disquiet about the sort of big brother - thou shalt not bet more than this amount at a given point of time; this is bad for you - approach, but nevertheless we feel that a lower betting limit does provide some kind of a cap on what individuals are able to do within a particular period of time, that the passage of time will become more meaningful in that sense than it sometimes appears to in gaming machine venues because of the simple fact that they'll have to work harder, if you like, to gamble the same amount of money.

Our concern though is that it's ceased to be an issue, it's ceased to be a public policy issue. It's parallel to what I was saying before about revenue generally, that it's fallen off that radar screen that people talk about and we believe it should be back on the agenda for discussion by government as one of those policy levers in terms of having an impact on gambling and gaming. We know that in that sense there aren't equivalent limits that apply if you go to a race track or to the TOTE, that it is treating one form of gambling differently from others, but our concern in terms of that growth of revenue and the growth of the impacts is such that we would seek consideration of changing those betting limits as a means of winding back the process.

**CHAIR** - Given that we all understand that - I think the figure is 98 per cent of people who do participate in gambling are not in that small minority area of problem gamblers.

**Mr OWEN** - Yes, and TasCOSS accepts that the number of people who qualify for the existing definitions of problem gamblers is quite small.

**CHAIR** - I note your emphasis on 'existing'.

**Mr OWEN** - Again, we make the point that for low-income households you do not need to lose that much money that often for it to leave you precarious in terms of other basic material needs or the security of your accommodation or your capacity to participate as a full citizen, if you like, within your community. Again, our *Dead Man's Shoes* report is all about what happens to people on very low incomes as they withdraw, not just from communities but even from families, as those reserves run down. So the notion of a problem gambler being somebody who wagers or loses a large amount or who spends a huge amount of time at a gaming venue, those kinds of ways into the issue of gambling don't necessarily address what we are concerned about, which is that small changes in the circumstances of very low-income, long-term unemployed households have a substantial impact.

**CHAIR** - It becomes a big problem for them.

**Mr OWEN** - It does, one that we know is starting to overflow to our member agencies and organisations.

**CHAIR** - We have already heard information about that this morning and from other submissions that we have had as well.

Would you please pass our compliments to Lis for this very detailed submission, very succinct submission, because it was easily read, easily understood and the fact that there were recommendations at the end of each particular term of reference has certainly given us something to focus in on. For myself it has been very beneficial, but I did hear a comment from Sue or somebody on that same issue. We do thank you for that. We are sorry Lis is not here but you have done admirably in her stead and we will take into account everything that is in this submission for our report and discussions.

**Mr OWEN** - Thank you very much, I will pass that on to Lis. She is very cold in Nova Scotia at the moment and those comments will warm her heart at least.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, David.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**