

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

Mr NEIL WEETMAN, COUNSELLOR, RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA, **Ms SHERRY REES**, PROGRAM COORDINATOR, GAMBLING BETTING ADDICTION INC AND **Ms ANGELA LUTZ**, SENIOR COUNSELLOR, ANGLICARE TASMANIA BREAK EVEN GROUP, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mrs Silvia Smith) - Welcome. First cab off the rank so you've got us nice and fresh. The last part of the day we're not necessarily nice and fresh.

Mr SQUIBB - Speak for yourself.

CHAIR - I'm speaking collectively because I was very much watching what was happening yesterday. We were very tired by the end of the day, I can assure you.

Thank you very much for offering to make this submission to this committee and we look forward to hearing what you have to say because we have heard mention of Break Even quite a lot through the submissions so far so we are looking to hear what Break Even stands for and what your services are and I'm sure committee members will formulate some questions as we go through. So who's going to start the ball rolling?

Mr WEETMAN - Can we do this as a shared presentation?

CHAIR - Most definitely, yes.

Ms LUTZ - I'm representing Break Even Anglicare today.

CHAIR - Right.

Ms LUTZ - I'm a counsellor at Anglicare overseeing a variety of counselling for them and one is problem gaming counselling.

Over the last three years since I've been in this position we have seen a steady increase in client numbers.

CHAIR - Some of the figures that venues give us say that there is no increase and those with other interests in this issue. Have you got a breakdown of those figures that you can get to us at some stage just to prove these facts for us?

Ms LUTZ - Yes, I have.

CHAIR - Sorry to interrupted you.

Ms LUTZ - That's okay. I have some. Anyway I've got them; I can provide them.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms LUTZ - The major concern that came through counselling sessions for clients - there are social and economic impacts of gambling in Tasmania. Gambling in Australia is well documented in the Productivity Commission's report. I can confirm this, the effect I can see in the counselling; the effect on people and the fact that it's not just often one person who is affected, it's several people who are affected by the gambling. People struggle financially through this, relationships too; the whole gamut of it as we've documented and researched. So I can confirm that.

I want to highlight what the concerns are for our clients. Shall I do it at this stage?

CHAIR - Yes, that's fine because the first term of reference is the social and economic impact of gaming machines.

Ms LUTZ - I've summarised the pitfalls as my clients would describe them, as five A's. One is the accessibility. As you know, it is highlighted in the Productivity Commission's report that accessibility is one of the major contributing factors to the proliferation of gambling.

The other A would be the advertising, the way it's advertised. When you look at the Oasis advertisements you see people sitting around a table drinking beer and having a good time. The reality is different. When you have a look at the gaming venues people don't sit together around a table, it's people sitting alone in front of a gaming machine, staring at the gaming machine and not having a good time. That's the reality.

It's made attractive obviously through the advertising. It's particularly attractive for people who can't afford dearer entertainment. The other A is affordability. That's a combination of these points.

Anyone can go. It's accessible for anyone. It's affordable, it's attractive, it's everywhere it's easily accessible, and you can get a cup of tea or coffee for free or often people are lured into the venues because they offer cheap meals. 'I might spend only a few dollars but I might come out with a few thousand dollars.' So it is very attractive and especially for middle-aged women, for example, or for single mothers who just want a break, some time out. To people who are vulnerable because they have to deal with stresses in their lives or problems in their lives or time out from kids or who are feeling lonely and isolated or have financial struggles, it is a very attractive venue to be there. I think, as I said, I can summarise as the five A's: the accessibility, the advertising, it is affordable, it is attractive, it is accessible for everyone. These are the themes that come through in my counselling sessions. People, in order to get to me, have to go past or drive past these three venues to get there.

CHAIR - How do they get to your service? You are with Anglicare?

Ms LUTZ - Anglicare, yes. How do they know about it?

CHAIR - Are they referred? Do they know about you?

Ms LUTZ - They are referred, yes. Break Even services are advertised in the community through brochures. Yes, Anglicare is a well-established community agency. People know about us. We have our own advertising material as well.

CHAIR - Do they come to you specifically because they have a gambling problem or they come to you initially because they are having problems with finance for feeding their families or finance to pay their rent and you find out the gambling is there?

Ms LUTZ - We provide several counselling services. Since our Break Even problem gambling service is well established people come straight through that service. But people might come through the financial counselling service or family relationship counselling. So I mean, people might come to us because they have a relationship conflict and we might find later there is a gambling problem that is the cause of the relationship problem.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Are people ever referred to you through hotels or casinos management? I notice in this Break Even review of fourteen months from 1997 to 1998 there is a split-up of different sources. I am looking to see whether or not our hotels and casinos have any input into these particular programs that you have.

Mr WEETMAN - Are you addressing that to all of us, Sue?

Mrs SUE SMITH - Yes, whoever likes to respond.

Ms REES - GABA has a few phone calls from venue staff. Sometimes it is a staff member of the venue who phones them and wishes to make either some initial contact on behalf of the client or perhaps to confirm that we are available to assist the person who has identified to the staff that they have a gambling problem. It does not happen very often but it does happen.

Mr WEETMAN - Likewise, at Relationships Australia, Break Even we do have some clients who are referred by the venue staff, but it is a minority. It is a small number.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Queensland Hoteliers Association have a protocol whereby a staff member in a hotel identifies a person and they refer it to the senior management who then perhaps bring to their attention that you may have a problem, take them into the office, take them through a self-exclusion process, make the initial contact if necessary and then somebody comes immediately while the problem is there in their mind to do something about it. You do not see that sort of thing happening in a major way with the hotels?

Ms LUTZ - If there is a breach of a self-exclusion they, hoteliers or staff might ring us up but in general, no we do not get them.

Mr REES - No, we do not receive it in that way. I think one of the problems there is that it is very difficult to identify just whether somebody has a gambling problem or not unless they speak on their own behalf and say, look I am having a problem here.

Mrs SUE SMITH - So if I am at the casino at 2 a.m. and I have just lost \$4 000 and I am distraught and it is picked up by the management and somebody gives me a leaflet or I

find one in the toilets that tells me I can make some contact and I dial that number, what happens from there?

Mr REES - It depends what number you dial. But if it is the gambling help line Tasmanian number, you should receive a professional person at the other end.

Mrs SUE SMITH - That assistance is telephone assistance only at that time?

Ms LUTZ - Yes, crisis counselling and referral.

CHAIR - And referral?

Ms LUTZ - Yes.

Mrs SUE SMITH - So there is no capacity in the services for somebody to come and deal with that at that particular time?

Mr REES - No.

Mr WEETMAN - After hours, no there is no after hours service.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Because it is all anecdotal, do you believe that perhaps, or has anyone done any figures about those who ring that 24-hour help line that may be 80 per cent and only 60 per cent follow on. Are there any figures done in that particular field?

Mr WEETMAN - You need to speak to the help line people about that.

Mr SQUIBB - Is that G-Line?

Ms REES - No, McCess and Bock. G-Line does not provide that service to Tasmania any longer, and has not done for a couple of years.

Mr SQUIBB - Oh, right. It was referred to in that report that Sue referred to.

CHAIR - It is an 1800 number, isn't it, now?

Mrs SUE SMITH - Yes. It says 'Gambling Helpline Tasmania' at the top of it, so if you pick something up that is the first one you get to, that is perhaps the one you ring, right?

Ms LUTZ - And often referrals are made to us. Maybe a quarter come through from them. It varies.

Mr WEETMAN - It would probably be less than that for our service.

Mrs SUE SMITH - I asked the question because it has been put to me that when I initially lose my finances I am distraught and I may then be more accommodating to some assistance, but when I have gone home with an appointment on Monday morning and I have had Sunday to think about it, the disaster is either much worse the next day because the family has walked out or I think I can fix this by going back to the bank and talking

to my bank manager on Monday morning. That is the issue I am trying to come to the crux of within our services.

Ms REES - I believe that the second scenario is more likely to be the case, because particularly if they have phoned the Gambling Helpline Tasmania they have all received some immediate assistance, whether it is referral or some direct counselling, depending on their situation at the time. But I find that the crisis passes and it is not so bad 24 hours later or 48 hours later, especially if you still have your family around, and especially if you are able to get a cover-up or recoup some of the losses that you have had.

Mrs SUE SMITH - If there were more finances through the community support levy or something like that to your organisations, do you have the capacity to provide that 24-hour after-hours cover if necessary?

Mr WEETMAN - We could do.

Ms LUTZ - Or something like that agency could be -

Ms REES - An on-call agency perhaps.

Ms LUTZ - Yes. And that is the other issue. The funding is there and I am sure Anglicare raised it yesterday in their own presentation that there are funds sitting in the community support levy and they are not utilised, and they could be utilised for emergency services, for example, like the Salvation Army, Benevolent Society, because many people who are in financial dire straits have a gambling problem. And maybe a service like Lifeline who provide telephone counselling anyway could be funded to provide this out-of-hours service, yes.

CHAIR - You said earlier that your services have increased over the last three years. Do you see that stopping and levelling out, or are you at the limit of what the services are that you can provide and you need more?

Ms LUTZ - We are already over the threshold.

CHAIR - You are over the threshold now?

Ms LUTZ - Yes.

Mr SQUIBB - Is there any reason why it has increased in the last three years?

Ms LUTZ - I think it is because it is a well-established service. People know about it now, so more people come through, you know, but we see the tip of the iceberg. There are still people who do not come to counselling. Not everyone -

Mr SQUIBB - So the increase, in your opinion, is mainly as a result of a greater awareness of your service rather than an increase in the problem?

Ms LUTZ - I do not know, but it could be one of the reasons.

Ms REES - It would be nice to think that was the reason.

Mr SQUIBB - Have all the agencies experienced the increase in the last three years?

Ms REES - Yes, GABA has. Our statistics show that there has been an increase in the last three years, but we provide a different service, as well.

Ms LUTZ - Since the inception of the Break Even service, the service has only been in existence since 1997.

Ms REES - Collectively, yes.

Mr SQUIBB - Nearly five years, yes.

Ms LUTZ - I have been senior counsellor on the program for three years.

CHAIR - Only for three years, okay. It would be interesting to have a look at the figures that I asked of you to see from when Break Even began in 1997 what the trend has actually been, whether it has been a steady growth.

Ms LUTZ - It has been a steady growth, I can assure you on that.

Mr WEETMAN - So to be clear about what you are asking, what was the growth in, there may be growth in -

CHAIR - Need for services and need for services because of gambling problems.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes.

CHAIR - That is the trend I am looking for.

Mr WEETMAN - If that is what you are asking about, I think the answer is very muddy indeed. We just do not know what the real need for service is. We have some grip on how many people are accessing the services, but you have to do a bit of speculation, I think, because there is no -

CHAIR - You don't keep any internal data to note on people's files and then do a cumulative list of how many people are accessing these services because of a gambling problem?

Mr WEETMAN - Oh yes -

CHAIR - You've got that?

Mr WEETMAN - we know quite well what the stats are for people actually walking through the door and getting help. What we don't know is what's the potential pool out there who do need help but aren't accessing help.

CHAIR - That's a very much an unknown figure.

Mr WEETMAN - We can only surmise about that and our guesses are that as participation in this form of gambling increases, which is demonstrated by increasing turnover figures, the level of problematic use will increase accordingly. That's only a guess.

CHAIR - So you'd be receptive to the idea that's been put forward by many people so far in these hearings that there needs to be very much an in-depth study done of the social and economic impact.

Mr WEETMAN - I think one of the most credible studies done was done by the Productivity Commission in 1999 and that was a multilayered research project which established a prevalence rate of 2.3 per cent for Australia as a whole. The rate for Tasmania was much less because Tassie had only had poker machines in the hotels and clubs for eighteen months at that stage -

CHAIR - That's right.

Mr WEETMAN - so it was still at the bottom of the graph.

CHAIR - Yes, that's correct.

Mr WEETMAN - But the trend line has been a very steep increase in participation activity in the gambling EGM sector in every State since it's been produced. It doubled in 10 years in fact -

CHAIR - And other States are recognising that and are now doing things about it.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes.

Ms LUTZ - Compared to other programs, they haven't the same experience with the other counselling programs; there hasn't been that steady increase. They're all in demand but -

Ms REES - It's a bit confusing when we talk about perhaps the percentage of people that actually have a gambling problem because I'm not sure whether they are being gauged by the severity of the problems that they are experiencing and whether that in itself makes that particular group of people a minority. If you use the term 'problem gambler' I think that you're encompassing a much wider number of the community.

CHAIR - And, of course, the question is what is the absolute definition of a problem gambler.

Ms REES -That's right. We say that if it affecting you in any way it is a problem.

CHAIR - Yes, that's the general consensus.

Ms REES -There are a large number of people out there that would be able to relate to that, not just the gambler. There's five to ten others that would be affected as well.

CHAIR - Absolutely, significant others; yes most definitely.

Mr WEETMAN - I would be concerned that you don't come away from this with a belief that it's like how long is a piece of string because there are international assessment instruments used; we talk about the Southoaks Gambling Screen in particular. It's not perfect but nothing's perfect but then it is some sort of an international standard and that's the one that's being used in Australia and it gives some sort of relevance to the prevalence rate and severity rates in other areas.

CHAIR - We had a good presentation yesterday from the Benevolent Society who has done a study, albeit a very small one, but it gives a significant picture of what is the potential out there so hence cited the need for a bigger study, a more in-depth study.

Sorry, Angela, I interrupted you there. Did you have any more or will we move over to Sherry?

Ms LUTZ - You can move on to Sherry.

CHAIR - And you're from GABA, is that correct?

Ms REES -Yes.

CHAIR - I'd like to know a bit about GABA.

Ms REES -Right, okay. Geoff's actually been to a meeting.

CHAIR - Okay.

Mr SQUIBB - You've got a good memory. We'd better explain that.

Laughter.

CHAIR - I wasn't going to inquire.

Mrs SUE SMITH - We've seen him in action. I'm pleased to see Geoffrey that you went along to a meeting.

Mr SQUIBB - I went to a meeting before that occasion.

Ms REES - Geoff was gaining some first-hand experience in seeing the effects of problem gambling on people, which was very much appreciated by the members.

CHAIR - We must talk to Geoffrey about he learned there.

Mr SQUIBB - That was a couple of years ago, wasn't it?

Ms REES -Yes - about three?

Mr SQUIBB - It would be at least.

CHAIR - We'll get him to explain later.

So Sherry if you'd like to give us your presentation.

Ms REES - GABA was started by people who had a gambling problem because they found that there weren't services provided in the community that were able to relate to their particular need - and it has grown. It started off in people's lounge rooms.

CHAIR - Yes, as many of these things do.

Ms REES - Yes. It has grown over the period of time of course and now we are funded by the community support levy. We have a mixture of professional people in GABA as well as the problem gambler or the person who is affected by gambling. So we have a real mixture there. It is still a small organisation and our primary role is to provide group support meetings. We have noticed in terms of the immediate effects that the number of people that are presenting to the group support meetings have been affected by the poker machines, by the electronic gaming machines, not just in the casino but also from the hotel perspective and again we put that back to accessibility. A lot of people would, on a social level, go to the casinos perhaps a few times a year but it would be a significant occasion for them. That might be a little bit different for the people who lived in Launceston and Hobart within the regions where it was -

CHAIR - A closer area.

Ms REES - Yes, that is right. For people who lived outside of those regions it was quite a big thing, a social thing. But with the introduction of the machines into the hotels, that became much more accessible to everybody and I think also it reached a new market level. All of a sudden, instead of it being just perhaps the race track that was available and that was predominantly a male orientated activity, the poker machines are promoted as being in a safe environment, socially acceptable, that you can go in there alone. Particularly for the casino the atmosphere created there is that there is the security there; you are safe. But also the marketing has changed in terms of the hotels because it is seen or promoted as a form of entertainment and it is okay to go there. But the people who are presenting at the meetings do seem to be more females that have a gambling problem. Not so much the older male or the middle-aged male but the younger male because I guess that is just part of what they are being introduced to as they are getting out into the socialising and so forth.

It is particularly important to recognise that females feel far more comfortable going to a hotel today than they have ever done and it is very easy just to slip into the gaming area - you are safe. One would hope that it was monitored and regulated so that there is that feeling of being safe there. You are not really checked on a great deal and you can slip in and slip out as you feel like it.

CHAIR - How do you make that comment that you can slip in and slip out?

Ms REES - Because the female problem gamblers tell me that. They can slip in and slip out without being identified. There are a lot of people who do not feel comfortable going into a hotel but if they can slip in and slip out without really being detected -

Mr SQUIBB - Is this in the larger urban areas as well as smaller country areas?

Ms REES - Yes.

Mr SQUIBB - Because we have heard from some of the smaller areas where they are obviously better known in the general community that is a problem and a lot of them revert to fire escapes and rear entrances. Have you struck that?

Ms REES - No, I have not.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Or gambling in an adjoining town rather than their local area?

Ms REES - Yes, absolutely; they travel around. That becomes really evident when people wish to self-exclude because they are not just doing it from their local area, they are having to do it from a wider region as well because they can just access the machine so easily and do. They know their limits. I guess that is part of the problem, accessibility, whereas originally it used to be in one or two places but now it is everywhere, and it is just not a problem.

CHAIR - And access wherever they like, almost.

Ms REES - Yes, and people do tell me that they can slip in and slip out, because the person that may be having to monitor the restricted gambling area is not standing there as a full-time observer, they are busy doing other things, and you can slip in and slip out, and that is one of the things that makes it attractive.

Mr SQUIBB - What about Internet? Do you have many -

Ms REES - No.

Mr SQUIBB - A little bit more sophisticated, or even though they can access it -

Ms REES - Affordability, I would put it down to.

Ms LUTZ - Yes.

Mrs SUE SMITH - You made the comment, Sherry, that you are funded from the levy. Is that your total funding?

Ms REES - Yes, it is.

Mrs SUE SMITH - You have also made the comment that the numbers are growing, and yet we see in 1999-2000 that Break Even services amounted to \$683 704 of the levy, and yet in 2000-2001 it went down to \$571 000, so you have \$112 000 less in your budget, according to the Tasmanian Gaming Commission annual reports, the following year. Can you give us some idea of the process you use to access this community levy, and a reason, if you have one, as to why you lost that \$112 000 when your clientele is growing?

Ms REES - No. Our accountant would need to be here. I think in our submission at one stage we were asked to speculate on perhaps the growth of problem gamblers that might make contact with us. As we have said previously, that is very, very difficult to do. I do

not really have an answer to that, except there was a period where the contract expired and there was an interim period. Perhaps that had some effect on it.

Mrs SUE SMITH - We will ask the department that hands out the money.

Ms REES - Yes.

Mrs SUE SMITH - I just find it interesting that your clientele is growing. There can be no provision of after-hours service because of finances, and yet your finances from the community support levy have decreased when you follow the charts.

Ms REES - Yes. Just off the top of my head, I would not have thought that they had, actually.

Mr SQUIBB - Finances had reduced?

Ms REES - Had not reduced.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Well, we will query the department.

Mr SQUIBB - Do you know how it is received? Is it received in advance? Is it received on claim, or monthly?

Ms REES - Quarterly.

Mr SQUIBB - In advance?

Ms REES - In advance. Well, we have experienced some difficulty in receiving it timely, but that has been corrected. It always did arrive, but not necessarily at the beginning of a quarter, whereas now it does.

Mr SQUIBB - And that may well have been a changeover of financial years, one coming later or something. We do not know but we will ask them.

Ms REES - But we are now receiving it within the first week of the quarter. Are we still on the first point?

CHAIR - I think that is where you were, yes.

Ms REES - Do you want me to continue on from there, or just stick with that?

CHAIR - If you have any more to say on that one.

Ms REES - I think the advertising has been a particular issue in terms of the expansion of the poker machines and accessibility to the wider community, and I do actually take that up in 'other matters incidental'.

CHAIR - Okay then. Perhaps we will offer Nick an opportunity to have some input here. We have another half an hour. Relationships Australia you are from, aren't you?

Mr WEETMAN - That is right, yes. I am the acting coordinator of the Break Even program in Relationships Australia (Tasmania). Relationships Australia tendered for a Break Even service, Break Even being a sort of an umbrella or brand name in most areas of Australia for the problem gambling services, and from 1997 commenced that service. I do not know what the staff level was originally, but it is about three or four full-time equivalents at the moment. Our actual demand for client services has gone up and down. I cannot say that it has been a consistent rise. At times it has risen and at other times it has fallen. I think, however, it would be pretty risky to draw conclusions about the prevalence of problem gambling in the community from any figures that we might produce about how many people walk through the door because there are many intervening factors there. One of those I would like to address in detail a bit further on.

So the Break Even services were established because it was foreseen that there would be big problems flowing from the widespread introduction of poker machines into hotels and clubs. It was a predictable impact on the community. That is why the services were established in that way in 1997 here and in other States. The Productivity Commission recognised that there was a dearth of good information. That is why they undertook the research that they did in 1999 to try to settle a few questions. They found that impacts on individuals and families included things like destitution, homelessness, mental illness, bankruptcy, criminality, domestic violence, family breakdown, child abuse, unemployment, suicide, among other things. We see all those things in the case work that we do. There is nothing different about Tasmania.

That is the personal and family impacts. There is also I think impacts on the wider community. I think Tasmania is part of a trend to increase in participation in machine gambling. It started late in 1997 but I do not see any reason why it should not be rising at a similar rate to any other State. I do not think Tasmanians are different Australians from other Australians, quite frankly.

Laughter.

CHAIR - Some people would say otherwise.

Mr WEETMAN - So I think that just on the basis of that increase that we see in Australia there will be increasing burdens on social resources such as policing, courts, welfare services, legal services and health services. Our grip from a casework point of view on this is that I prepare letters for the court for the clients who have to go to court and I direct people to their GP because their depression or anxiety is so high. Legal services, I refer people to Hobart Community Legal Service because the gambling problem is like, once it reaches a certain level of severity, then it has a whole lot of ramifications in other areas. That, I think, is a tax on those community resources that was not there before 1997. It looks like it is going to be increasing.

CHAIR - This is all anecdotal, isn't it? We do not have the statistics on all this and that I think is an important link that is missing, would you think.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes, we do not have the stats for Tasmania. I guess we are making the assumption that Tasmania is no different to other States and that the work the Productivity Commission has done was going to apply to Tasmania unless somebody can produce some evidence to the contrary. That means also that the prevalence rate is likely

to rise to similar rates as similar States, unless somebody can produce some very convincing evidence to the contrary. There has been Morgan telephone research which is used fairly uncritically to suggest that the prevalence rate here or the problem here is not very severe. I say you are not comparing apples with apples because that telephone research is very flawed. The flaws are well known and well understood and if you are looking at prevalence rates you really do need to repeat the Productivity Commission's multi approach to research the prevalence. So in terms of somebody saying the prevalence rate of problem gambling in Tasmania is x I would say, how do you know? Because I do not think anything has been done yet to really establish it with any degree of confidence.

The community as a whole is also affected by less financial support for charities, less involvement in other community activities because of that diversion of money, less support for local small business for the same reason, diversion of spending. That diversion of spending is well documented by the Productivity Commission as well.

If I can move on to the role of the Tasmanian Gaming Commission, I'm just concerned there - I should Relationships Australia is concerned - that while the TGC is very good at consulting various sectors, working in collaboration with the industry, with Break Even I still think maybe there is a question over to what extent it can provide independent leadership and a public advocacy.

Ms LUTZ - Yes, Anglicare shares that concern as well.

CHAIR - And your reasons for that concern, would you like to put them on the record?

Mr WEETMAN - I think it would need to be responsive to more sectors of interest more effectively to be able to be seen to be independent of any particular sector interest or influence.

CHAIR - Independent from government arms or government, you're saying?

Mr WEETMAN - Government, industry or even Break Even.

CHAIR - And even Break Even?

Mr WEETMAN - Yes.

Mr SQUIBB - Industry is precluded really by the wording of the act. If anybody's been associated with -

CHAIR - Yes, they are precluded.

Mr WEETMAN - I raise the question: is that something that needs to be looked at?

The other thing which is of major concern, and I've put this under term of reference 4, is the role and application of the community support levy. The community support levy is discharging its responsibilities apparently quite well in certain areas. The levy, however, has a primary role in terms of community education. Community education is largely

taken on by CSL with Break Even agencies doing a little bit of community education. CSL is supposed to take the running on that.

CSL is in the process of evolving some sort of overall strategic direction or policy document and they are taking a public health approach and I think that's laudable. The Productivity Commission would say that's the way to go because that potentially offers the best approach to minimising gambling-related harm. But there doesn't seem to be any formal external process of review. What is CSL doing in this area? If there is no formal review or evaluation of what they're doing, how can anybody know what they're doing is effective?

You can raise that question in the context of going out and talking to professional groups in the community, as I have done. The first question I put is how many people have heard of Break Even service? Maybe one or two out of ten at the most. It suggests to me that Break Even services have a very low profile in the community. I'm talking about community nurses and mental health workers.

CHAIR - Right, okay.

Mr WEETMAN - If these people don't know, what's the level of awareness in the broad community? We've got some little bit of evidence for that concern in that in September last year CSL did a statewide distribution of community education brochures and posters and things. There's no notice of change to the gambling help line statistics.

CHAIR - That was the pamphlet in the letterbox et cetera?

Mr WEETMAN - Pamphlets into letterboxes and I don't know how many tens of thousands would have gone out. There was no noticeable blip as a response to that and that raised serious questions for me about what have they done in terms of looking at what's the best practice in reaching people with this sort of problem. Where is it grounded, this community education strategy? It does not seem to be working.

Mr SQUIBB - Could it also have been that the problem is not as great as perhaps we think it is?

Mr WEETMAN - Well, we do not know. Once again we get back to that earlier question. We just do not know.

Mr SQUIBB - If a brochure went to every household -

Mr WEETMAN - Yes.

Mr SQUIBB - I cannot think of any more effective way of getting the message across. Well, getting the message out there. I do not know about getting it across, but certainly getting it out there.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes. What I would say is that best practice in the area of things like this is often not what you think it is, and while the first thing that people think of when they want to promote something or market something is to just print up a brochure and give it

around, we all know that our brochure stands in our various agencies get very dusty. People just do not bother to look at the blooming things.

Ms LUTZ - No. It has to be relevant at the time. We all get lots of junk mail, and if it is not relevant to us at the time, if you are not ready to do something about this or if you do not have the issue you chuck it out with the rest of the junk mail. It has to be relevant really.

Mr WEETMAN - This is where I would say it is really important that a community education strategy, to be effective, has to work within some sort of strategic framework which also has to be located in broader State development initiatives. Tasmania Together does set a benchmark for the reduction of gambling-related harm. I do not know what they base that on, whether it was some figure they plucked out of the air, but it is something like a 50 per cent reduction of gambling rate of harm by 2020. I would say if you actually do not have some sort of detailed strategy and benchmarks to actually look at progress, you could do a hell of a lot of harm in 20 years, gambling-related harm, and then what happens? I think it is better to look at best practice now and look at it maybe from the health promotion point of view and say, 'How about if we do some basic research about what modalities of marketing for these services is going to be most effective?' It could be that brochures are a complete waste of time and money. Maybe radio advertising is better. Maybe TV ads are better. Maybe fridge magnets are better.

CHAIR - Yes, well, the appearance of no strategy is your concern.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes. Well, there is an evolving strategy, but how well researched is it and is it defensible in terms of the existing knowledge about attacking social problems, social health issues.

Mr SQUIBB - You would obviously be aware of programs that are in place in other States.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes. In South Australia, in Victoria, in New South Wales, conferences that I have been to show a range of different approaches; quite substantial TV advertising and things like that.

Mr SQUIBB - From your observations, are there any programs or is there any one particular program that to you appears to be working?

Mr WEETMAN - I think it needs time, and while at a conference you might see a fantastic video clip for an ad, I think it is going to take time to decide, a bit of longitudinal research, to decide is that actually reaching the people and actually convincing them they need to go and get help.

Ms REES - One of the lessons that we have learned, and it might have been from South Australia, is that you need to be very careful about the message that you are sending even from a visual point of view -

Mr WEETMAN - Thanks for bringing that up.

Ms REES - I think one of the examples was using a clown mime and people were highly offended, because they related 'Do you think as problem gamblers we are nothing but

clowns?' So whilst it was certainly not meant to be presented as that, it did not go across right. They are very sensitive.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr WEETMAN - From my own practical experience - and I have worked in the field for about seven years, most of that time in South Australia - about 90 per cent of the referrals that I got in my previous position were from fridge magnets, so why would you put \$20 000 into leaflets when you could put the same amount into fridge magnets and have a five or ten-year effectiveness in people coming in and getting help?

CHAIR - I am not too sure whether it is New South Wales or Queensland that have a message on the machine itself of where they can get services.

Mr SQUIBB - I think it was Perth.

CHAIR - Perth, was it. Right, okay.

Mrs SUE SMITH - In New South Wales sectors of the gaming machine operators actually facilitate some advice to their clientele, so they have taken a proactive approach, bet-safe programs, that they assist financially into the schools with an education program as well. Would you see that it perhaps is appropriate that organisations like yourself and the Australian Hotels Associations et cetera should be sitting down and formulating a protocol that assists to make this work without strict regulation or legislation which is always the argument, that we are over-regulated. and that if we can jointly partnership and help ourselves we should be able to circumvent some of that?

Ms REES - Do you mean within the schools education 0

Mrs SUE SMITH - A protocol that brings your hoteliers, your casinos, your practitioners with problem gamblers in the field together around a table to formulate a plan where you all help the person with the problem, that should assist both sides of the industry, if I can call it an industry.

Ms LUTZ - We are going to have a meeting on Friday.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes.

Ms REES - That is right, so everybody is taking steps towards that.

Mr WEETMAN - I think we would all like to see less harm from problem gambling, every sector. It is a matter of how we go about that and it is also a matter of recognising that there may be opposing interests involved. For our part, as a service we would like to work ourselves out of a job. We would like to work towards zero harm from gambling. From the industry's point of view, they own 42 per cent of their profits in the gaming machine area from problematic use. I rest my case.

Mr SQUIBB - But that has to be a worry to them though.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes, and I am sure that they would like to reduce that somewhat. How much they would like to reduce it I am not sure.

Mr SQUIBB - Sooner or later that problem gambler is not going to be a client.

Mr WEETMAN - No, but people are becoming problem gamblers every day; people are growing into it. There is advertising that is being done heavily. It is a bit like smoking. The smoking industry can afford to lose so many thousand or tens of thousands to lung cancer every year because they are targeting young people who are coming in. That sounds a bit cynical, I know, but I suppose what I -

Mr SQUIBB - I would not have thought it was in the industry's best interests to have any problem gamblers either.

Mr WEETMAN - I would say it is earning a lot of money for the industry and when we talk about gaming machines, they are machines which have a built-in bias towards the venue, otherwise the venue would not be making any profit from them.

Ms REES - Yes, but I think the other point in that, Geoff, is that the casinos and the hotels have been very proactive in developing, for instance, a new self-exclusion deed to reflect the changes in legislation, which is great. But I think there are other things that perhaps venues that have the poker machines can do to help reduce the negative impact of the machines on the players. Some of those I have noted down here and it is part of the paper that we are going to leave with you, that perhaps slower reel turns and shut-down periods and things that -

Mr SQUIBB - Shut down as in the reduction in the number of hours per day?

Ms REES - Yes, and if perhaps a machine has been playing for two to three hours then it has a shut-down time which breaks the cycle. The players talk about a sense of loss of time, a sense of being in a different -

Ms LUTZ - Being mesmerised.

Ms REES - Yes.

Mr SQUIBB - We have looked at New South Wales and Queensland in particular regarding these things, slowing down the reel speed, and the evidence there seems to be that it has not had much of an effect. The compulsory closure for three to six hours each day, of course in pubs and clubs in Tasmania that is already in effect. The note acceptors, or pubs and clubs do not take note acceptors in Tasmania, so a lot of those things that are being -

Ms REES - Implemented.

Mr SQUIBB - implemented or being suggested in other States do not apply in Tasmania. So we really need to be looking at something a little bit - I do not know what.

Ms REES - Another idea - it may also be implemented already - is not to use credits but to put real dollars up there so that people know what they are spending. It's easy to slip a

note in there. It doesn't matter what number is on it, it's no longer money, it's just a means of making the machine go. So whether it's a coin or whether it's a note, it's not money, it's a means of making the machine go for them to achieve what they're seeking, whether mental numbness or whatever. But if they're having to be reminded that they have spent so much money and have, perhaps, lost so much money -

Mr SQUIBB - I find that hard to follow because surely each time they go to their wallet -

Ms REES - No, but it's difficult to -

Mr SQUIBB - I know what you're saying but what's going to be the difference between seeing a dollar amount on the screen and actually going to their wallet or their handbag, purse, every now and again and getting a note out?

Ms REES - Because problem gamblers - we only know this because of what they tell us - if you put a note in the machine or several coins in the machine immediately it has lost its value, it's not money, okay? So it's just a means of making the machine operate.

Mr SQUIBB - I realise that.

Ms REES - If you have up there that you've got 200 credits - and I'm not much of a poker machine player so have some difficulty in understanding it as well - if you've got 2 000 credits or 200 credits that means nothing. It's not the credit. But if you were to have and you do look to see how much you've got or lost in terms of credit so you know whether you've got to put more money in or not, if you have a little message up there saying for this period of play - perhaps when it's run out of money and you've got to put more in - you have lost \$300, not that you have lost 6 000 credits but that you have lost \$300.

Mr SQUIBB - But how is that different to when they're getting that money out of their wallet or purse, they realise it's \$50 or \$100 -

Ms REES - Because it's broken the mesmerising - it's a change in thought process, that's what it amounts to - it's a change in thought process and it's a reality check. It's puts it in very, very real terms just what has been played and perhaps lost for that period of time.

CHAIR - A continual reinforcing.

Ms REES - Yes. It's a continual reality check.

Mr WEETMAN - I suppose the other point is that often people will go out to an ATM and draw out another \$50 and they they'll spend that and they'll go back to the ATM and draw out another \$50 and another and another. If you look at a gambler's bank statement you will see an incredible pattern there.

Mr SQUIBB - But each time they do that they get a receipt which tells them how much they've taken and what's left. What's the difference between that and the same information being given on the screen?

Ms REES - Because that's money coming out of an account to do with what you want. The message that's on the screen is actually what you've done with it.

Mr SQUIBB - Perhaps, I guess, unless you've got the problem you can't make that connection but I can't, quite frankly.

Ms REES - It doesn't always make sense to us either but then we're fortunate enough not to have a problem.

Mr WEETMAN - The question you raise is an interesting one because generally when that person is playing a gambling machine their critical judgment is very deeply impaired. They lose sense of time, they don't feel pain. I've had clients tell me they don't feel their back pain when they're playing the poker machine. So it has a very strong hypnotic analgesic effect. Very powerful indeed.

Mr SQUIBB - Expensive.

Mr WEETMAN - Expensive, yes.

Machine gambling is a fairly new product, a relatively new product to Tasmania and I think it's going to take quite a while before Tasmanians build up a folk law or common wisdom or understanding about how dangerous machine gambling can be. Until they do and even when they do, I think people are using machine gambling not on a basis of informed choice or informed consent. People don't know and are not told that they've got about a one in ten million chance of getting the top prize on a poker machine. That's pretty poor odds and even that figure if you were to translate it into some other graspable, concrete way, is pretty astonishing. It is about one in every 300 years or something incredible. They are not told that machine gambling involves very powerful behaviour conditioning principles which are not in the control of the player, they are in the machine, and it is about intermittent reward, it is about reinforcement with lights and electronic music, the occasional win. They are given advertising images of all fun, which as we have heard from Sherry and Angela is quite different from reality, which is of individual people fairly grimly sitting and focused on their machine. So that is why I say I do not think people are gambling in this gambling mode on the basis of informed choice, and that is something that community education needs to address as a consumer protection issue.

Ms REES - And certainly as a way of putting forward harm minimisation from a preventative point. If you have the education you do at least have the opportunity then to make an informed decision prior to playing.

Mr WEETMAN - It is a bit analogous to having a product, a brand new product named tobacco, and nobody is told that it can cause lung cancer. You are told you can be real cool and attract friends by smoking.

Mr SQUIBB - How much of the problem can be attributed to the novelty effect? I guess it is a little bit like alcohol, those that are sort of brought up with alcohol from childhood are usually much more responsible users of alcohol. New South Wales, of course, have had poker machines in clubs at least for a long period of time. Have there been any studies

as far as you are aware that compare the incidence of problem gamblers in other jurisdictions as compared to New South Wales?

Mr WEETMAN - No, I do not know. But it could be that in an environment of fairly persistent advertising promoting a certain view of a product, that whatever folk wisdom is built up has to work against that. Now if the consistent message is that machine gambling is all fun, you have the chance to win, you meet people, you get free cups of coffee or whatever the inducements are, and you are not told about the down sides, or you are not told about the nature of the product itself, then I do not know whether common understanding can be built up anyway in that sort of context.

CHAIR - So you are suggesting that not only the potential benefits of gambling, if one can consider there are any, but certainly the things that are harmful within gambling should be part of the education program.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes, those inherent dangers in the product.

CHAIR - The dangers, yes.

Mr WEETMAN - The focus seems to be on the player or on the problem gambler. I would say this is more an issue about problem gambling being a hazardous product that any of us could encounter and get into trouble with.

Ms REES - Yes, the potential is there for all to suffer.

CHAIR - Similar to the tobacco program advertising.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes.

Mrs SUE SMITH - So I suppose a comparison is you see a car company that advertises a bright, shiny, glitzy car speeding around a race track - we can all own one of these - and it is balanced, one might say, by road safety advertisements that do not say 'Don't buy that glitzy car', but do say 'Speed kills' et cetera.

Mr WEETMAN - Yes.

Mrs SUE SMITH - So who do you see as the responsible party for that balance act with the gaming?

Mr WEETMAN - I would say the industry and the advertising regulator. The advertising regulator is now requiring car ads - you mentioned car ads - not to show people in cars doing incredibly dangerous things, so there is some reality starting to be brought into the road safety area. How about some reality into the machine gambling area?

Ms REES - I agree with that. The advertising of the machines and the way that they are advertised and the venues has an effect on the gamblers, and that comes from the members in the group. Some get angry at the way it is advertised. I have here in the paper that you will get that there is the advertising code of ethics, and whilst that may be adhered to, it is felt that they might stretch the boundaries a little bit. One of the ones that has been found to be really quite upsetting is the one where the Oasis venue is

promoted. It just really does not make sense. Oasis means gambling machines, it does not mean eating and drinking and having a really good time, and not everybody that is in a gaming area in front of an Oasis machine, in fact I have not seen anybody who is really smiling and having a wonderful time. If they want to promote the venue then promote it as the venue or -

CHAIR - The reality.

Ms REES - Yes, the venue name and so forth. Not that it is an Oasis venue. Because Oasis simply means gaming machines and if they are going to do that then show the gaming machines. Let us be real about it.

CHAIR - Yes, we have heard that advertisement mentioned. I am sorry, I am one of the committee that does not watch very much free to air television. So I have not seen that advertisement. I might make a point of trying to see the advertisement itself so I can get a handle on what people are saying. I can understand what you are saying.

Ms REES - I know we are running short of time.

CHAIR - Yes. I was just wondering if you would like to round up and as we are going to get these papers, I presume.

Ms REES - The other thing is about the smoking.

CHAIR - It has been introduced a couple of times.

Ms REES - Yes, perhaps I will just leave it.

CHAIR - Are you suggesting non smoking in the venues?

Ms REES - I am suggesting if it is good enough to not have smoking at the bar or within an area of the bar area and in designated eating areas why is it okay - there is a lack of consistency in regulation there that it is okay for machine players to be breathing in cigarette smoke. That does not make sense to me.

CHAIR - Is that the only aspect of wanting to ban smoking you have considered? It is the health aspect.

Ms REES - It is the health aspect. I mean is it sending a message that if you play machines it does not matter.

CHAIR - What about the aspect of breaking the cycle of gambling?

Ms REES - If they have to go out, yes we have noted that.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Is there a link in your clientele to smoking and gaming machines?

Ms REES - Oh yes. That is probably it.

Mr WEETMAN - Just in wrapping up, there are a few points that I just wish to add there. I will not be summarising, I am just adding a few. The prevalence rate for Australia about 2.3 per cent, you multiply that by about five to get a snapshot of how many people at any one time have been significantly affected by problem gambling. It is about 10 per cent at any one time because it is family, employer, et cetera. The second thing that I would like to add is that we talk about problem gamblers and maybe we are not thinking about who they are but they can be anybody. I do not know about the other services but I counsel solicitors, teachers and nurses - all sorts of people.

CHAIR - You have just answered the last question I have here of what the profile is. It is across the board.

Mr WEETMAN - There is no discrimination. Anybody whom it seems is under extreme stress particularly is vulnerable.

Mr SQUIBB - Has that profile changed much since the report of September 1998?

Mr WEETMAN - I cannot say. My guess is no. My guess is that there is something about the psychodynamics of extreme emotional or psychological stress and discovering a machine that just takes it all away - very powerful stuff. My clients have said it is the strongest drug they have ever used.

CHAIR - Right, that is interesting.

Mr WEETMAN - We are talking about machine gambling.

CHAIR - It has a mesmerising effect, I think one of you said.

Ms LUTZ - Yes, that is a word that is often used.

CHAIR - It is an anaesthetic.

Mr WEETMAN - And they do not feel their pain.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms REES - Until they walk out and then their problems are compounded.

Ms LUTZ - It is a vicious cycle. To alleviate the pain they go back.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for that information. It has been most informative and I think that all committee members have appreciated it. So thank you for that and your time.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.