

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

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**Mr LEIGH BISHOP** WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mrs Silvia Smith) - Welcome before the committee Mr Bishop. You are aware that this is a public hearing and we have a member of the Press and other interested persons in the room. The process is that you talk to us - and firstly an apology for the time you had to wait for us. Some things have gone a little bit longer, as they do on these occasions. You talk to us and members of the committee might question you as we go along.

**Mr BISHOP** - Well, I responded to the editorial in today's *Advocate* when they said it was disappointing that so few people have made themselves available for this inquiry. I would like to say that my first stint with poker machines was in 1961 when my wife and I and four other bowlers went to a bowls tournament in New South Wales, taking into account that in 1961 New South Wales was the only State with poker machines - no casinos in Australia - and on our arrival the President, Mr Ran Wilson, after welcoming us took us into a room and he said, 'Now, we are delighted to have you at this bowls carnival but I want to tell you, as President, that the poker machines are loaded against you and your odds of winning can be minimal. If you want to enjoy yourself please do so but my suggestion to you is, don't play them'. Forty-one years later I, as a dill, am still playing poker machines. I feel that the message I have to this committee and to the community might be that something has to be done for the punter to receive a better shade of odds and a better chance.

**CHAIR** - That is an interesting angle.

**Mr BISHOP** - I read with great interest - and I did mention this - that the *Sun Herald* had two pages where they said in Las Vegas the punter received 96 to 98 per cent back. In Australia it is supposed to be 76 to 78 per cent.

**Mr SQUIBB** - Is that comparing gaming machines to gaming machines?

**Mr BISHOP** - Yes.

**Mr SQUIBB** - Not table games or anything like that?

**Mr BISHOP** - No, these are poker machines. For you to have a 50-50 chance of winning you would have to play the machines for 12 hours a day for two and a half years. That is not to win. That is to have a 50-50 chance of winning. In my estimation now as an old man that can afford to play poker machines and I do but I have a limit - but I have several of my friends who I think have a problem and it is on their behalf that I am speaking to try and get them a better chance.

I know that they are not going to stop. It is the same if you caught one for smoking or for drinking alcohol, they are not going to stop. But in some way I think we have to try and do something where we give the person back a little bit of better odds.

**CHAIR** - Perhaps just on that question before we move on while I have it on my mind, are you suggesting also that not only should the punter get better odds but perhaps that the punter needs to be advised, taking into account your earlier comment about 1960-odd, what the likely odds are of them winning? Would that be an appropriate thought there?

**Mr BISHOP** - He has to be a dill if he does not know before he started that has not got the odds but sure, anything like that might help. At the moment, I consider it would be just as quick if you took the money and you put a match to it and you burnt it.

**CHAIR** - Just as quick to get rid of it.

**Mr BISHOP** - Yes. I feel that with multiple betting - in the old days, in the 1960s - and I do not want to harp on it - you played a single line so that if you got three of a kind and you won, you had won four. Nowadays, with multiple betting if you get three of a kind you win five but if you are playing 20 lines you have lost 15. It is just ludicrous. But you see, if somebody does not step up and try to help the people who have a problem or a big problem it is going to go on just the same.

**Mr SQUIBB** - By increasing the odds, do you consider that that may encourage more people to play or to play for longer?

**Mr BISHOP** - No. I think it is not going to cost them as much per day as it does at the moment. If you were getting something back in return, the person that say, is going to spend \$100 might only be spending \$60 or \$70. It is an indictment on our society that the Government is getting so much back from revenue out of poker machines that is not going into the community and the business premises which we have. Millions and millions.

**CHAIR** - Yes, we have all the figures on what is going through it.

**Mr BISHOP** - That is about all I have got but I am putting my hand up for the punter. Somebody has to, surely.

**CHAIR** - Sue has a question for you.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - Leigh and I have had this discussion on the telephone and I am pleased to see that you did take up the challenge to appear before us, Leigh, because we did have some discussion before about it. You make the comment about the Government getting all of this revenue and certainly about 13 per cent of State income now is attributed to gambling taxes. One would say that it is a voluntary tax. It is your choice whether you go to play the machines or not, on one hand, and on the other hand the taxes of the State help to assist our education, our hospital facilities, our roads and bridges and so on. Have you got any comment to make on perhaps the morality of it being that tax that is utilised in those particular ways?

**Mr BISHOP** - No, it is great but if you have to wait a little bit longer for things well then you have to wait. If we are not careful they are going to keep increasing it and increasing it because, you know, if I was in the Government I suppose I would want to do it. I think it is going to get out of all proportion if we are not careful. It is the person that we want least to get hurt who is getting hurt, in my opinion.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - Outside of changing the odds so that you have a better chance of winning, for those people who are getting hurt - and we all accept that there is a certain percentage of our community who have problems with gaming machines - what sort of improvements do you think we could make to the actual processes, as well as improving the odds, to help some of those people who do have a problem, without affecting the 95 per cent plus of people who go there for entertainment and can walk away?

**Mr BISHOP** - Well, it can only be counselling. Most of the people would never admit that they have got a problem. I smoked for 50 years and if I had not had a heart attack I would probably be dead now because I would still be smoking. It is the same. I think you have to find those people and counselling is the only way you are going to help them. It's always hard because if you've got a problem - and each and every one can have some little problem in our life - we're always the first that won't admit it.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - Do you think we've perhaps created a new sector of the community who have got problems now because of the introduction of the gaming machines?

**Mr BISHOP** - Oh yes, there's no question.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - From your experience through your bowling links and other areas of the community, any experience of whether it is more young people, more mature-age people, females, males?

**Mr BISHOP** - From my point of view I'm disappointed that there's so many young people, and they are the people that you don't want to be hurt with it. When I go round Queensland all through the winter and you walk around there, predominantly there's more young people in the gaming areas and using poker machines I think than there used to be.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - And here in Tasmania would you think we're following the same pattern?

**Mr BISHOP** - Yes, I do. Yes, most assuredly.

**Mr SQUIBB** - Whilst you acknowledge that there are some problems overall, would you see them as being a negative or a positive in a community?

**Mr BISHOP** - Poker machines?

**Mr SQUIBB** - Yes.

**Mr BISHOP** - Negative. I've got nothing against them because I believe the hotels that have them have very nice venues and it's greatly improved and they're entitled to their percentage, the people who own the machines they're entitled to theirs and the

Government's entitled to theirs but somebody - and hopefully it's you good people here - has to stand up and say, 'Hey, just reduce it a little bit so that these people can play a little bit longer for a little bit less. And if there are so many million less then that's going to go into our community and probably the councils and all the people that have business may appreciate a little bit to come back their way but somebody in the ordinary punter style has got to get up and say, 'Hey, it's time we had just a little bit better deal'. Now that's life itself.

**Mr SQUIBB** - If we look at it from the point of view of the venue and some of those venues are sporting clubs and some of those sporting clubs are obviously bowls clubs and I know that as you move around the various bowls clubs from your observation or from your discussions with club management are there any advantages to those clubs? Have those clubs been able to improve their facilities as a result of the introduction of gaming machines?

**Mr BISHOP** - I couldn't say as far as Tasmania's concerned because I don't know of any bowls club that has poker machines. East Devonport had them and they -

**Mr SQUIBB** - They've taken them out now, have they?

**Mr BISHOP** - Yes.

**Mr SQUIBB** - That's an indication then.

**Mr BISHOP** - They couldn't afford them because there wasn't the people going through all the time and through the winter period which is a flat period and they had to pay the tax so they had to go.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - RSL clubs I think are the only clubs to my knowledge in Tasmania who have them.

**Mr BISHOP** - I do not know a bowls club now.

In New South Wales yes, they've done particularly well but rarely would you see a New South Wales bowler walk up to a poker machine. He'll sit back and laugh and let all the tourists do it.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - In New South Wales they were in the clubs well before they were in the hotels, weren't they?

**Mr SQUIBB** - Yes.

**Mr BISHOP** - Oh yes.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - They're probably a different clientele, member of, so to speak to start with.

**Mr BISHOP** - Up in Queensland, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, you've got the influx of visitors all the time. So, yes, their facilities are great but if I had my choice of having

the bowls clubs as they are now or the possibility of poker machines where they could extend them to everything, please leave us as we are. We don't want them.

**CHAIR** - The real crux of the reason why you don't want them, what is that?

**Mr BISHOP** - Because I think we're better off with our members as they are than we would be to have the machines, and we're getting a lot of money and we're extending it and our members are in trouble.

**CHAIR** - But a lot of people do enjoy playing them and, as you've said yourself, on the mainland a lot of people do enjoy playing them. Don't Tasmanians have a right to have an enjoyment such as this?

**Mr BISHOP** - Yes, I'm all for it.

**CHAIR** - As long as they get the better odds?

**Mr BISHOP** - Yes.

**Mr SQUIBB** - Don't forget you're on record.

**Mr BISHOP** - No, no please quote me. I'm silly enough that I play them. All I'm asking is that I might get a -

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - A better return.

**Mr BISHOP** - just a better shade of odds. That's all I ask. I have nothing against the people with poker machines or the hotel. I could be addicted easily but I'm not going to be only because I've got half a brain left. But to me someone's got to stand up and say, 'Hey, we're entitled to just a little bit better run'.

**CHAIR** - A bit more for the punter you're looking for?

**Mr BISHOP** - Just a little bit.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - So you're saying that the hotels you believe are doing well out of this, the operators of the machines who are renting them out are doing well out of it and the taxman is doing well out of it but you want to see the balance changed a little bit for the punter?

**Mr BISHOP** - Just drop a percentage and get down to the punter. Somebody's got to stand up and say, 'Hey, it's gone on long enough'.

**CHAIR** - They've got a marvellous champion in you there's no doubt about that.

**Mr BISHOP** - When you get old then you can look back and you can see all the things that you've done that's been wrong in your life and me playing poker machines and my wife too we've both been stupid for doing it but we get a certain amount of enjoyment. Now they say everywhere that it's enjoyment, pleasure and you've got to play for pleasure.

I can go down to the picture theatre for \$15 and I'm going to get an hour and a half's entertainment. I can play the poker machines and I'll guarantee I can lose \$15 inside two minutes. They say, 'Yes, you're suppose to pay for entertainment' and I'm quite happy to do it but that \$15 at the pictures where I'm going to spend an hour and a half I can do inside two minutes flat and it doesn't take a lot of multiple betting to do. So someone's just got to say, 'Hey, please, if there is a good Lord above, shine on us and help us'.

**CHAIR** - It's not a quote we've had before I can assure you.

**Mrs SUE SMITH** - You're the first person who's said look after the punter in that vein I might tell you.

**Mr BISHOP** - Somebody must step up and say, 'Help us'.

**Mr SQUIBB** - I must admit they're different comments than what we had yesterday.

**Mr BISHOP** - Yes, well, we all wonder if there's a good Lord above us but if there is, help us.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, Mr Bishop, for those comments. They were very personal comments and, as I said, at least the punters have got one great champion in you and we'll certainly take into consideration the comments you've made.

**Mr BISHOP** - I'm just so pleased that this committee has been formed with people that'd look at both sides of it and I wish you every success.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**