

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPACTS OF GAMING MACHINES MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON TUESDAY 16 APRIL 2002.

Pastor RONALD WILSON, Reverend PAUL CHARLSON AND Bishop JOHN HARROWER WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mrs Silvia Smith) - Thank you very much, gentlemen, for appearing before this committee. We eagerly look forward to you expanding on your submission that we have which was extremely detailed and took a lot of getting into and reading so I look forward to you participating in putting that to us in your own words and we'll pose some questions to you perhaps as we go along.

Are you going to be the leader of this?

Bishop HARROWER - I think that's the idea. It's a bit like a crocodile hopped into the boat and the gentlemen stood back and said ladies first.

Laughter.

Bishop HARROWER - It's a bit like that I think.

Thank you very much for the opportunity of being here. It's my first time at doing this and I have butterflies in my stomach so I hope I'll get right through.

CHAIR - As long as you've got them in formation you'll be all right.

Bishop HARROWER - I'm no expert in the area but what I'd like to do is try to paint I guess a broad Christian perspective of why it is that we as the Christian churches in Tasmania have decided to get together on this particular issue.

In September of last year we formed the interchurch gambling task force and we have representatives from all the main Christian denominations, the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Pentecostals, Uniting, the Quakers, Salvation Army and so forth so we're all involved.

You may well ask, 'Why such passion?' as it were about such a theme. I think, for us, often when I am asked why is it that the bishop of the Anglican Church does not stick to religion and wander around the cathedral and swan around waving incense or something, I think that it really has to do with Jesus' words when he was asked to summarise what the Gospel was. He said that we are called to love God and to love our neighbour. So, the loving of God and loving of neighbour summarises the Judaeo-Christian tradition. For us then, we do have a real passion and concern for our neighbour. That is fuelled by our love for God and God's grace towards us and His grace towards us flows out to the

community in which we are placed, to our neighbour, to those with whom we live. This Judaeo-Christian tradition is firmly ensconced in the Old Testament tradition.

When the people were harvesting the fields, for example, if some grain fell to the ground, it was not picked up as they went through making the sheaves but it would lie on the ground. It was to remain on the ground. They were not to harvest around the edges of the fields. Why was this done? It was done so that the widows and the orphans and the strangers who were in the land would have food to eat. So this concern for those who are less well off, for the marginalised, is very much a part of our tradition.

I remember back in about 1975 when I was a director of the Industries Assistance Commission. I was working in Canberra at the time and I was responsible for bringing together an investigation and presenting it to a commissioner of the Industries Assistance Commission. The commissioner and I had spent a very long day together because my staff had finished the report and we had submitted it to him a week before. Then I had sat down with him and spent a day with him. He said he was very happy with the report but he had chopped out of the report a section that I had put together on equity and adjustment assistance for those who would be disadvantaged by the change that we were to have. We had quite a vigorous discussion and he accepted most of the recommendations of the draft report except that he said to me, 'John, I do not intend to include the section on equity and assistance for those who are going to be prejudiced by this change', the lowering of tariff protection and subsidy protection. I debated this very vigorously with him. By this time it was about 10 p.m. in a hotel in Canberra and he said to me, 'You know, your problem is that you really believe that you are to be your brother's keeper'. That was an interesting comment to me because I had not long become a Christian. I looked at him and I said, 'I do, in fact, believe that I do have a responsibility to my brother and my sister and that we do have that responsibility'. Well, we finished the discussion at about midnight and it was a fairly heated discussion.

I guess that concern that I see that is God's concern for those who are less well off, I think is a right concern that we all have. A healthy community has to do with having a concern for those that are not well off.

I think it is interesting, in a way, that since coming to Tasmania one of the things that we do in Tasmania is: because we have Bass Strait between us and the mainland and because we are basically a rural community we suffer because we do not have manufacturing industries and because our social and economic indicators are not as strong as the social and economic indicators of the big metropolitan cities like Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane then we often appeal to these bigger cities on the mainland to help us because we are in need. So it seems that we have learnt how to do that but now that we are in a position within Tasmania that there are some who are less well off, will we be equally compassionate to those who are not as well off as we seek the compassion and care from those who are better off than us? I think that is a real issue. We must be consistent in what we do.

I guess the churches are, as a whole when we bring ourselves together, organisations that have a network throughout Tasmania and that includes rural and remote Tasmania. This last weekend I spent three days on King Island which we know has declined in population by about a half over the last 10 years. So we have these contacts with all these populations whether they are in the bigger urban centres or whether they are in the

more remote areas of Tasmania. So the issues that they often face, people say, well it has to do with globalisation, there is nothing we can do. There is a helplessness about what it is that we can or cannot do here. But this one particular issue that has to do with poker machines, it seems that in fact we do hold our destiny in our own hands. But it is not an issue of globalisation. It is an issue of will and of compassion. Therefore, I think there is a great challenge for us to accept this as something that in fact we are prepared to grasp. Will we in fact grasp the nettle of this issue that in fact we do have control over?

We are not out to end all gambling. So we are not here to turn ourselves into some State that does not gamble or anything like that. But what we are doing is calling for a halt to growth in gambling in the poker machines and we are saying enough is enough. Let us just hit the pause button and let us ascertain where we are. Because if we do not take time to take stock of what we have done to ourselves now then the danger is that when we are another five or ten years down the track in fact hitting the pause button then, we will find ourselves in a much more serious state than we are in now.

So the recommendations that we are calling for, I have just summarised them into four broad points. One is an independent research program. These are set out on page 5 of the submission but the first one is an independent research program. In other words, we do want a genuine research program that is independent and in my years as a research director in the Industries Commission, for example, one of the key issues is to begin research. So you begin research because one of the key indicators always of research is the tracking, is the trend analysis and we need trend analysis of what is happening here in Tasmania, in our own backyard, not relying on what Melbourne University is doing or the University of Berkeley or whatever it might be, some of the statistics that are quoted in here. I was very saddened as I read the drafts of the submission to realise that there were very few statistics that were ours. When you read this report in fact one of the things that most strikes a reader is 'But where are the Tasmanian statistics?' So I asked questions about that and I think we desperately need those and certainly my background in economic research shouts that out to me.

The second thing is a moratorium on further expansion of the number of gambling machines. I really think we need to pause and to take time and say let us -

CHAIR - I am not too sure we have -

Mr SQUIBB - The page numbers a little bit different. We are page 3, I think.

Bishop HARROWER - Okay, sorry. On mine it was 5, on yours it is 3, is it, Geoff? Thank you very much; I am sorry about that. So the moratorium, there that is spelt out, but it is just wishing to say we do need to take time to find out what it is that we are doing to ourselves.

Then the third one is a long-term framework for gambling policy. So, you know, what is in the interests really of all Tasmanians and will we be a compassionate society, will we be a healthy society that takes care of those who are less well off than us?

The fourth one is just a general one, I suppose, but it does seem to me, without going into the argumentation that is being presented about an independent Tasmanian gaming commission, that the whole issues of advertising codes of accountability and all these

issues could properly be addressed were there to be a truly independent gaming commission. So I think that is a fourth one. So it really has to do with research, a moratorium, a policy framework and an independent gaming commission. They are the key things I would mention there.

So that is my broad brush I guess. I suppose it is what bishops are called to do or something. I trust that is helpful in terms of kicking off our conversation.

CHAIR - Yes. What about the other two gentlemen, do you wish to add anything there?

Rev. CHARLSON - Certainly I want to reinforce what the Bishop has said. We're here out of a concern that in Tasmania Together we work towards a compassionate and responsible society. As the churches we don't feel that we have the right or the force to say this is the way our society should be but we do believe that we have a voice that can speak into public life portraying our vision, our belief, our understanding of life in Tasmania and society in Tasmania. Essential to that is the compassion that John has spoken of. That is very much part of the ethics of our faith.

One of the other issues, I think, that is raised in the report as well as the ones that John has named which is really important for you to take note of is the question of education regarding gambling in Tasmania.

CHAIR - Education of the public?

Rev. CHARLSON - Of the public, yes.

There are a number of myths that exist among many people regarding gambling and some of those are propagated further by the nature of the advertising that we often have on our television screens. The advertisement I can think of is a picture of two people sitting at home looking basically like stuffed dummies and then people who are out at Oasis are having a wow of a time. I always found that interesting because I've watched other documentary shows of people who engage in electronic gaming machines and they seem to be sitting fairly in isolation just pressing a button.

Now the images don't always coincide in that regard but I think people have certain ideas about gaming machines. For instance the idea that eventually you're going to win and that you'll be winning money from Federal Hotels rather than necessarily realising your winnings are in fact at the expense of somebody else who is losing, that the money you're putting into the machine is accumulating there slowly so it's got to pay out eventually.

I'm not an expert on this so I may be wrong but I do understand there is a note in the report that in fact there is a process whereby the machines are emptied at the rear. The money isn't just accumulating in the machine. As I said, I can't say that with absolute certainty but it's certain portrayed in the report.

I think actually there is one thing in the report that I really did warm to, the idea of the little screen on the machine that actually informs the patron just how much in that session they've won or lost in real dollar terms because I think that sometimes you can go along and that can in fact be a warning to a person to say 'Hey, I've forked \$10 into the machine that I've lost and maybe it's time I set a limit and stopped'.

I remember when I was young and worked for the bank I did go to the clubs with the people in the bank and we did play the poker machines but we each put a dollar in and that was the kitty and that was our limit. Once we had achieved that you could not put any more money in through the kitty and sometimes we walked away with a bit of money but most times we didn't.

Mr SQUIBB - Just an experience.

Rev. CHARLSON - Yes, just an experience.

I think because we had each other that acted as the regulator. 'Okay we're not putting any more money in. We've spent our amount' and so something like that on a screen which is suggested in the report I think would be an excellent idea.

CHAIR - The report that you keep referring to, is that the recent report from the Department of Health and Community Services?

Rev. CHARLSON - Sorry, the submission that we've placed here.

CHAIR - Your submission? Right, okay.

Rev. CHARLSON - There is a note in the terms of reference section where it talks about education. For me it's page 15. I guess it's probably about page 13. That's the wrong one, I'm sorry. I've read this so many times now. Usually I'm reading it around about 10 o'clock at night so you lose track.

The whole process of education is underlined in the terms of reference.

CHAIR - 'Support services for gaming machines', it must be under there.

Rev. CHARLSON - Yes. Terms of reference 2 has some reference to education processes.

SECRETARY (Sue McLeod) - It's actually in appendix 1, page 19, on ours.

CHAIR - Appendix 1.

SECRETARY - Is it the one with examples of education measures and things like that?

Rev. CHARLSON - It is mentioned there as the second dot point. It is also mentioned in another point in this.

Anyway that is an area that is also of concern. There are the four that John named and I also think that there is that whole question of education. We have engaged for a long period of time in educational processes regarding the use of illegal drugs and regarding smoking. I think some arguments warrant that people, particularly young people, should also receive some education regarding the use of gambling and what are the possible dangers of that. There are some figures that are quoted in the report that, again as John pointed out, unfortunately come from interstate but they give some very alarming indications regarding the place of gambling with the young people and in fact how it is

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increasing. It quotes some quite alarming figures about how many young people have gambled, and in fact how many gamble regularly now below the legal age. I realise it is a different issue, but I think education is an important aspect.

CHAIR - A social and economic impact study would actually ascertain a lot of that information that could be happening here in Tasmania.

Rev. CHARLSON - I think that is one of the really crucial issues. The Uniting Church a couple of years ago did a public statement regarding the question of gaming machines in Tasmania, and for us in our research at the time and reinforced again the interchurch task group's work. One of the big issues is that research. I know the Government - there was baseline research done before the introduction of EGMs, and recently last year or the year before there was further research done on that, because I know Paul Lennox wrote in response to our statement and that was one of the issues that he named. But my understanding is that research is quite limited in its nature. It actually just really picks up on what is the level of problem gambling and again there are some questions over the definition of problem gambling. I think we do need that much broader-based research to reinforce, to give us an understanding, because at the moment we are all really working on hearsay. We get hearsay from the people we encounter in our work. The Government gets hearsay from its constituents as well as from its negotiations with people like Federal Hotels et cetera. We need some much more solid facts to be able to make some informed decisions, and we can work together then towards hopefully creating a more compassionate and responsible society.

CHAIR - In your role as ministers of the church, I know it is only anecdotal evidence, but how much contact do you have with people who come to you and say they are having a problem with gambling per se, gaming machines, and you or members of your Church are doing some confidential advising to those people on the problems that they might have? Do you have any of that happening within your churches that you know of?

Rev. CHARLSON - I certainly do, both with people who are directly part of my congregation who either within themselves are working with issues where they have perhaps developed some gambling habits or else they have family members or friends who are having similar struggles. I also know that from our welfare agencies, our support agencies, there is an increase in requests coming in, and again we are working on anecdotal, because people are not usually going to sit in and say, 'Look, I spent all my pay on the pokies', but there have been a number of correlated increases shown, particularly ones with the introduction of EGMs in an area.

Mr SQUIBB - So you have reports which would document this increase over that period of time?

Rev. CHARLSON - I personally do not. As I said, the evidence I am hearing is anecdotal.

Mr SQUIBB - But you would have access to -

Rev. CHARLSON - I am not sure how much. Again it is one of these questions of research, and maybe for ourselves that request it, that is an issue that people who are working in our welfare arms make comments on this. How much they have actually done to document it in detail I would hesitate to answer. I suspect that what we are mostly

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hearing is anecdotal, but they should be able to demonstrate an increase in how much money they are paying out over a period of time. That is what I am hearing, but what I am hearing is anecdotal. Several years ago I was much more hands on with the welfare arm. In my current settlement I am more involved in other areas of the church's life and work, and so, as I said, I can basically only report the comments that people make to me rather than on figures that I have seen or necessarily know that I can produce for you. Chris from Anglicare seemed to be on much stronger ground in my conversations with him, particularly in wanting to present that particular argument. I have heard that from our own people as well.

Mrs SUE SMITH - The beginning of your submission actually says, 'in the last few years this concern', over government's policies to promote and expand gaming in this State, 'in the past few years this concern has been replaced by desperation as our welfare agencies struggle to cope with the human fallout from unparalleled annual rates of growth directly linked to the rapid increase in poker machine numbers'. Considering that you represent so many of those groups, one presumes that has come out very strongly from all of those who are named as members of this task force. And our welfare agencies, they are talking about their individual welfare agencies within their own church sectors, I presume. Is that correct?

Rev. CHARLSON - Yes, I think that would be correct to say. I know, directly related to my present settlement, we have what we call the Equal Opportunity Shop. It used to include a family support service. Because it was completely staffed by volunteers the increase in workload in the last ten years in fact became so much that they could no longer adequately maintain that family support service. The option that they have been forced to take is to, in fact, direct all the funds that they would raise into the Benevolent Society and they also have to refer all their cases to the Benevolent Society for support. That was, in part as I said, out of an increase in the number of people needing assistance.

Mr SQUIBB - Can that be related back to the increase in gambling opportunities as a result of the roll-out of electronic gaming machines in the pubs and clubs? Back in 1993 we had unemployment much higher than it is at the present moment which was not related to gaming machines. We had the extension of Saturday trading. We had a whole number of other factors. I guess what we are trying to find out is: can we relate it back?

Rev. CHARLSON - I think that is a very valid question. Certainly from my experience I would have to answer that we cannot definitely relate it back. It does raise the point though that despite the vastly improved situation in, for instance, unemployment we are existing in a society that is vulnerable. Therefore the issues raised earlier about being a compassionate and responsible society are crucial to us because we are in a climate where there are many vulnerable people and we need to be a society that cares for each other as much as we can and therefore needs to seek to make sure that all avenues of vulnerability are being examined.

Bishop HARROWER - I think one of the interesting things is that yesterday and today, I was not asking for them, I was told stories of people who are in trouble because of their addiction to pokie machines. Today in Hobart, I was told this by a young woman. Yesterday, I was sitting in a taxi in Melbourne and a 60 year old father poured out his heart to me about his daughter who is in her mid 30s and they had paid out yet another

\$4 000 to try and cover her credit card. She swears that this time it is going to be all right but for the last six years this is what has been going on.

I think one of the causes, why it is number one on our list here for independent research programs, is because, like my taxi driver yesterday, it is an intensely private affair - until he found out that I was a bishop about halfway from Moorabbin to Tullamarine. After flying out of King Island. He then opened up and it was just cathartic. He just poured out his heart and we gave each other a big hug when we got to Tullamarine which normally I do not do to taxi drivers. We had had a most intimate and I trust helpful and supportive conversation together as two men trying to understand life. That sort of experience, that is very personal to his family.

I think this is one of the issues for a proper research project that could actually be done with the proper parameters of confidentiality so that we can actually have conversations that are not just anecdotal because bishops and reverends and pastors and caring people in the community, I am sure politicians and so forth, they are the sorts of conversations that we have. Maybe we do not always have them yesterday and today but we do have them. I think that it is one of the great challenges that we have. I am all with you, Geoff, in terms of we have to get to the bottom of this and isn't there some way of us documenting and finding out exactly what is going on and I think that is one of the things that lies at the number one of our calls here because somehow or other to convince people we have to have a stronger information base than we have. But to do that we have to jump over the denial hurdle and get to the yes, I am prepared to change place and let us do some research.

Mr SQUIBB - Even though we do not refer in our terms of reference to problem gambling, we do refer to those addicted and I guess, as you have acknowledged yourselves, the definition of a problem gambler is difficult and we read some reports where it refers to two per cent of the population being affected. Your submission refers to reports where it is anything from 12 to 30 per cent. Then when one looks at the definition of problem gambling it refers to the situation when a person's gambling activity gives rise to harm to the individual player and what degree of harm. So it is very difficult. I guess you would say that any harm is a problem, is too much. Are you aware of the Southoaks Gambling Screen which I think is used in other jurisdictions to define; it is a factor that is used to determine a gambler with a problem? So we do not know how others in this definition - that is used when you make claims that 12 per cent or 30 per cent -

Bishop HARROWER - Yes, that's right.

Mr SQUIBB - It would be a person or persons that would fall under that definition?

Bishop HARROWER - Yes, that is right, and that was taken from the Victorian report, from memory.

CHAIR - Yes it was, the 1997 report.

Mr SQUIBB - I think Victoria have now gone down to Southoaks, have they?

CHAIR - I am not sure.

Mr SQUIBB - Or is it New South Wales?

CHAIR - New South Wales.

Mr SQUIBB - New South Wales, sorry.

Bishop HARROWER - In any social research, my limited experience some years ago now was that the issue of definitions is the broad and the narrow and that you often need to work with both when you do research so that you can get away from getting bound down by any one particular social definition so that you take both. But I do not know any of the details, Geoff, of that particular definition. But we sought out those figures which were 1997 so from about five years ago and from Victoria which we thought was a close thing to go to. But they are very significant, are they not, that if we want a healthy Tasmania, to further increase something that we know causes ill health seems to me to be counter intuitive. It is just not the sort of thing that you do. So a healthy Tasmania will be a Tasmania where the disadvantaged are cared for and where we minimise any further damage to them. I think health involves respect and support and if you were to play the old Socratic game and I do not want us to wax too philosophical but gaming is often promoted as healthy family entertainment. You could ask the question, is Russian roulette healthy family entertainment? Why is Russian roulette not healthy family entertainment? Because every now and then somebody - again a minority; not a big number - becomes unhealthy and so Russian roulette is not regarded as a healthy family activity. Poker machines claim to be healthy family entertainment. But why is poker machine gambling not health family entertainment? Because every now and then - according to one definition, in fact one in three players but maybe it is one in 20, so let us say it is one in a thousand - one in a thousand becomes quite unhealthy. So I do not think it is healthy family entertainment and I think that is part of this code of practice and research thing that we have to be looking at and having a Tasmanian gaming commission that looks at these things in a strong way and says, is it right to say that this is healthy family entertainment?' I think that some of those phrases ought to be put through the sieve of some code of ethics and say this not a proper and fair way to advertise this particular activity.

Mr SQUIBB - I guess many would argue that you could say the same about an activity that was fairly common in most communities around Tasmania prior to the spread of electronic gaming machines and that was a game called bingo where there is no doubt that people were addicted. I know that in my area it was possible to play bingo every night or every afternoon of the week. You are probably not looking at the same amounts of money that were being used but it was still a form of addiction and using this problem gambling definition, there were probably 30 per cent suffering harm then, too.

Bishop HARROWER - Well then, these things ought to be looked at. I think that is part of the call, to say what is the level of harm that is done by these different activities and let us have a look at bingo or pokie machines or whatever it might be so that we might be an informed community and desirous of being a healthy Tasmania and a compassionate Tasmania we would actually know, so when I start promoting pokies or whatever as a healthy family entertainment I can actually be held accountable. Whereas at the moment we do not know. We do not like that idea of Russian roulette but why do we not like the idea of pokies or bingo? I am prepared to run with you on that.

CHAIR - On the issue of care of people who come to you with their concerns and with their problems, specifically in this area obviously I am talking about, do you have a process where you deal with it within the church agencies that are able to assist people with counselling and guidance or do you have a process of being able to refer them on as well, if necessary?

Rev. CHARLSON - No, this will vary extraordinarily according to the situation that you are encountering. I have dealt with people who needed to leave their husbands because their husband's gambling was in such a state, and they still loved their husband but to protect themselves and their children because they had been cleaned out financially several times over they needed to actually sever the legal connection otherwise they would just be continually placing themselves in a situation of extreme financial risk to themselves and the children. As well as the whole loss of trust issues that relate to that. In a situation like that, often what is needed is the compassionate and caring ear and the friends who will journey with them and also journey with their husbands through an incredibly difficult period of time.

I have dealt with people who are in fact seriously struggling with a gambling problem. I am not an expert in this field. Again, what I can offer is to be the friend, the listening ear but, yes, there are processes that you may want to refer that person on to. Often by the time someone starts talking to me anyway, they are already taking these other steps to go to an agency such as Anglicare that will offer counselling regarding struggling with issues of gambling addiction as well as the other budgetary issues that go alongside.

For the welfare agencies it will vary, in my experience, according to the agency and its capacity. When I was at Bridgewater-Gagebrook the food relief agency that we were managing at that time had the capacity to give food relief to people and some limited counselling but if people wanted to take it a step further and take specific counselling because they were struggling with a problem such as gambling addiction or just general budgetary counselling then often we would have to refer them to a larger agency, usually Anglicare who had the resources to provide that depth of counselling. My understanding is that Bridgewater now has a budgetary counselling service.

I think that with the gambling issues, again, for some people it is an issue that they have a problem and they want to be accountable to somebody and say, 'Look, I have this tendency and I would be really happy if you could just talk to me'. Sometimes people just want me to contact them every now and then and say, 'Look, are you keeping this in line or not?' Other times somebody seeks professional counselling in which case it is often far better. I am like the GP. It is far better that they go to see the specialist in those instances.

CHAIR - Were you going to add something there?

Mr SQUIBB - Just in relation to the counselling services, it may be an unfair question in that you've indicated that it's been a while since you've had hands-on experience. John is fairly new to the State and I'm not sure about Ron but we're looking at the effects in the period since electronic gaming machines have been added to clubs and pubs so something over the last eight years. I was just wondering whether you knew or whether you've had access to information that would indicate to us whether the profile of the problem gambler has changed in that period of time?

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I take it from your submissions that you are saying that there are more people as a result of that but the normal type of person that was coming along for counselling, has the profile of that person changed since the roll-out of video gaming machines?

Rev. CHARLSON - I couldn't talk to the question of what the agencies are dealing with. Anecdotally I seem to be hearing that yes there is this increase in profile showing through but that's completely a casual comment that I'm hearing.

Mr SQUIBB - What are you hearing? That it's the younger person, an older person, more females?

Rev. CHARLSON - No, I'm not hearing that much detail.

When I first came to Tasmania I was at Bridgewater-Gagebrook for my first four years which would have to be financially and in many other ways one of the most vulnerable communities. The issue of gambling struggles came up but not much. I was hearing it more and more when I was at Penguin and now in Clarence I have been encountering it for last seven or eight years. So in terms of as a minister dealing with lots of human beings both inside and outside the church it is an increased issue. I wouldn't say it's a massive increase, I'm not getting them lining up at the door, but several times a year whereas 10 years ago maybe I was only dealing with a couple a year. It certainly has become an issue some people want to talk to me about.

Mr SQUIBB - Ten years ago at Penguin, for instance, access would have been a -

Mrs SUE SMITH - Casinos.

Mr SQUIBB - The only access they'd have had for electronic gaming machines would have been the casinos. There were obviously other forms of gambling but electronic gaming machines would only have been available in Launceston.

Rev. CHARLSON - That's what I'm saying.

Ten years ago I was at Bridgewater-Gagebrook and I was dealing with lots of people, lots of different issues. I honestly can't recall - say if I went back to 1992, I probably had one serious issue of gambling. In 1995-96 when I was at Penguin - it was a reasonably stable rural community and in fact not a community which goes a lot for counselling because there are such strong family connections there that people tend to look after each other very well - two to three a year. That's a marked difference with the trend coming in two very different communities but also in that very different period of time.

Mrs SUE SMITH - And a community in Penguin in 1995-96 wouldn't have had the access to gaming machines. They have only actually introduced them into Penguin in the last 12 months. So they're travelling.

Rev. CHARLSON - Yes, but the people I was dealing with weren't actually -

Mr SQUIBB - So were they travelling to Launceston, the hour and a half's drive, or were they engaged in other forms of gambling?

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Rev. CHARLSON - Certainly on one issue I'm aware of which resulted in a suicide, yes Launceston was the issue. The Country Club actually sent representatives to the funeral.

Devonport would have had machines because one of the -

Mrs SUE SMITH - There would have been machines in their neighbourhood either side. They just didn't have them in the Penguin community until last year when there was a change of ownership of the hotel.

Rev. CHARLSON - See, the north-west coast, there are those who argue that they really should declare the greater city from Devonport to Wynyard -

Mrs SUE SMITH - That's right.

Rev. CHARLSON - Certainly in the cases I'm dealing with -

Mrs SUE SMITH - It's ten minutes to somewhere, isn't it?

Rev. CHARLSON - Devonport is the name. Again, you're having to walk around edges because you are also dealing with confidentiality issues. But certainly there was a couple of issues and one very major one had to deal with a pub in Devonport.

Mrs SUE SMITH - The profile of a person with a gaming problem is interesting because I know of one instance in my own community at Ulverstone where the person made a conscious decision to go outside of her community to gaming machines because she did not want to be recognised going in and out of the local establishments. Forgetting it was such a small community right along the coast it was not long before it was identified anyway. So people certainly do move if there is this and in some ways acknowledge that they have a problem but a pride factor is still there that they do not want the community to see that they have a problem.

CHAIR - Ron, we have not been able to hear any comments from you. Perhaps we can give you an opportunity to say some things.

Mr WILSON - The churches have been making representations about gambling I see for quite a long while. But our section of the church is really only just coming in on that and that is mostly because of I guess the perception. It is very hard to quantify in answer to a question that Geoff asked. But the perception is that the proliferation of gambling is having an effect on the communities. So I guess our values are that esteem people and we want to see that protection and I think it is a marvellous thing that the Government does have the capacity to control, it is not beyond our control, and I guess those same things that we have been talking about are the things that concern me. The agenda on what is our page 5 of the moratorium and the investigation or the research are very important things. So mostly my thoughts are in support of what has already been said.

CHAIR - Fair enough then. You had some suggestions, on my page 19, for legal regulatory measures that need to be properly considered and I did not know whether you wanted to elaborate on any of those.

Rev. CHARLSON - Page 21.

CHAIR - Page 21 for you. You must have some beginning pieces that we do not have.

Rev. CHARLSON - Yes. I have worked out that your page 1 starts at the beginning of our body of the document, whereas we have the cover and all that.

CHAIR - I was rather interested in some of your suggestions - in particular the one of doing things to machines in displayed amounts won or lost in dollars and cents and there was another one down here, an activity statement. These two suggestions have come to us from other forums. I just wonder, a bit of an explanation as to why or where you came from with these ideas?

Rev. CHARLSON - I am not sure where the idea came from, to be completely honest. But this document has been prepared across a broad span and we are turkeys who get chucked in to write these. But I will make a small confession; I am a computer game addict. I have a computer at home and my son keeps wanting to collect games and all that. Amongst everything else we have collected over the time is a game which it is not like Internet gambling or anything, it is just that you play it on your computer. It comes in one of these soft game packages and it shows such a counter. So it is just interesting. I thought, 'Okay, let's learn how blackjack works' because I've never played it in my life and it is quite interesting to then watch technically how much through this game I have supposedly won or lost. It is quite an awareness. For me, this is just numbers on a machine because all I am doing is playing with my computer; I have not won or lost anything. But when I read this I could see the sense of that because even without putting any money in, you look and it says I have lost \$250.

CHAIR - Do you think that sort of thing on an electronic gaming machine could be some sort of a wake-up call? Is that where it is coming from?

Bishop HARROWER - Yes, that is right, so that you know. I do not know whether you are supposed to mention pubs here but I dropped off at Kempton with my wife.

Rev. CHARLSON - Front page of the *Mercury* tomorrow.

Laughter.

Bishop HARROWER - We were coming back and so you walk in the pub and in the front door and there is this darkened room, right. So there are not outside windows and then you go through to the family bar where we had our meal or you go through to the front bar if you are with a couple of mates and just want a beer or something. But the actual gaming room is a darkened room and so you go in this room and so me, being curious, I thought I do not know what they will do if they find the Bishop in here but anyway, the *Mercury* were not around on that particular occasion -

Laughter.

Bishop HARROWER - and so I hung around and wandered around - and it is darkened. There are not windows to the outside, it is just hypnotic, you know, the thing going around and around, and there are not any breakers. So you ask how do you break this

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thing? With our bingo night maybe we all have a cuppa in the parish hall or something, I don't know, but you get inside this place and where are the breakers? Where are the mates who come in or we go off and we do something else or there is someone out the front doing something? So there is this sort of enclosed space, this total focusing on this blinking machine - blinking in many ways - in front of you and you just end up with a total absorption in this one thing, because everything else around you is taken away. There is this sort of hypnotic atmosphere. So it is doing things with that, so whether you put a counter on the machine, you actually cause the airconditioning to break down every hour or something, but there is something to break it so that people are not locked into this almost hypnotic engagement by these machines. So in terms of coming up with ideas, that was what lay behind having a display, and activity statements were clearly longer-term things that people might get hold of in that one, and down the bottom are the ideas -

CHAIR - Yes, I was looking at the ones down the bottom.

Bishop HARROWER - That was the idea of how do you break that intensity, that people end up sort of absolutely captured by the machine and the game, and it is really hard. There are no birds flying past the windows, or you do not even suddenly see that, hey, it is dawn, or it is dusk. You haven't got a clue, you don't know. So I think it had to do with those sorts of things.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Victoria certainly have moved down the track of improved lighting, clocks, and no smoking, which means people have to make a choice on A or B in that particular arena, so they certainly have acknowledged - and we were told there actually is computer capacity now that as a player starts and presses the button it can tell you every 30 minutes how much you have put in and how much you have won or lost. And the issue of credits versus dollars and cents, so there are some capacities already in the process for that.

Bishop HARROWER - What we are trying to do is give the capacity back to a person to be in charge of their own destiny, and we need to recognise that that is an important thing for us to do, to actually help the person to be in charge of what they are doing, whereas the atmosphere in the design of the thing actually is taking away from a person that independence that they are able to actually exert and to make a choice of saying no, enough is enough. And so it is helping a person take a step back or a step out for a fag or something so that they can actually do that.

CHAIR - So you would support any measures that could actually do that sort of thing?

Bishop HARROWER - Yes, well, having no smoking in those areas is clearly a good thing. There are plenty of non-smokers who play the pokies, of course, but at least if you are a smoker you might want a cigarette and so you might step outside. It just gives you that chance to reassess 'Where am I?' and, 'Okay, I am making an ongoing commitment to this for the next hour' or whatever, but at least you have the opportunity to reassess and to be in charge of your own destiny.

CHAIR - I think you have given us certainly a lot of food for thought. It is an excellent submission, and I guess on my own behalf I can say I am glad that you have become proactive and took the initiative to set up your task force last year, and to participate in

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this debate, because I think the more interested parties that are participating in the debate then we can perhaps come out with the right answers at the end for the people of Tasmania, as you said, so we do thank you for making your submission to us and coming and speaking to us today. It is most appreciated.

Bishop HARROWER - Thank you very much for the initiative that you have all taken, the Council. We are very grateful. It is great leadership and I congratulate you for that.

CHAIR - Let us hope with the information we are gleaning from people and groups such as yourself that we can come out with some good recommendations at the end of it, and that those recommendations will be seriously looked at and taken into consideration. Thank you.

Bishop HARROWER - Thank you very much.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.