

From: Julia Bestwick <campaigns@good.do>
Sent: Thursday, 24 November 2016 11:24 AM
To: fgm
Subject: Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am pleading with you to act to remove poker machines from community venues like pubs and clubs, and asking you to ensure that poker machines that remain in casinos are properly regulated to be safe and fair, so that those people who are addicted do not come to additional mental harm and/or be driven into poverty, or at least financial stress, and even, in some cases, into crime or to suicide.

“Pokies” (what a warm, friendly-sounding name for cold, hard, unfeeling, money-guzzling, misery-generating machines) are deliberately manufactured and designed to be addictive. They take money from those who can least afford it, while governments profit from the tax generated. People addicted to playing the pokies suffer not only financial stress, but feelings of worthlessness, depression, isolation, hopelessness. The fact that pokies are rigged to give a little, raising hope, only worsens the problem. They give a little before they take a lot. The idea is to bring the pokies player back again and again, because of that little bit of hope for a bonanza.

So people who are struggling financially and looking for a way out are often the people who are playing the pokies, in that forlorn hope of a money miracle to save them.

And if you do not think pokies are rigged, as a sometime player and fascinated observer, I can tell you that a 25-cent gamble on a poker machine will elicit a big win or a major jackpot win once in a blue moon, whereas a \$5 gamble will produce more “free games”, more exciting big wins in “free games” (producing a “high”, feeding addiction – I have heard people yelling “Yes!”, jumping off their seats, clapping their hands), and more jackpot opportunities, so gamblers are encouraged to place larger bets. This is why bets should be regulated and limited, so that there is no advantage from “betting big”.

When you see people betting \$5 at a time, feeding in one \$50 bill after another, you wonder how? Are they embezzling from their employer? Are they betting their wages, so that their families cannot eat? Are they betting their pensions, so that they will live in poverty? Are they widows, losing money they have inherited, so that they will end up with nothing? Are they lying about where they've been, what they've been up to, what happened to the money?

I have personally heard comments like: “Clearly they haven't turned the machines on yet”; “I always bet at least \$2.50 and I have won the major jackpot five times, but I have lost way more than I've won.” “You can't win a big jackpot unless you bet the maximum.” “I can go home when I've finished the coins in my bucket.” For God's sake!

People do not necessarily recognise that they have a problem, or that they need help, I think because of shame, refusal to face or admit, so they don't want anyone, especially family or friends, but even a stranger, to know, don't want to discuss. So gambling is very isolating.

It seems we can't get rid of pokies, which would be ideal, but we can regulate to limit their pervasiveness in the community, and to limit the amount of money people can put into them. Surely the health of Tasmanians far outweighs financial benefit from tax.

The role of our governments is to work for the benefit of those people over whom they have jurisdiction, whose lives they manage to an extent, to ensure the mental health of those people, not to profit from misery.

Yours sincerely,

Julia Bestwick.

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