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The Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Hobart 7000
Phone: 6212 2250
Email: fgm@parliament.tas.gov.au

7/12/16

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets

The Gambling Impact Society (NSW) Inc. is an ACNC registered Health Promotion charity that aims to raise community awareness about the impacts of gambling and problem gambling in the community and is a peak body on gambling issues in NSW. We promote a public health approach to gambling harm through information, education, professional training, self-help support and advocacy. In particular our Consumer Voices –peer spokespeople project is a powerful community education program sharing the personal experiences of those who have directly developed a gambling problem and/or experienced the negative consequences as a family member.

Governments are responsible for supporting their constituents, through leadership, legislation and regulation, which promotes the health of individuals and communities. It is accepted that gambling has the potential to cause harm and that poker machine gambling in particular has an increased risk of harm over relatively minor financial pursuits such as lotteries. Electronic Gaming Machines (poker machines) are well recognised in the field of Population/Public Health as high-risk “products of dangerous consumption” requiring serious consideration as to the immediate and long term harmful effects and significant negative impacts on individuals, families and communities. There is an urgent need for governments to closely examine these products and their impacts with a view to protecting consumers from dangerous practices, reducing the risks from poker machine technology, reducing the harms from gambling products which directly encourage high-risk taking behaviour as well as caring for those who have been harmed.

The Federal monopoly of poker machines in Tasmania and the expiring deed is a unique situation that represents an opportunity for the Tasmanian Government to provide some leadership in gambling policy and promote the health of its communities for decades to come. We believe that there is much that can be done to support public health and prevent social harm from poker machine gambling in Tasmania. If the Tasmanian Government truly wants to be objective, and be seen to be objective, it must consider all options for the future of gambling in the state, including the complete removal of poker machines from pubs and clubs.

The science of programming poker machines is intrinsically involved with mathematics and human psychology in the pursuit of co-creating an experience of risk and reward in such a manner that places the user at significant risk of serious financial and psychological harm. Poker machine are designed to manipulate player experiences and outcomes by providing frequent small rewards, which often under closer examination, actually represent a loss, near misses and inducement to continue gambling such as free spins. These are accompanied with sensory stimulations of lights and noises often celebrating a perceived win (which may in fact be a loss). It is these design features recently considered in the ABC award winning documentary *Ka-Ching: Pokie Nation* (2015) which draws the player in and induces them to play longer sessions at higher intensity.

It is a common experience for players to lose track of how much they have bet and how much they may have won or lost. It has been evidenced since 2001 that 50% of those who gamble on poker machines regularly (once a week or more) experience a loss of control as a normal consequence of engagement with the machine (Dickerson, 2001). However these risks are seldom made transparent to the individual gambler.

The Productivity Commission (2010) found that it is possible to lose over \$1200 an hour on a poker machine. A player, who through these product design features, enters what has been described by consumers as “the zone” will forget about all other considerations in their life – consumers regularly describe their experiences as “getting lost in the machine” and for some this becomes part of the attraction – a machine + human co-created experience of “mindlessness” or “time out”. As a consequence some will expend funds to maintain this experience until there is nothing left. Chasing losses is part of the addictive cycle of a Gambling Disorder (DSM -5).

It is well researched, that the concept of player “Time on Machine” is the entire goal of the poker machine designers and operators (Schull, 2014). Most poker machine gamblers would be unable to realistically estimate the actual cost of play before using this product and the design features of this technology specifically undermines individual agency once gambling has begun, thereby undermining all concepts of Responsible Gambling (Dickerson, 2003).

Those who become physically and cognitively entwined with these poker machine products are often unwittingly risking more than their money. There are considerable physical, mental and social health impacts not only for the gambler, but for families, friends, employers and the community at large. These have considerable repercussions on public health systems, welfare systems, justice systems and socio-economic systems of the community.

The Tasmanian Government has performed several Social and Economic Impact Studies, none of which has found a significant positive net benefit to the Tasmanian people from poker machines. It is difficult to see what objective reason there may be for the government to choose to keep the machines in local communities. Tasmania has the



opportunity to lead Australia in gambling harm prevention policy and save thousands of people from the negative consequences of problem gambling.

As a Health & Welfare Practitioner for over 30 years, an AASW accredited Mental Health Social Worker, Public Health & Gambling Researcher, Problem Gambling Counsellor and Adult Educator I have developed some considerable expertise in this field. I would be happy to talk with the Committee about the specific impacts of poker machines and why harm minimisation regulation, policy and practices developed and implemented to date have had limited success and how for a consumer perspective they have often created further barriers to harm reduction (Caroll, 2013).

I welcome the opportunity to expand on this submission if invited.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Roberts". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'K' and 'R'.

Kate Roberts (PhD Research Fellow UOW, BA (Hons), MHPed, CQSW, CASS)

Executive Officer
Gambling Impact Society (NSW) Inc.

Julie Thompson

JSC / FGM 122

From: Gambling Impact Society (NSW) <info@gisnsw.org.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 7 December 2016 5:13 PM
To: fgm
Subject: Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets
Attachments: GIS Submission to Tasmanian Joint Select Committee.docx

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached a submission on behalf of the GIS to the Tasmanian Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Future Gaming Markets

Kind regards
Kate

Kate Roberts
Executive Officer
Gambling Impact Society (NSW) Inc.
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