

Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets

From: Lyn O'Grady

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I write this submission as a Councillor with West Coast Council, Community Services Worker to the West Coast Municipal region for over 20 years and non-consumer of gaming products.

As a Councillor of West Coast Council, I voted to remove gaming machines from public and clubs in Tasmania. Sadly, the majority of Councillors voted to retain gaming machines.

My vote was a reflection of the toxic situations caused gaming machines. People have presented for assistance, such as Emergency Relief, to put food in the mouths of their children after heavy losses on gaming machines. Gaming machines have been the cause of relationship breakdowns, financial crisis and reactive depression. I am constantly perplexed as to why these machines are called entertainment – perhaps the Pied Piper of Hamelin could have been construed as an entertainer too. As a Community Services worker, I consider that gaming machines prey on the lonely, desperate and unfulfilled. The Government takes a meagre proportion in taxes and the smallest of crumbs come back to our community in the form of grants.

Living in a small community, one sometimes hears that “so-and-so” won \$1,200 on the pokies. I wish the sad news stories would travel as quickly. How much has that same person lost in order to “win” back \$1,200? The pokies are calibrated to favour the house.

From a personal perspective, I no longer attend venues where gaming machines are situated. I have seen enough. I have watched people sitting at machines like gormless drones inserting their grocery, rent and utility funds. I have watched people’s faces when they “win” money back – their expression is one of relief rather than joy. This is not entertainment.

I have watched extended families come out for a meal and, after a short time, the children are left sitting at the table while the others are “playing” the machines. We are losing our sense of connectedness and community spirit to a feeling of quiet and embarrassed desperation. Venues that were once social opportunities are now coin rattling dens for zombie like behaviour. The expression “playing” the pokies is a joke in itself.

I would like to present a case-study that is a small taste of the issues of problem gambling in our community:

Amy had been married to Bill for about 5 years. It was the second marriage for both of them. Bill had a gambling problem that was under control – he had a self-exclusion order with the local gaming venue.

Amy noticed that Bill’s mood state had altered, his self-care had deteriorated and that he was making a frequent trips away from town. Amy discovered that Bill had been travelling to other townships to gamble. Amy also discovered that \$60,000 was missing from her bank account. This discovery, along with other deceptive and controlling behaviours lead to the breakdown of the marriage. Amy found herself trapped in a small town without sufficient funds to start a new life elsewhere. Being richer in resilience yet poorer in financial circumstance, Amy has managed to create a life for herself.

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Sometime after the separation, Bill's mother passed away. Bill received an inheritance of over \$100,000. Amy was informed by Bill's extended family that the gaming machines made short work of the inheritance.

I trust that this brief snap shot of one case study (and there are many more) will give some indication of the damage created by gaming machines in our community.

I implore that the Parliamentary Committee listens to the concerns expressed by people who truly care about their community. Please remove gaming machines from our pubs and clubs.