

Thursday, 27 November 2003

Gambling Harm Minimisation
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
PO Box Q290
QVB Post Office NSW 1230

SUBMISSION: GAMBLING HARM MINIMISATION

Dear Mr Pierce,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the submission to this IPART issues paper in relation to Gambling Harm Minimisation Measures.

There is basically only one argument in my submission – the addition of strategies which address harm minimisation measures aimed at problem gamblers from a non-English speaking background.

I would argue this is appropriate given:

- The demonstrated over-representation of people from non-English speaking background in gambling activities
- Obvious cultural differences which need to be taken into account

A key element which is missing is recent research into ethnic communities to identify potential communities at greater risk and key issues which contribute to problem gambling in that community.

Should you wish to clarify any issues in the submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Councillor Thang Ngo

GAMBLING HARM MINIMISATION SUBMISSION BY THANG NGO

Fairfield Local Government Area

Residents of the Fairfield local government (Fairfield) suffer the twin evils of low social and economic disadvantage together with extremely high expenditure on gambling.

According to a recent Social Impact Assessment, "The 1996 SEIFA (Socio-Economic Index) score for the Fairfield Local Government Area places it at the bottom of all Sydney metropolitan Local Government Areas"¹.

While I do not have access to gambling figures for Casino table games, TAB, Lotto, scratch tickets and other forms of gambling, I do have access to gaming machine statistics which is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Social/Economic Disadvantage and Gaming Machine Statistics

	Fairfield	NSW
Social/Economic Disadvantage		
Weekly income estimate, 2001 ²	\$282	\$386
Unemployment (Sept Quarter 2002) ³	8.0%	6.1%
Gambling expenditure (yearly)		
Total gaming machine expenditure ⁴	\$251,889,981	2.844 billion
Gaming machine exp per machine	\$64,629	42,274
Average gaming machine exp per adult	\$1,915.43	\$906.21

As Table 1 shows, while residents earn around \$100 a week less than the state average we spend over a quarter of a billion dollars (\$251m) on just gaming machines each year or double the state in terms of expenditure per gaming machine. This figure compares with Fairfield Council's annual operating budget of 99m.

Not surprisingly, given the higher than average expenditure on gambling, local residents have been preyed upon by gambling operators:

- Currently there are 41 Clubs and Hotels in the Fairfield Local Government Area with around 3,898 gaming machines. Many of these are amongst the most popular and profitable gambling institutions in the state
- A Cabramatta Newsagent is one of the most profitable in terms of Lotto and scratch tickets sales

¹ Class 2 Social Impact Assessment on behalf of Mounties Bowling Club by Acuiti Legal, May 2003.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002), Census of Population and Housing Characteristics for Statistical Local Areas: NSW and Jervis Bay Territory.

³ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (2002), Small Area Labour Markets Australia September Quarter 2002.

⁴ NSW Dept of Gaming and Racing, February 2001 to January 2002 for Clubs, March 2001 to February 2002 for Hotels.

- Star City Casino operates a regular bus service from Cabramatta to the casino, seven days a week
- Bulldogs “Oasis” development, one of the largest gambling developments, despite several controversies is planned in Liverpool, which borders Fairfield

Cultural Diversity

Fairfield is NSW’s most culturally diverse local government area where more than half of residents were born overseas.

There is evidence to support the fact that people from Non-English speaking background represent a greater percentage of gambling patrons compared to the general population. Evidence to support this include:

- Observing patrons at clubs, hotels, casinos
- A recent study by the NSW Clubs industry into the effect of the NSW Government’s proposed ‘pokies tax’ showed the Clubs in the Cabramatta electorate would have to pay the most tax in the state

While the ‘ethnic’ gamblers lose considerably more than the general population, there has been very little research conducted into the issues of problem gambling within ethnic communities.

Recommendations

While Table 1 summarises key harm minimisation measures into 7 groups, I would recommend an addition grouping called “ethnic community strategies”.

This additional grouping recognises the significant size of gamblers who come from a non-English speaking background. Doing this would recognise cultural and social differences which need to be taken into account when implementing harm minimisation strategies.

While the current harm minimisation extends to brochures and other messages in languages other than language, the basic assumption is that the behaviour and attitudes of a problem gambler from an English speaking background is similar to that of someone from a non-English speaking background.

To do this may ignore some key differences:

- English proficiency: may reduce entertainment options and contribute to greater take up pokies which requires little English language skills
- Lack of social/sporting facilities: many new migrants live in the west with poor investment in facilities making gambling more of an attraction
- Economic factors: new migrants, with low income may see gambling as a short cut to wealth and prosperity
- Cultural issues: are there any cultural reasons why migrants from some communities might be more disposed to gambling
- Counselling Services: are current services for problem gamblers those from a non-English speaking background sufficient, appropriate and effective?

To ensure that the strategies are appropriate and relevant, I would recommend research be conducted to identify:

- potential ethnic problem gambling communities
- key issues for each of the identified communities which drives problem gambling
- key issues which stop problem gamblers seeking assistance

Appropriate strategies can then be developed based on sound research together with insights gained from community consultation.

Submission by:

Councillor Thang Ngo