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The Independent Pricing Tribunal
Level 2
44 Market Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

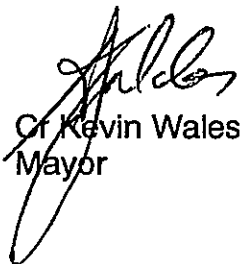
Dear Sir/Madam

SUBMISSION ON GAMBLING HARM MINIMISATION

Please find enclosed Wagga Wagga City Council's submission on Gambling Harm Minimisation.

If you have any inquiries, please contact Council on 69269100 during office hours.

Yours faithfully



Cr Kevin Wales
Mayor



Wagga Wagga City Council

Submission on
Gambling Harm Minimisation
Measures to the Independent
Pricing Tribunal

November 2003

Recreational gambling is part of the Australian culture but gambling leads to significant harm for some individuals, families and communities. This harm has personal, social, economic, political and health dimensions. Gambling products and practices must be regulated to minimise this harm. The Government's role is to ensure that the harm related to gambling is minimised by providing clear legislation, policies and resources. Harm minimization in relation to gaming should be the shared responsibility of the gaming provider, counselling and support services along with a nominated independent regulatory body.

Based on estimates made by The Productivity Commission, that:

- 1 % of the adult population in Australia has severe problems with gambling
- 1% of the adult population in Australia has moderate problems with gambling
- 3% of the NSW adult population has some degree of problems with gambling
- an average problem gambler has a financial or emotional impact on five other people

Estimates suggest that in the Wagga Wagga Local Government Area (LGA), 1651 people have some degree of problems with gambling. Problem gambling in the Wagga Wagga LGA impacts on 8255 people.

Minimising harm to problem gamblers, their families and their friends:

The effects of problem gambling impact on individuals, families and the broader community. The effects include financial difficulties, an increased incidence of health-related problems, loss of social networks and extended family support, family dysfunction, increased crime rates and reduced capacity to work.

The women partners of gamblers, report increased levels of stress and illness, family breakdown, domestic violence and neglect of children. Often families experience an alteration of family spending patterns to accommodate the rising expenditure on gambling, and in severe cases can include loss of family savings, loss of the family home and financial policies such as superannuation, insurance policies and other protective policies.

Living with a pathological gambler places demands on a family, financially, emotionally and socially. Inherent in pathological gambling is dishonesty, manipulation and isolation from loved ones. Family members can be left feeling confused and angry.

Family violence in families where pathological gambling is a factor found explosive anger that is engendered in the family members of pathological gamblers. In the case of pathological gamblers, it is more likely that their family members will be the perpetrator of the violent acts.

Impacts tend to fall disproportionately upon those members of the community who already face disadvantages, such as low income earners, intellectually disabled, sole parents, the unemployed, and members of various ethnic groups, are more likely to experience adverse effects of gambling.

Community and counselling services are the foundation of support for problem gamblers and their families who wish to address gambling and financial issues related to problem

gambling. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal suggests no new measures related to the provision of community and counselling services.

To assist problem gamblers, their families and friends, it is imperative that local services are made accessible through provision of contact details for local services, along with general information about problem gambling.

There are three services offering support to gamblers and their families in the local LGA:

1. Gamblers Anonymous

- Meets on Tuesday evenings at 7.00pm at Salvation Army, 188 Edward Street, Wagga Wagga
- 12 step support group for gamblers only
- Free Service

2. Best Bets

- 41 Trail Street, Wagga Wagga
- Auspiced by Wagga Family Support
- Funded by the NSW Government from the Casino Community Benefit Fund
- Established five years ago
- 8.00am - 5.30pm Monday to Thursday
- 8.00am - 12.00pm Friday
- Free service to problem gamblers and their families
- Staff: 2 x full time Gambling Counsellors and 1 full time Financial Counsellor
- Free service to problem gamblers and their families living in the Riverina Region (including Wagga Wagga, Griffith, Narrandera, Leeton, Tumut, Temora, Young and surrounding districts)

3. The Riverina Gambling Service

- Auspiced by Mission Australia, Fitzmaurice Street Wagga Wagga
- Funded by the NSW Government from the Casino Community Benefit Fund
- Established five years ago
- Staff: 2
- Clients: Funded to deliver services for 110 people
- 8.30am - 5.00pm Monday to Friday
- Offers a free service to Individuals, families and their friends
- Staff: 2
- Clients funded to deliver services to 110 people
- Offers a free service to individuals, families and their friends in the Riverina Region, and delivers services to individuals in Correctional Centres who experience problems with gambling.

Services have experienced a dramatic increase in demand for their services since they commenced operation. Their work is made more complex due to the hidden nature of problem gambling in the community and the rapid diversification of the gaming industry over the past decade.

Wagga Wagga City Council would support:

- a) A review of services including the service mix, service delivery areas, strategies for meeting the needs of isolated communities and the level of service that is required by the community.
- b) A review of CDSE programs and projects and assessment of their capacity to address harm minimisation in relation to problem gambling.
- c) Consideration of a coordinated approach to counselling and community services in NSW that are designed to meet the needs of problem gamblers and their families, including the provision of services under a single service name for the whole of NSW, easing the problem associated with promoting the availability of a service in localised areas.

Minimising Harm to the problem gambler in gaming environments:

The review suggests the use of "Circuit-breakers", liquidity controls and technical measures to address the problems associated with problem gambling in gaming environments. The measures proposed could potentially have a positive impact on the gambling behaviour of problem gamblers. Problem gamblers often self-report about moments when having taken a break from a gaming session, allowing for the capacity for personal insight and informed choice to guide their gambling behaviour. Circuit-breakers, may assist gamblers who wish to control, cutback or stop their gambling behaviour, but may have little effect on those who do not see a problem with their gambling behaviour.

The financial impact of problem gambling can potentially be slowed by liquidity controls in the gaming environment - by simply slowing down the loss rate by regulating the amount gambled and the speed at which money may be gambled. The introduction of a 'pre-commitment' or 'smart card' would be supported, however, the smart-card may act to encourage problem gamblers to play at a number of venues for a number of sessions over a given time period, in order to get around the problem of setting gambling limits.

Harm minimisation through promotional restrictions and information provision for gamblers:

The role of advertising in encouraging gamblers is significant, and tighter controls should be adopted. Advertising should present a realistic view of gaming odds, including a disclosure by gambling providers of the true value of prize payouts and the true odds of winning.

It is noted that the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal proposes regulation of alcohol and other refreshments to gamblers and would support further research to identify the extent and impact of inducements and subsidies used by the gaming industry, including provision of alcohol and other refreshments.

Concerns have been expressed locally about gambling providers offering food to gamblers at a local club and free transport to and from home. For a problem gambler, the supply of food in the gaming area removes the requirement to leave in order to eat. The food provision enables the problem gambler to remain in the playing area and continue with the gaming session. Transport to and from the venue increases accessibility to gaming machines and links home and the venue closer.

Conclusion:

The State Government has a responsibility to provide clear legislation, policy and appropriate community resources to minimise the impact of problem gambling on individuals, families and the broader community. The considered management of gambling products and practices, including the gambling environment itself requires regulation by a nominated independent regulatory body.

Wagga Wagga City Council would support the measures outlined by the Independent Pricing Tribunal and would welcome additional measures to support individual problem gamblers, their families and their friends through gambling and financial counselling and provision of information about the nature of problem gambling and services available members of the community.

The gaming industry in Australia occupies a prominent position in the leisure market, offering for many fun and excitement. For more vulnerable members of the community, the gaming industry represents a threat to their ability to meet their most basic human needs and the needs of their families and friends. This is heightened with the fact that the availability across the community has grown to not only central clubs and pubs but to more neighbourhood based venues. Although gaming machines are not higher than the state average across the Local Government Area this now offers a diversity of gambling market options and attracts families and younger people who previously did not frequent traditional club operated gaming areas.