

**K .Whether there are any other matters necessary to satisfactorily resolve the matters set out in paragraphs A to J, above.**

Some General Thoughts: These Underpin My Concerns About the Crown Casino Issues.

Community concern about poker machines generally is unable to be ignored now. Poker machine damage affects people and families but also it causes fragility and instability to other businesses eg retail. Individuals and groups are increasingly calling for poker machines to be closed permanently both in Victoria and in other states of Australia, to stop the rise of mental ill-health, to help to strengthen businesses and our job market, but also because it is now better understood that poker machines as products cannot be made “safe” enough for normal people to use. Research has also shown that gambling venue staff cannot reliably intervene to stop people from gambling, despite claims to the contrary. Poker machines are not the “harmless recreation for most people” that they are presented to be. Indeed, ALL citizens are adversely impacted by pokies either directly or in directly.

I have experienced the huge loss that occurs, from pokies. The family misery is devastating. The loss to the communities, the retail sectors and citizens is no longer able to be easily hidden. Until now citizens have misunderstood the fact that governments have a net loss from poker machines. The public mostly believed that pokies ‘had to be’ part of our economy. That was misleading information broadcast to support poker machine promoters and politicians who sought poker machine industry funding for support of their political parties. Coupled with that, gambling addiction was the “secret addiction” so harmed gamblers have always been hard to spot, even by their own close loved ones and families. Family members suicide before they are discovered to be gambling addicts. It is true that Australia has a very inadequate regulatory and consumer protection framework that is supposedly effective for gambler protection, but which in fact is possibly most flawed.

The poker machine gambling industry is a huge “all cash – no proof” industry effectively. Venue-reported machine takings are known to be able to be “fiddled” despite regulation. Because a mandatory ID card with consumer safety tools such as a transaction record is not required to gamble on pokies, no reliable count of gambling patrons nor their individual spending on poker machines per venue exists. Damage and harm to poker machine gambling consumers cannot and never has been reliably quantified because the full cohort at any time has never been counted. Yet the gambling industry and the VCGLR purports to assess social and economic impacts of poker machines? Upon whom? Not the individual gamblers and their families and that obvious deficit should be considered.

Our figures about poker machine spending and who spends how much are fabricated upon claims made by gamblers. A noted group of liars as was amply shown in the Household Expenditure Surveys of the early 2000’s. Gamblers vastly understated their losses on poker machines, so frankly how can assumptions be made now when the same lack of reliable data exists in the 2020-21 era? Indeed, the lack of accurate data that underpins our supposed understandings about poker machines are a mockery of justice.

In 2008 in Tasmania the Household Expenditure Survey PROVED that gamblers LIE and under-estimate their pokies spending. Yet we have for at least 30 years, used self-confession of gambling addicts as a research basis to assess impacts and costs of pokies? From the Tasmanian Study: Is this proof enough that the VCGLR is NOT checking enough?

“Unfortunately the HES is unreliable when it comes to analysing gambling expenditure as it severely underestimates average gambling expenditure. Under reporting basically arises from the self-reporting nature of the HES.”[p116, Social and Eco. Impact Study into Gambling TAS – by SA Centre Eco Studies, Flinders Uni. June 2008]

It is hard to believe that any consumer who buys a new electric iron is given more safety protection than a poker machine gambling consumer who receives no written warnings about the product he is about to use, no mandatory receipt for his spending on poker machines; not even a mandatory personal "gambler ID registration card", that online sports gamblers must already use, by law, to gamble online in Australia. Online gamblers get a host of safety tools and warnings and addiction advice handed directly to them. Yet land-based poker machine venue staff pretend to be able to protect pokies gamblers better? How? Those same venue staff have stated how near impossible it is to intervene with a gambler.

When will supposed suggestions of the gambling industry be seen for what they are? They are attempts to deflect from the obvious. That is that our current poker machine gambling regulations are not working effectively in all of Victoria.

It is my firm belief that Registration of ALL poker machine gamblers must be achieved at a minimum. Preferably, Casino gambler licencing such as is used effectively in Singapore, should be introduced by law to keep gamblers safe, particularly poker machine gamblers who currently can spend thousands of dollars daily, at huge community loss, on an inherently unsafe gambling product, without full knowledge of exactly how much they have spent.

I reached this conclusion based upon my own knowledge and my gambling addiction experience. We are told that the ones most affected have the insights closest to the truth, but nobody has listened since my first call via my VIC MP Robin Cooper in 2003.

What disgusts me is that Mr Chris Freethy of the Bentleigh Bayside Community Health Service told Mr Banks of the Productivity Commission on the 25/08/1999 the following.

**"MR FREETHY:** Can we talk about the smart cards for a minute. We are in favour, as Kathy said, of the introduction of smart cards linked to enhance technology for all gambling consumers, not just those with a problem, but it's probably particularly important for those who participate in the more continuous forms of gambling, such as electronic gaming machines. It's our belief that all players should be required to consciously choose to participate in gambling activities through your smart card and be able to receive a number of harm minimisation and consumer protection measures by this means. So we're agreeing with the gambling industry that gambling participation should be a free choice, but - unlike the industry, I guess - we believe that at present gambling participation is not a sufficiently informed choice and does lack adequate consumer protection measures." [Productivity Commission VIC Transcript of Hearings, Banks,1108J / 25/08/1999]

So why was this excellent safety idea ignored? When it was reliably given by an expert and has been backed up by gambling addicts – and yes – also makes logical sense?

This situation where poker machine gamblers cannot receive a mandatory transaction record of all of their pokies spending, is no longer acceptable. If poker machine gamblers refused to buy a licence, then they should not gamble. But to allow gamblers to spend so much cash money without effective proof of spending is unforgivable in consumer justice terms. It should NOT be an OPTIONAL choice to know what any high-spending consumer is spending or losing. A consumer should know it precisely or he should not gamble. Poker machine gamblers must accept responsibility for the losses they cause to themselves, their families and all other citizens who must make up for the losses that they all cause for governments and taxpayers.

The negative impact of poker machines upon jobs and business viability was already serious but now in the Covid-19 era the approval of the Crown Casino's right to engage in the business of gambling, without increased safety and regulatory changes, would be a most misguided step in my opinion, based upon research reports from other jurisdictions eg Tasmania, New Zealand and the USA where loss of jobs has been directly related to availability of EGM's. Provision of jobs is now and should be a top priority, way over enabling Victorian poker machine gamblers to lose yet more money on poker machines.

One very worrying fallout of the presence of pokies is the fact that an amazing number of jobs are killed annually because pokies kill more jobs than they create. Various estimates have been given but a reasonable rule of thumb, though likely to be conservative, is that every single poker machine will kill one job per year, in Australia. That equates to about 2682 jobs annually, from Crown Casino's 2682 pokies, alone. How can Victoria afford to lose 2682 jobs annually, especially when the number is likely to grow yet higher, if gambling rates continue to escalate?

Another way of estimating pokies' destruction of jobs is calculated on pokies spending rates. It is often estimated that every \$1 million spent on pokies will give up to 3 pokies-connected jobs, but if that same \$1 million were spent in shops and businesses, up to 20 new jobs could be created. The estimated job losses by running pokies using either method outlined, is usually similar. But Crown pokies have a much higher loss rate per machine annually [Approx \$168 / EGM], than other pokies [\$102/EGM] so the "annual job loss per machine" figures are likely skewed. Crown Casino loses about \$450million annually via poker machines. For the sake of an estimated 1350 pokies-related jobs at Crown, about 5,400 jobs may be actually lost annually in Victoria, entirely because of Crown pokies. Those figures are alarming. We need strong research to find out the correct calculations. Nobody is doing it, it seems?

The Australian Retailers' Association stated in 2010 that if pokies were shut down, that we could halve our national unemployment if that money were spent in retail businesses. Australia has 200,000 pokies. So are we losing 200,000 jobs annually in Australia? Such estimates are ignored. Our government regulators ignore the obvious red flags that we should be researching. Our people are crunching. Our regions are especially fragile. Shops are frequently closing. Jobs are scarce. Our local councils see the heartache of pokies, daily. They witness the damage at the coalface. I feel so sorry for our local councils who try to do the right thing and stop pokies expansion.

The federal and state governments all know about this destruction of jobs. They know that pokies bring NET LOSS to both state and federal governments. Yet we must suffer such misleading comments as these from Ross Ferrar, a gambling industry executive, without any correction from our governments? When we KNOW the information was WRONG?

*"When the anti-gambling activists drive off down the pokies-funded road to drop their kids at the pokies-funded school and when they have to visit the pokies-funded hospital, I hope they remember that government revenue from gambling benefits all Australians, whether they like poker machines or not." [ROSS FERRAR - [https://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/gamblingnews\\_30082018](https://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/gamblingnews_30082018)*

[The Alliance of Gambling Reform's deputy chair Allison Keogh was quoted citing a recent study showing the total NET LOSS or social cost of gambling harm was estimated to be almost \$7 billion a year in Victoria alone. Ross Ferrar was wildly WRONG.

The Victorian Government knows that despite the extra money that pokies taxes bring initially, that \$billions more are lost annually overall. Taxpayers must find that money extra. It means far less money can go to regional infrastructure for example, so society loses! The running of pokies is a travesty of justice. Now, after Covid19, it is imperative that the young are given decent work career opportunities, but if the federal and state governments get rid of pokies, they will also lose the donations that fund their parties!! THAT is irresponsible, to put politicians' jobs before citizen life chance, as well as mental health safety! Local governments must be very frustrated. However citizens are not told the truth! Who knew?

Although there are references to proposed "reforms" within the poker machine gambling sector eg \$1 bets, earlier closing, these reforms are not the basic reforms that are required to keep gamblers safe. They can also allay concerns about the dangers of poker machines as they are relatively innocuous. Such "reforms" are singly limited in scope and all must be used together to create safe gambling environments. However, reforms have not eventuated, not even a mandatory pre-commitment card for gamblers, when "optional" pre-commitment has been proven "not to work". Pre-commitment must be mandatory to be effective. We know that now. The poker machine gambling industry and Crown especially refuses to be transparent about the ID / Pre-commitment card issue, no doubt as currently, the government cannot easily check on Crown's declared figures. Without "mandatory reporting" of consumer spending per venue, only Crown Casino knows its pokies' takings.

An obvious inclusion in the suite of gambling reforms to reduce the harm of poker machines should be to register and levy every new gambler with a paid-for gambling licence, like we do for our drivers. It would be a strong reform and is thus unpopular. The gambling industry is fearful of introducing any "TOTAL" reform because now, without having any external count of exact takings for Crown, per gambler per day, any pokies takings figures may be fudged.

Machine technicians especially are believed to fudge machine reader meters. It probably happens in some of our local venues also. It should be better questioned, especially at Crown with 2682 EGM's.. Despite almost 30 years of gambling harms in VIC with a heavy accent on "community safety" being touted, nothing has changed essentially. There is something radically wrong with that aspect. It is inexcusable. Local governments and Australian taxpayers bear the brunt of those community financial losses.

Nobody needs to be using pokies at 3am, least of all the addicts who comprise around 90% of patrons at those times. Late-night pokies dens are sad. Addicts are sadder. I lost count of my hopeless, rabid over-spending on poker machines. Driving home exhausted, I would often be in tears. So would Crown gamblers I expect.

Local governments are the human face of government for most people. I see how hard our council staff work to try to improve our communities. They are dedicated and caring people who fight tooth and nail with too little support, to protect local citizens. A recent ABC article asked for local Gippslanders' opinions about venues being closed. The support to keep them shut was overwhelming. That one article had around 900 "likes" and comments. A significant reaction. Why are such outpourings of public grief over pokies ignored by state governments? Those readers were all worried and concerned Victorian citizens.

We all need to see a visible sense of leadership to combat the harms of poker machines and without proper local government support and influence, I doubt we will ever see it. State government, the VCGLR and gambling industry representatives are doing nothing to keep citizens safe from poker machine harms apart from raising red herrings to make it look like something is "about to happen". Meanwhile we get more poker machines in Victoria? We also hear of the poor regulation of Crown Casino? Finally in 2021? **We must do better.**  
[Ms Elizabeth [ Libby] Mitchell]

