

THE AUSTRALIAN

Victorian royal commission into Crown casino seeks public submissions on problem gambling crime

By LACHLAN MOFFET GRAY, JOURNALIST

6:42PM MARCH 29, 2021 • 2 COMMENTS

Gambling reform campaigner Reverend Tim Costello is urging people who have experienced “gambling harm” at Crown Melbourne due to alleged “predatory” tactics to come forward and tell their story to a Victorian royal commission.

It comes after the commission, which is investigating whether the James Packer-backed Crown Resorts is suitable to continue operating the 26 year-old casino, said on Monday it was inviting public submissions, particularly on issues” concerning problem gambling, and criminal activity and influence at the Melbourne casino”.

Mr Costello, who is chief of The Alliance for Gambling Reform, said that, ever since Crown Melbourne had opened in 1994, he had heard stories of “predatory operations” by management to encourage gambling.

“Ever since Crown opened people have called, emailed and approached me, sometimes Crown staff themselves, to tell me about what can only be called predatory operations at that casino, which have led to people experiencing gambling harm,” Mr Costello said on Monday.

“I’m talking about allegations from free drinks and parking, through to failing to prevent the entry to the casino of people who have taken the steps to self-exclude from gambling there.

“Then there are the exploitative busloads of people, often vulnerable members of our communities, being brought into Crown to gamble. Crown doesn’t do that out of the goodness of their hearts, it’s because these people lose money there and they profit from that.”

The \$10m royal commission, headed by former Federal Court judge Raymond Finkelstein QC, gathered for its first hearing in Melbourne [last Wednesday](#).

6/28/2021

Victorian royal commission into Crown casino seeks public submissions on problem gambling crime

Mr Finkelstein outlined the terms of reference and said he was not interested in retreading issues raised during the NSW Bergin inquiry into Crown Resorts, which ultimately found that the James Packer-backed company was not suitable to operate its \$2.2bn Sydney casino.

Mr Finkelstein said he was more concerned with the process of Crown executive chairman Helen Coonan's [reform agenda](#) as well contemporary instances of criminal activity that may be occurring in Crown Melbourne.

But Mr Finkelstein also said a primary concern was an issue with the company that has managed until now to escape regulatory scrutiny: "The manner in which it (Crown) deals with gambling addiction."

The commission can examine the issue under [the broad powers afforded to it in chapter D](#) of the terms of reference, which asks whether it is in the public interest for Crown Resorts to continue to hold a casino licence in the state.

"There are over 300,000 Australians who have problems with their gambling," Mr Finkelstein said last Wednesday.

"Gambling addicts are estimated to account for one-third of the total expenditure on gambling. That is around \$3.5 billion a year. The impact of this problem gambling is widespread. It affects not only the gambler but the gambler's family, employers and unrelated third parties."

Mr Costello said the Alliance for Gambling Reform would also make a submission and said he hoped other organisations that worked in areas intersecting with gambling harm would do the same, noting the impact gaming addiction could have on families.

"Then there are the family members of people who have experienced harm at Crown who also deserve the chance to share their experiences," he said.

"Unfortunately some of the family members they will be speaking on behalf of are no longer with us due to how dangerous their harm became.

"I'm so pleased Commissioner Finkelstein has opened up the royal commission to hearing about this. It all goes to whether Crown deserves to have a casino licence, which is a privilege."

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, a state statutory authority which says its vision is to see a "A Victoria free from gambling related harm" told The Australian it was "considering

6/28/2021

Victorian royal commission into Crown casino seeks public submissions on problem gambling crime

making a submission to the royal commission.”

On Monday Mr Finkelstein asked members of the public to make a submission.

“I urge interested members of the public to express their views and share their experiences on matters that will help the commission, by making a submission,” he said.

“The work of the royal commission is important to the fabric of our society and I am keen to hear directly from people with experience relevant to the work we are undertaking.”

The commission will accept public submissions until 4pm on April 26.

The increasing scrutiny on Crown’s operations and how it handles problem gamblers comes as the company faces another royal commission in Western Australia which will also examine the suitability of Crown in regards to its licence to [operate its casino in Perth](#).

The company is also examining an [“opportunistic bid”](#) from US private equity firm Blackstone, which is offering \$8bn, or \$11.85 a share for the company.

Crown Resorts closed at \$11.80 on Monday, up 0.8 per cent.

LACHLAN MOFFET GRAY, JOURNALIST

Lachlan Moffet Gray is a journalist at The Australian. He is studying law and communications at UTS and has previously worked in radio and the advisory industry. You can contact him at [moffetgrayl@theaustralian...](mailto:moffetgrayl@theaustralian.com.au) [Read more](#)