

Submission to the Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Future Gaming Markets

Men's Resources Tasmania Inc. is a community based, not-for-profit organisation that supports and promotes the wellbeing of men and boys in Tasmania. We contribute a male voice to community conversations and public sector policy, particularly around social, health and wellbeing issues relevant to men. We operate primarily through volunteer involvement, with some support from member organisations. Please find more information about MRT in the attached flyer.

We currently have around twenty individual members and six organisational members, along with over one hundred associate members from across the wider community.

Men's Resources Tasmania (MRT) calls on the Tasmanian Government to:

1. Remove poker machines from hotels and clubs in Tasmania.
2. Not increase the number of poker machines in the casinos and to impose on the machines in the casinos a maximum \$1 bet limit and a system that requires people to set an enforceable limit on their losses. Further, for it to be mandatory for staff to intervene where customers may be experiencing harm from poker machines.
3. Continue counseling and other support services for those harmed by gambling.
4. Support hotels and clubs that currently have poker machines to transition their business model.

MRT is a participating member of the Community Voice on Pokies Reform, and also supports their submission to this inquiry.

We believe the above requests are a legitimate call for change, and urge government to take the above action for the following reasons:

- The impacts of gambling on increases to family violence.
- The impacts of gambling in child safety.
- The impacts of gambling to suicidal ideation and suicide.
- The impacts of gambling on community wellbeing.

The detrimental affects of gambling addiction including increased risk of family violence by people addicted to gambling as demonstrated by Markham, Doran and Young (2016).¹

¹ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953616302891>

The Tasmanian Governments current efforts to improve child safety and wellbeing provide reason for removing poker machines from local clubs and hotels. Child health and wellbeing requires the whole community to play a role and take responsibility. The Tasmanian Government is asking the wider community and for community and health services to taker greater responsibility for the broader welfare of our children, and to not be too focused on our immediate area of work or involvement. It is up to the Government who have the task of setting the law and governing on behalf of the whole community, to play its role, and to guard the future of young Tasmanians, and to prevent the damage done to families by poker machines.

Various reports and programs have demonstrated recently the addictive nature of poker machines, and how they are programed to addict people; to give the illusion of winning even when they are loosing; and to keep people engaged in the machine and distracted from their surroundings. It is up to government to act on behalf of the people and to protect the community from harms.

As an organisation working to support men and boys in particular, we want to point out the study by Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation² that shows Men gamble more often, with more money and are at greater risk of developing gambling problems than women. Men rarely rate special mention in these sorts of discussions. In gender analyses' of various issues, men are often seen as perpetrators rather than victims. We believe men are entitled to consideration, support and understanding of the negative impacts they specifically experience.

The links between suicide and poker machine use appear to be strong. A Victorian Study released in 2010 states:

- Results highlighted that 27.06% of problem gamblers and 6.07% of moderate risk gamblers considered taking their own life in the past year and respectively, 15.17% and 3.46% said their gambling led them to do something that is technically against the law.³
- Another more recent study also found similar rates of suicide contemplation. This suicidal ideation is across both genders, and is important no matter what gender. With men accounting for 75% of suicides, this is why MRT wishes to highlight this issue. Suicide is such a significant issue for men, with so little reduction in numbers despite decades of effort from governments, a new approach needs to be taken. Reducing the impacts of harmful devices and activities such as poker machines in the community is well worth doing.
- 400 suicides per year are attributed to gambling in Australia⁴.

That last statistic is unacceptable. We as a community cannot allow a few people to profit from addictive poker machines. As a community we cannot allow our Government to rely on taxes taken from the gambling industry to fund other activities.

Applying the Victorian research to the Tasmanian context suggests that 27% of problem gamblers(2500) in Tasmania equates to 625 people contemplating suicide as a result of problem gambling.

² <https://www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/2014/gender-gap-highlighted-in-new-gambling-study>

³ https://www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/4027/A-study-of-gambling-in-Victoria-PRINT-Sept-10.pdf

⁴ http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/the_damage_done

Some further information about suicide in Tasmania:

- 78% of known suicides in Tasmania in 2015 were by men and boys
- The economic cost of suicide by males in Tasmania is estimated to be \$402 Million⁵

We have written here about the links between suicide and poker machine use. It is not hard to also see the correlation and potential impact of poker machine use and family violence or other criminal activities.

Removing poker machines from local community pubs and clubs can potentially assist some families to avoid the many and varied issues that poker machines can create. Supporting local families to avoid financial difficulty through poker machine use and addiction is not only good for them, but also good for the wider community. Money currently spent in poker machines, and funneled to the owners of the venue – which only accounts for 6% of the spend, to government (20% of the spend approximately) and ultimately the owners of the machines could be better spent.

That money could be spend at the same local venues but on food, or in other local entertainment venues such as café's, music and arts events, outdoor recreation activities, sport for children and the local grocery shops. This would be providing more money for spending in the local economy and community, used for health giving activities rather than gambling.

We would like to have been able to provide a more comprehensive and finely tuned report. As an unfunded community organisation with no paid staff our time and capacity is very limited. We hope however that the Committee deeply considers the points made in this paper, and makes favourable recommendations to benefit the whole community.

We urge strong and courageous action by the Tasmanian Government to stand up for the needs and clearly articulated desires of the broader Tasmanian community, to see the removal of poker machines from local clubs, pubs and hotels.

Thanks for your consideration.



Jonathan Bedloe

Chair
Men's Resources Tasmania

⁵ <https://stopmalesuicide.com/2016/06/09/australias-gender-suicide-gap/>