

The Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets
Parliament of Tasmania
Parliament House
HOBART TAS 7000

Monday 27 February 2017.

Dear Secretary

I write with our response to the Committee's request for further information about gambling related suicide.

In our submission we cited a Productivity Commission report from 2010 to suggest that 400 suicides a year are considered attributable to gambling. Your request was for a further breakdown of gambling related suicide, to determine suicide linked with Poker Machines. Details on the type of gambling used by people who suicide was not able to be identified in the Productivity Commission report.

We cited an online article called **The Damage Done** from The Alliance for Gambling Reform, which incorrectly cited the 2010 Productivity Commission report. It should have cited the 1999 Report.

In correspondence with the Alliance for Gambling Reform, we sought clarification on this issue. The following information has been provided.

The estimate of 400 suicides per annum is based on work done at the Alfred Psych Unit in 2005. That study found that 17.8% of those presenting after a suicide attempt had significant gambling related problems. Subsequent work (a 2011 report) found a similar pattern among patients presenting for assessment by the CATT team (i.e., given that this is a public mental health facility, people experiencing severe psychological issues).

The number of known suicides in Australia in 2015 was 3,027. 17.8% of that would be 515 people.

In addition, the following is information from the 1999 Productivity Commission report:

"Around half of those with at least moderate gambling problems* say they have suffered depression as a result of gambling. And about 9 per cent of problem gamblers (and 60 percent of those in counseling) report that they have seriously thought about suicide because of their gambling. It is estimated that there are between 50 and 400 suicides linked to gambling each year."

(*Emphasis added by MRT)

While this information does not provide the detail we were looking for, I believe there is good reason to consider Poker Machines as playing a potentially significant role in suicide and suicidal ideation. At the time of the 1999 Productivity Commission report, online gambling was considerably less prevalent than today, and Poker Machines were far more accessible in communities, where casinos and other forms of gambling were not present.

We have however found other compelling information that relates to the impact of Poker Machines.

In a report from the Victorian Coroners Court, The Coroners Prevention Unit, searched that state's suicide register and the National Coroners' Information system for suicides in which compulsive gambling was identified as a factor. Their report ***Gambling-related suicides Victoria 2000-2012***,ⁱⁱ states:

“The Coroners Prevention Unit (CPU) could not identify the type of gambling in which the deceased engaged, in 105 (82.0%) of the 128 deaths. For the remaining 23 deaths the primary identified type of gambling was: - ***Poker machines in 19 deaths****. - TAB gambling in two deaths. - Online gambling in one death. - Roulette in one death.ⁱⁱⁱ (*Emphasis added by MRT)

An article on the ABC website cites the same study to say, that 85% of the victims were men aged 30 to 49 and that poker machines were the biggest problem.^{iv}

Another article on the SBS news website^v, also cites the Victorian Coroners Report and links the failure of gambling venues to intervene with problem gamblers when they can see problems arising, again links to suicidal outcomes.

MRT is not aware of evidence of the interventions made by the Gambling industry with problem gamblers.

The Social Action Research Centre states that there is no evidence that people who gamble on Poker Machines would move to online gambling. While the Tasmanian government does not have the same control over the internet, and the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry do not include Online Gambling, this Committee and the Tasmanian Government is in a position to make decisions that dictate the availability of Poker Machines in the Tasmanian community, and the associated harm that clearly arises.

It is our understanding that the Committee has heard evidence that men constitute a majority of problem gamblers. We know that men also account for 75% of suicides in Australia. The Committee has heard from the Gambling Industry that rural communities and small towns lack sufficient activities and that Poker Machines provide a suitable outlet. Rural communities deserve support and a strong voice from their politicians and community leaders to ensure that there are safe recreational or entertainment options. Entertainment options that risk the wellbeing of individuals, as well as their families and communities should be removed.

Men's Resources Tasmania urges the government and wider community to value men, and to take a stand to protect all problem gamblers, including men, from harms clearly felt thanks to the addictive nature of Poker Machines.

The Federal Group has recently won national tourism awards for properties that do not include poker machines. A clear demonstration that they do not need to rely on income from machines designed to be addictive, machines that do tremendous harm in our community.

Once again, we thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide further evidence to the inquiry, and look forward to a report that make recommendations in the best interests of everyone in the Tasmanian community.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Bedloe', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Jonathan Bedloe
President
Men's Resources Tasmania

ⁱ Productivity Commission 1999, Australia's Gambling Industries Inquiry Report November 1999 p. 7.14

ⁱⁱ <http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/resources/64095dbc-321c-42e4-8f75-01a8d201c062/cpu+data+summary+-+gambling+related+suicides+-+10+sep+2013.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/resources/64095dbc-321c-42e4-8f75-01a8d201c062/cpu+data+summary+-+gambling+related+suicides+-+10+sep+2013.pdf>

^{iv} <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-20/problem-gambling-linked-to-130-deaths-in-victoria/4970772>

^v <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2013/10/09/exposing-links-between-gambling-and-suicide>