

Item 3.3**State Government Action on Gambling Harm****File No: S051491****Minute by the Lord Mayor**

To Council:

For too long, successive State Governments have been addicted to the proceeds of gambling and let the industry expand unchecked to a point where we have shocking rates of gambling harm and numerous inquiries finding the industry supports organised crime.

I have a long history of opposing the proliferation of gambling in this state, including the establishment of Sydney's first casino at Pyrmont.

In 1992, as Member for Bligh in the NSW Parliament, I opposed the Casino Control Bill because it would provide an outlet for criminals to pursue illegal practices and cause further harm to gamblers and their families. My concerns were vindicated by the recent Bell inquiry into the Star, which found evidence of money laundering, organised crime, fraud and foreign interference, concluding that it is unsuitable to hold a casino licence.

In 1999, I called on the Government to strengthen its so-called "Responsible Gambling" Bill, asking:

What does a bill that has in its title the term "responsible gambling" reflect of our social values? Where have we arrived as a society when governments sell assets which generate revenue to provide better services and instead raise revenue through the misery and exploitation of its citizens—the problem gamblers?

In 2003, I opposed the Gaming Machines Amendment (Shutdown Periods) Bill which sought to water down a range of gambling harm minimisation measures introduced just two years earlier.

And now here we are – three decades later – and the State Government is stuck in the same cycle of increasing revenue raising opportunities for gaming venues and itself, while occasionally conceding that something must be done to mitigate the devastation gambling causes within our communities.

I am now calling on Councillors to support the latest gambling harm minimisation initiative by Independent members of the Legislative Assembly cross bench, Alex Greenwich, Greg Piper and Dr Joe McGirr.

As they state in their open letter to the Premier calling for a Special Commission of Inquiry into Gambling Harm:

Data from the NSW Gambling Survey and the Productivity Commission show that 3.8 percent of all adults in this state are either problem gamblers or at risk, and together they represent up to 75 per cent of electronic gaming machine spending. Harm minimisation experts have reported countless examples of clubs and hotels knowingly allowing, or at times encouraging, problem gamblers to use electronic gaming machines in their venues.

Here are some more sobering statistics:

- With more than 86,000 gaming machines, NSW has more gaming machines than any other place in the world aside from Nevada.
- Around \$95 billion is gambled through gaming machines across NSW each year, including billions of dollars in proceeds of crime.
- While gamblers in the City of Sydney lost \$282 million in 2021, the highest losses were sustained in council areas where residents can least afford it – \$562 million in Canterbury Bankstown, \$527 million in Fairfield and \$356 million in Cumberland.

Although this should be more than enough to illustrate how harmful gaming machines are in our communities, we can't lose sight of the fact that behind these high-level statistics are real people's lives, in ruin. Studies repeatedly highlight the link between gambling and suicide, bankruptcy and criminal behaviour, including family violence.

Unlike many countries, Australia does not limit gaming machines to casinos and betting shops, but instead permits them in hotels, clubs and pubs. Gaming machines are everywhere. The role of successive State Governments in enabling this harm is indisputable, and it is incumbent upon the current State Government to fix it.

Gambling harm minimisation experts and the NSW Crime Commission say that the only way to reduce harm from gambling habits and organised crime is to introduce a mandatory cashless gaming card. The one card would have built-in harm reductions like restrictions on losses and hours played, traceable expenditure, universal to all venues and linked to a state-wide exclusion register. Currently people seeking to control their gambling habit must register venue by venue and then rely on staff in each venue to recognise them to deny them entry. I also support experts' calls to turn gaming machines off after midnight because that is when most harm is done.

In addition, councils have been excluded from making submissions to, or appealing decisions made by, the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority about gaming machines in their local government area, even though we are the level of government closest to the people. We should have a right of submission and appeal.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note:
- (i) 3.8 per cent of all adults in NSW are either problem gamblers or at risk, and together they represent up to 75 per cent of electronic gaming machine spending;
 - (ii) with more than 86,000 gaming machines, NSW has more gaming machines than any other place in the world aside from Nevada;
 - (iii) around \$95 billion is gambled through gaming machines across NSW each year, including billions of dollars in proceeds of crime; and
 - (iv) while gamblers in the City of Sydney lost \$282 million in 2021, the highest losses were sustained in council areas where residents can least afford it, including \$562 million in Canterbury Bankstown, \$527 million in Fairfield and \$356 million in Cumberland; and
- (B) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the NSW Premier and Opposition Leader calling on them to:
- (i) take immediate action to reduce the harm caused by the proliferation of gambling machines including by:
 - (a) introducing a mandatory cashless gaming card scheme;
 - (b) establishing a state-wide exclusion register with management and oversight that is independent of the gambling industry;
 - (c) outlawing the use of gaming machines in hotels, clubs and pubs between 12am and 10am; and
 - (d) restoring the right of councils to make submissions to, and appeal decisions by, the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority about gaming machines in their local government area; and
 - (ii) support a Special Commission of Inquiry into Gambling Harm that examines the influence of the gambling industry over public policy on gambling harm.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor