



Council of Social Service of New South Wales

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GAMBLING POLICIES NOT TOUGH ENOUGH

NCOSS has called for a tougher approach to gambling reform. In releasing a 6 point plan for reform of gambling regulation NCOSS has also called for a bilateral commitment to reducing the impact of problem gambling.

The statistics make it clear that gambling is a much bigger problem in New South Wales than in any other State of Australia. We spend, per capita, 22% above the national average each year. This requires a strong, long-term approach to regulating the gambling industry and reducing the impact of problem gambling.

Key facts about gambling in New South Wales:

- 41% of net takings from gambling in Australia come from New South Wales, despite the fact that only 34% of Australia's population lives in the State;
- Net takings per capita in New South Wales were \$1,154 in 2000-01, 22% above the national average;
- Poker and gaming machines are the largest contributor to net takings from gambling.
- There are over 2,924 businesses providing gambling activities in New South Wales.

[ABS, 2000-01]

6 Point Plan for Gambling Reform

1. Reduce the numbers of poker machines in New South Wales

While the Government capped poker machine numbers at 104,000 in July 2001, New South Wales still has more poker machines per capita than any other jurisdiction in the world. NCOSS seeks a commitment to a gradual reduction in the cap.

2. Introduce an Independent Gaming Commission

Both the Productivity Commission and the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal have recommended the establishment of an independent regulator to oversee the gambling industry in New South Wales. The circumstances surrounding the departure of the last Minister for Gaming and Racing highlight the need to separate the regulatory function from the political arm of Government.

3. Establish a Gambling Industry Ombudsman

There is currently no mechanism for independent monitoring of gaming industry codes of conduct or for addressing consumer complaints. Given the high risks of inappropriate treatment of problem gamblers, as highlighted through recent court cases, an independent Ombudsman is needed to perform these roles.

4. Improved Social Impact Assessments for new poker machines

The current process for assessing the social impact of proposals for new or expanded poker machine facilities does not give sufficient weight to community interests. The opportunities for participation by local communities are limited and organisations such as NCOSS struggle to respond to lengthy documents prepared by private consultants. The Government should extend the timeframe for response to SIAs, require notification of a broader range of community groups within the local area and provide resources for organisations such as NCOSS to effectively respond to proposals.

5. Uphold the compulsory 6 hour closure of gambling facilities

NCOSS is concerned to see pressure from the hotel and club industries to further water down the compulsory six-hour closure of poker machine facilities announced in July 2001. The Government has already slowed down the introduction of the closure and allowed clubs to seek exemptions on the basis of hardship. Any further weakening of the closure provisions will make them useless.

6. Funding further research and implementing the findings

Research has commenced into the effects of possible technical modifications of gaming machines. Modifications such as reducing the maximum amount of each bet and reducing the maximum number of bets per hour have the potential to reduce the impact of problem gambling. The next Government should continue to fund research into these types of initiatives and commit to implementing measures that are demonstrated to be likely to have an impact.