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CLUBS DEMAND GAMBLING REPORT REMEMBER PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Productivity Commission has today been told that the drastic restrictions it has recommended on poker machines would cost more than 23,000 jobs and decimate the Australian club industry.

ClubsAustralia told a public hearing in Canberra that the draft report into gambling was fundamentally flawed because it had considered only the costs of gambling while ignoring the positives it generates to the economy, such as jobs, infrastructure and 'the social good'. This omission occurs despite the report's terms of reference requiring the Commission to undertake such analysis.

ClubsAustralia President Peter Newell OAM questioned how the Commission could make 41 recommendations, almost all involving poker machines, without first assessing the impact of reduced revenue on club employment, donations to charities, the tourism industry and local economies.

Mr Newell said the report had recommended a system that involved Australians needing to first apply for a gambling license which decided how much people could spend as well as when they could gamble, and where personal responsibility no longer existed.

"The Commission spent the best part of a year producing a draft report that uses the phrase 'personal responsibility' just twice in more than 600 pages.

"This attitude is at odds with I believe the view of the Australian public and also the Australian courts.

"Last week the Victorian Supreme Court found that gamblers must take personal responsibility by utilising the self-help options that already exist such as the ability to formally ban oneself from a venue and a multitude of free counseling services.

"Earlier this year 3 Australian High Court judges issued a judgment warning of what they called "interfering paternalism". The statement was in response to a rejected claim that a hotel was responsible for the death of a motorcyclist who had earlier in the day been drinking at the venue.

"The rate of problem gambling is less than 1% and has been falling year after year for the best part of a decade. That suggests that we have a system that is working very well. Certainly we think it could be strengthened but not by creating a licensing system that punishes the 99% of Australians who gamble responsibly.

"For the last ten years poker machine revenue has been growing by just 1.1% per annum. This is well below inflation and stands in stark contrast to online gambling, which is growing at 25% each year. You would never know these facts by reading the Commission's draft report.

"For reasons that the Commission admits are largely about generating tax revenue, it has recommended liberalising internet laws and even praised the use of credit cards as a constructive way of placing online bets. The laws of common sense are sadly lacking here," Peter Newell said.

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