

## **FEDERAL PARLIAMENT HOUSE ADDRESS NOV 2009 – PETER NEWELL**

- Good evening everybody. I am Peter Newell, President of ClubsAustralia, Chairman of ClubsNSW and Chairman of the Steelers Club in Wollongong.
- Welcome to what we are calling unofficially our first “friends of clubs” dinner at the heart of Australian democracy in Parliament House.
- Thank you especially to Shayne Neumann, Member for Blair and Chair of the ALP social policy caucus committee, and to Jess in his office, and also to Kerry Rea (pronounced Ray), Member for Bonner and Secretary of the committee.
- Every federal electorate has a club employing locals, providing recreation to members and building social and sporting infrastructure and we are pleased to see so many of our elected representatives here tonight. Thank you so much for joining us.
- I would also like to welcome representatives of our not-for-profit clubs from around the country: from NSW, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT. Our club colleagues from Tasmania, Northern Territory and Western Australia could not join us but they are here in spirit.
- And welcome to other important members of our extended club family. Representatives of the RSL, that great organisation that does so much to support returned servicemen and women, protects our traditions and encourages patriotic activity.
- Representatives include National President of the RSL, Rear Admiral Ken Doolan, and the Victorian President, Major General David McLachlan as well as representatives from CabraVale Diggers, Twin Towns, Canterbury-Hurlstone Park RSL, Merrylands RSL, The Richmond Club and the RSL and Services Clubs Association.

- Clubs directly employ 75,000 people in Australia (and mobilise the same number of volunteers). We have a representative here of the industry trade union the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, Tara Moriarty.
- We enjoy a close relationship with the union and pride ourselves on being the best hospitality employers in Australia, as well being a place of recreation for working men and women. We have a number of worker's clubs here tonight, including Revesby Workers, Tradies and the ACT Labor clubs.
- About two-thirds of our clubs are sporting clubs. They have a number of representatives with us tonight, notably John Brady from the National Rugby League, former Australian representative player Steve Mortimer, tonight representing Canterbury Leagues, and David Furner, coach of the Canberra Raiders.
- We also have representatives from the Raiders Group, St George Leagues Club (backer of the mighty St George Illawarra Dragons), Redcliffe Leagues, Ainslie Football Club, Bankstown Sports club and the Leagues Clubs Association.
- Club sporting contributions go well beyond professional sport, to include support for grassroots junior and amateur sport. In NSW alone, clubs provide and maintain sporting infrastructure with a replacement value in excess of \$2 billion.
- This includes more than 1,500 bowling greens, nearly 400 golf courses, more than 150 sporting fields, gymnasiums, swimming pools, tennis courts, as well as funding for uniforms, transport to and from games, and other team needs. And that's only one state.
- Numerous community organisations rely on clubs to sustain their vital work. Clubs provide a social contribution of over \$1.2 billion per year,

with a fair share of this being financial support to the most needy in our community. We welcome Yvonne Cushieri from the Eden-Monaro cancer support group tonight as one recipient of such club support.

- Ethnic communities are also accommodated in club land. Club Marconi and the Hellenic Club are here. We also have numerous religious clubs, including reps tonight from Dooleys Lidcombe Catholic club and the Canberra Southern Cross clubs.
- And finally, we have a representative of a club the politicians here should know very well, Maurice Reilly from the iconic National Press Club.
- So tonight we have represented a movement that is unique in the world – and I use that word advisedly. Four thousand not for profit clubs in Australia, boasting 10 million memberships.
- These clubs support the lifestyles and aspirations of millions of ordinary Australians. They allow people from all walks of life, from all strata of society, to come together, to club together, to pursue a common goal, be it sport, RSL, workers or just being sociable. Clubs are a melting pot of society and we are very proud of our movement.
- We see tonight as an informal opportunity to meet and discuss matters of specific interest to clubs – at times of concern to clubs, of which there are a number at the moment.
- We know our issues may appear to pale alongside the important national issues being debated in this place at the moment, but they are significant issues nonetheless and we're grateful for your time and your consideration.
- Most notably we face the Productivity Commission's Draft Report into Gambling.

- For many years clubs have been at the forefront of debate about implementing the best harm minimisation strategies for gamblers. We introduced an industry code of practice and ClubSafe, a responsible conduct of gambling training program for staff.
- We have worked co-operatively with State and Territory governments on the introduction of a raft of measures, at last count running to some 37 pages. As a result, research conducted by every Australian State and Territory Government has reported dramatic declines in problem gambling over the past 10 years.
- Last year I gave an address at the National Press Club publicly launching ClubsAustralia's six point plan for further addressing problem gambling, which included proposals such as: a ban on credit betting; improved staff training; national accreditation for counselling services; the guaranteed right to family intervention; and harm minimisation for internet gambling. We believe these are affordable, effective measures.
- But the Productivity Commission's report proposes a number of recommendations which would cost clubs billions of dollars to implement, would dramatically reduce revenue and, we believe, would have very little impact on problem gamblers.
- One recommendation alone, which was introduced in Queensland back in 2001 and abandoned 3 days later, caused revenue to drop by an average of 30%.
- The Commission left important questions unanswered by failing to address two of the terms of reference, which required them to quantify the **positives** that come from gambling. We don't know how the Commission can make recommendations without balancing the good that comes from gambling against the downside.
- They also did not assess the cost-benefit or likely effectiveness of measures, so we believe the findings are questionable. It doesn't help

that the Commission appeared to ignore coalface submissions from more than 120 clubs and associations, including many in this room.

- We know it's only a draft report, but we do not expect much change between the draft and final reports. Unfortunately, we do not believe it is a report that sets a foundation for long term decision making. In the short term, it already has caused uncertainty among clubs and forced some to mothball planned developments and delay recruitment of new staff.
- We are deeply concerned about the impact if Government looks to implement the report; the impact on revenue, jobs, contribution to sport, to veterans, to charities and, ultimately, to tax.
- Only yesterday, the Brisbane Courier Mail newspaper reported that if only two of these recommendations were to be implemented, there would be a corresponding drop in Queensland clubs' net profit of between 40 and 60 per cent.
- That would simply render them unviable and force their closure.
- Another recommendation would require Australians who wish to play a gaming machine to be registered and in possession of a card that would limit the amount of time they could spend playing and the amount of money expended. To us, that smacks of a Big Brother approach, rejected by the electorate in its Australia Card context well before today.
- In this regard, it's coincidental that only in the last couple of weeks, five judges of the High Court of Australia - the nation's supreme judicial body - have, without dissent, brought down a landmark judgement in a damages appeal that places clearly in the spotlight the general issue of personal responsibility. Three of those judges saw fit to warn specifically against what they termed "interfering paternalism" with a person's right to freedom of choice in a legal pursuit.

- At ClubsAustralia we continue to emphasise that our clubs are community based organisations that are not for private gain – any surpluses they create do not go into somebody’s hip pocket, nor onto a multinational corporation’s bottom line.
- Nevertheless, we still pay \$2.5 billion per year in tax and while we would *like* to pay less through a generous and unexpected tax cut, we don’t *want* to pay less because our revenues have been devastated.
- ClubsAustralia will continue to make suggestions to reduce problem gambling which are affordable, targeted and effective, without having an impact on the more than 99.2 per cent of people who are able to safely and responsibly enjoy Australia’s unofficial hobby of having a punt.
- In the meantime, enjoy your meal and the company. We thank you for your support and your interest in clubs and wish you happy and safe holidays.

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