

Statement by Heads of Victorian Churches

GAMBLING IS NOT THE SOLUTION

We all sympathize with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, in their search for a solution to their serious financial problems. But we do not believe that it lies in casinos and poker machines.

The solution is not practical

Two recent Public Inquiries, by Mr Xavier Connor and Mr Murray Wilcox on casino and poker machine respectively, have reported that these would immensely increase the need for Police intervention. This would be required at least to check the laundering of money from other criminal activities, associated racketeering and street crime.

Economists of the highest calibre, such as Mr John Sullivan of the Faculty of Economics and Commerce in the University of Melbourne, have claimed that the expense of collecting the revenue from the new gambling could outweigh other financial advantages.

Finally Governments would be passing on their poverty to victims, whose impoverishment from gambling they would have to remedy in the end by welfare payments, once more at the tax-payer's expense.

In particular, both Parties have proposed a 'luxury' casino. This produces a pressure environment that overstimulates gambling; makes the play too unbroken for reflection; and fosters addiction by a very regular, very conspicuous venue (at least as seen through the media).

One Party also proposes to establish 'poor people's casinos', spread far and wide, for all hours of the day, by means of poker machines, no longer reserved for the occasional 'spree across the border'.

The solution is far from attractive to the electorate.

Australians are said to be a nation of gamblers and proud of the title. That price may have been true for an earlier generation, who were prepared to take great but honest risks, and extended this daring to *traditional* gambling, from two-up to horse racing and lotteries.

However, they have recently become more suspicious of much that passes by the name of gambling. This includes all the new and dubious ways of making money quickly, not least through the pressure gambling of casinos and poker-machines, that is a caricature of the *traditional* gambling of the race-course, TAB or Tattsлото.

Letters and articles in the Press have recently made this distrust abundantly clear.

The new gambling solution is not in keeping with the civic code of the country (or what is expected of a decent citizen or group.)

Some people would simply rule out all gambling on this score. Others, however, would check first to see whether the play was fair, whether the money gambled was within the players' means, and whether the players were bringing a cool mind to the game (and not labouring under the highly contrived forms of pressure associated with the new types of gambling).

They would want to know whether the new gambling would provide more opportunities for cheating normal players, defrauding the Government and harming more fragile persons involved.

Would it be more likely to entice the young gambler to risk his or her whole career, in the public service or in business, by a desperate dip into the till, to cover irresponsible betting?

Would fathers or mothers waste more money they needed for their dependants and so, in the long run, create welfare bills for the Government and the rest of us to pay?

Should we not have some concern for the pathological gamblers, who might cope in some measure with the traditional gambling, but not at all with the newer forms?

Not least the public will be disturbed to learn that the newer forms (casino and poker-machines) are threatening even the earlier and more benign TAB and Tattsлото (with their contributions to charities), as these latter threatened the more traditional bookmaking. *They must be wondering where the process will stop.*

The many critical articles and letters in the Press are a serious indication of how the community is thinking: from the Report of the Victorian Heads of Churches (that is completely opposed to the gambling proposals) to the many letters of protest to the Editors.

In summary, we have proposed three tests of the gambling proposals of the two Parties: practicality, attractiveness to the electorate, and accordance with civic values. It seems to us that on all three counts they should be rejected. The careful qualifications by the Leaders show that they are not too comfortable about them; and a highly articulate electorate appears even less so.

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Rev Kingsley Smith, President - Baptist Union of Victoria
Mr Brian White, Conference President - The Conference of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania.
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The Rt Rev David Innes, Moderator of the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria.
The Most Revd Frank Little, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne
Rev Kerrie Graham, Moderator, Uniting Church in Australia (Synod of Victoria) -
The Rt Rev John Stewart - President, Victorian Council of Churches.
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