**Victorian Inter-Church Gambling Taskforce**

**Reining in Pokies Harm**

**Issued July 2014**

*“Surely the venues should have a duty of care. They were allowing her to come in relentlessly and consistently for 10 years…. Even when they see someone going repeatedly to an ATM machine they are not obliged to say something or restrict the use of a machine. Something is very wrong here. There needs to be a sense of accountability for the problem of gambling to be addressed.”*

Tracy Smith from Ballarat, whose sister, Julie, committed suicide due to losses from a pokies addiction.

The Victorian Inter-Church Gambling Taskforce remains concerned at the harms caused by gambling in our community. The harms caused by problem gambling include:

* Suicides;
* Relationship breakdown;
* Bankruptcy;
* Lowered productivity and job loss;
* Depression and anxiety; and
* Crime (especially fraud).

For every person with a gambling problem, the lives of several people will be impacted including dependent children, spouses, anyone in their care, employers and work colleagues.

The pokies industry continues to profit at the expense of vulnerable members of our communities. People with gambling problems are five times more likely to report having poor health compared to non-problem gamblers, with significantly higher rates of depression and anxiety disorders.

**What you can do:**

With the State election approaching, please send polite and respectful letters or e-mails to:

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| The Hon Edward O'Donohue  Minister for Liquor and Gaming Regulation  Level 26, 121 Exhibition Street  Melbourne, Victoria, 3000  E-mail: edward.o'donohue@parliament.vic.gov.au  Salutation: Dear Minister | The Hon Martin Pakula  Shadow Minister for Gaming and Racing  Suite 3, 387-389 Springvale Road  Springvale, Victoria, 3171  E-mail: martin.pakula@parliament.vic.gov.au  Salutation: Dear Mr Pakula |

Points to make in your letters:

* Express deep concern regarding the harms gambling, especially the pokies, continue to cause in our community, pointing out the last measure of problem gambling in Victoria found around 29,000 adults had gambling problems.
* Ask they commit to supporting the introduction of the following measures to reduce pokies related harm in our communities:
  + Introduce a bet limit of $1 per button push on the pokies.
  + Reducing operating hours for the pokie areas in venues to being between 10 am and midnight, noting people with gambling problems are much more likely to be gambling on pokies between midnight and 4 am than those without gambling problems.
  + Introduce a duty of care for pokie venues for staff to identify people with gambling problems and be required to appropriately intervene as has already been successfully trialled in some venues in Victoria.
  + Allow local communities to have the final say on if they want pokie venues in their communities or not, as is already the case in New Zealand.
* Finally, ask that they do not give highly profitable pokie venues licence extensions from the current 10 year licences. Express concern that the current government is thinking about giving pokie venues that are already making a killing up to a 25 year extension on their licences.

**Mocking Christ for Profit**

SportsBet is an online gambling company that has successfully pursued a strategy of offending parts of the community for free publicity to increase their profits.

Their first effort in Victorian involved creating a giant image of a kangaroo having sex with a lion in a paddock near Tullamarine airport with the slogan “RootingforOz”. With the offence it caused, it gained them widespread free media coverage worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to help them promote bettiong on a rugby game between Australian and England.

Having had such great success with this marketing strategy, on 10 June 2014 they decided it was time to repeat the trick by offending parts of the Christian community. They launched a giant hot air balloon in the shape of the statue of Christ the Redeemer wearing a shirt with the twitter hash tag “#Keepthefaith”, promoting betting on the Socceroos in Brazil. The hot air balloon was backed up by advertising online, including one advertisement of a smiling Jesus giving both thumbs up to endorse betting with SportsBet.

The marketing strategy was criticised by church leaders in the media for its offensive nature, which achieved what SportsBet was aiming for. The controversy gained them widespread free media to promote their betting service, getting coverage in newspapers, on television and online.

Offensive advertising is banned by Section 4.7.8 of the Victorian *Gambling Regulation Act 2003*. However, the maximum penalty for breaching this part of the law is less than $3,000. Such a fine is a joke compared to the hundreds of thousands of dollars in free media advertising SportsBet achieved with its strategy. Without causing offense the marketing strategy would have failed.

SportsBet has already been prosecuted for multiple counts of breaking Victorian law by offering inducements for people to gamble. For this unlawful activity SportsBet incurred a laughable fine of $1,500.

This is not an innocent activity. People who gamble online are more likely to have gambling problems than other gamblers. Sports betting is one of the main forms of gambling online. Recent research has found that marketing by online gambling providers, like SportsBet, increases the number of people taking up gambling and how much they lose.

The only way we can deter SportsBet from further offensive and unethical marketing strategies is to try and get a conviction recorded against them. Having a conviction recorded (rather than just a laughable fine) will help stop SportsBet from getting gambling operating licences elsewhere.

So if you saw the hot air balloon of Christ the Redeemer or other marketing material associated with it and were genuinely offended, please send a complaint to:

Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation

GPO Box 1988

Melbourne, Victoria, 3001

Your complaint must state what you saw and why you were offended. Point out that offensive advertising is unlawful under Section 4.7.8 of the Victorian *Gambling Regulation Act 2003*. You must include your name and address, the date you are making the complaint and you need to sign the complaint.