

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY
– LIQUOR & GAMING

**REVIEW OF LOCAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR
GAMING MACHINES**

(Based on my experience of electronic gaming
machines in the Fairfield Local Government Area)

Submitted by

Ms Frances Manusu

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

17 June 2017

Background and Reason for my Submission

Firstly, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to make comment on the impact of poker machines and give a brief profile of who I am. I am a 67 year old great grandmother of three adult children, twin 24 year old granddaughters and a four year old great grandson.

I retired last year after approximately 44 years in the workforce and moved to my current address in the country. Up until my retirement, I resided in the Fairfield Local Government Area at Prairiewood. My son, daughter and granddaughters still reside in the Fairfield LGA.

My submission is based on my time in the Fairfield LGA and the devastation poker machines have caused to my family. I am detailing two members of my family affected by poker machines, namely my son and one of my granddaughters. I will not give their names, apart from referring to them as my son or granddaughter, for confidential reasons.

It is not only my immediate family members affected by poker machine addiction. I also have a nephew who is addicted to poker machines and every payday virtually goes to the Brown Jug hotel at Fairfield Heights and “blows” his whole pay on the poker machines and has been doing so for years. He comes home very late after his elderly pensioner mother has gone to bed, so as not to have to explain why, once again, he does not have his board. However, as stated, my submission is based on my immediate family.

I have noted that as poker machines have flourished in the Fairfield LGA, the clubs have undertaken multi-million dollar extensions and refurbishments to their premises. Pubs competitively offer cheap (usually \$10) meals, no doubt to attract patrons to their venues in the hope they will play the “pokies”.

Pubs and clubs may have to have stickers on their machines with a telephone number for gambling addiction, but what addict has the logic and frame of mind to address their addiction by seeking help? Very few! A small win on the “pokies” is the incentive to keep playing as they think the “big one” is going to come up soon. Before they know it, their money is gone – quite often, their whole pay.

I remember about 20 years ago, I went to Mounties Club at Mt Pritchard one night and before I knew it, I had put \$150 in the pokies because the four symbols kept coming “so close” to being on the line that I thought it’s sure to come up soon. Thank goodness I had the sense of mind to walk out after losing the \$150 and not go back. That is how easy it is become addicted.

About three years ago, I went to a function at Mounties and noticed that their poker machine numbers had increased significantly and virtually all the machines were being played. I wondered how many of those players were pouring in their last dollar and how many families would probably go hungry until next pay day.

CASE 1 – BASED ON MY SON'S ADDICTION TO POKER MACHINES AND THE IMPACT THIS HAS HAD ON HIM

My son resided with me for most of his life, apart from a period of approximately 12 months about six years ago, after which he returned to reside with me. He had always been a responsible, hardworking and likeable son, brother and uncle. For approximately the last five years of his living with me, before I retired and moved from Fairfield, he had started to change.

He had always paid his board weekly, but he began to stay out on pay nights (he mostly worked night shifts) and sometimes made excuses the next day as to why he was unable to pay any board. As there were only the two of us living together, I relied on his board to help pay the rent, utilities and food, not to mention the cost of petrol driving him quite often to work in nearby suburbs as there was poor (or non-existent) public transport at night to his workplaces.

Together with this change in his attitude, people would tell me they had seen him at local pubs playing the poker machines. It got to the point where it was weekly where he was unable to pay me any board at all. I spoke to him about people seeing him playing the poker machines, but he denied it. I also told him if he had a gambling addiction he could seek help to deal with this problem. Again, he denied he had a problem (as most addicts do). Eventually, to ensure he paid his board, he told me to collect him from work after his shift on pay nights, so I could take him to an ATM to get the money to give to me. He would then come to the car, give me his board, and then go on his way to wherever he was going.

He would mainly stay out for hours before returning home. The next day, he would ask for his board back to see him through until next pay. If I refused to give the money to him, he would threaten not to go to work. It put me in a "catch 22" situation where if he did not work, I would definitely get no money to help with expenses, but by him continuing to work I thought I may have some chance of getting some money. This went on week after week, month after month. He began to lose interest in himself and his self-esteem lowered as he constantly had no money to buy clothes, etc. He was literally wearing torn clothes at times. By the time I retired I was completely stressed, unable to get him to seek help.

I have not had contact with my son since moving to the country. It breaks my heart to see how an addiction to poker machines changed my son from being a good, responsible person, to becoming irresponsible and losing his self-esteem, as well as his family. I have since heard that he got evicted from a flat he had moved into. I do not know where he is living now. I could not give him my address when I moved, as I feared he would turn up at my place and it would be exactly the same pattern as it was previously. As I am now on an age pension, I simply could not afford to have him live with me.

CASE 2 – BASED ON MY GRANDDAUGHTER’S ADDICTION TO POKER MACHINES AND THE IMPACT THIS HAS HAD ON HER AND HER FAMILY

I recently found out my granddaughter now has an addiction to poker machines. She resides close to Club Marconi at Bossley Park with her four year old son, her mother and her twin sister. She is 24 years of age.

She is a single mum, however, her and her mother share an informal arrangement of custody of her son, with her mother receiving the Centrelink allowance for the child. This arrangement was put in place due to domestic violence with my granddaughter’s previous partner.

My granddaughter is on the New Start Allowance from Centrelink. From her New Start Allowance, Housing NSW deducts \$144 rent per fortnight and she is paying off a \$500 dollar loan from Centrelink. She is left with approximately \$367 per fortnight to pay for her food, her share of the electricity bills, clothes, transport costs looking for work and personal toiletries. As you can see, she is living well and truly below the poverty line.

Centrelink do very little to actually help people train for work, let alone give them enough to pay for fares to go to training places. However, this is another story which angers me.

In her desperate need to get funds she has been going to nearby Club Marconi at Bossley Park to play the poker machines. The few small wins she has had do not make up for losing what little money she has on which to try and survive. As stated previously, I am now on an age pension, but I often get calls from her where she is very teary and distressed because she has had no money for food. I then put some money into her bank account knowing that at least she will not go hungry. I have tried to counsel her that poker machines are not there to pay money to the community, but to make money for the pubs and clubs. Unfortunately, this is falling on deaf ears as the few small wins she has had entice her to keep playing them. This afternoon when I spoke with her, she had very little money and was feeling depressed as it is her son’s birthday tomorrow. This evening when I phoned her to see how she was feeling, she told me she was at Club Marconi and had just won a small amount of money. I advised her to leave the club and not to put any more money into the machines. She said ‘yes, nan”, but I know this advice probably fell on deaf ears.

CONCLUSION

Times are hard and people are desperate for money. Rents and utility bills are high. People on low incomes have difficulty meeting the cost of living. Poker machines in pubs and clubs have flourished in the low income areas, such as the Fairfield LGA, due to the desperate need for money. Problem gambling is a very big issue for so many families, not just mine, and as long as clubs and pubs are allowed to continue to increase their poker machines in their greedy quest for more money, families will continue to be impacted and suffer. Clubs and pubs care very little about the impact their poker machines are having on families and individuals.