



Gambling and its impact in Australia Is nothing sacred?

Social Justice Sunday 28 September 2014



National Council of
Churches in Australia

Introduction: Message from the NCCA

The NCCA Social Justice Network has chosen the topic of gambling for the 2014 Social Justice Sunday resource in the hope of voicing the strong concerns held by the Churches about the encroachment of gambling and its destructive influence into the daily lives of many Australians. Poker machine reform is no longer on our national political agenda, however the expansion of gambling methods is extending, prompting the subtitle “is nothing sacred?”.

The marketing and influence of the gambling industry into the political arena as well as into entertainment and sports is such that it seems to have become the “new normal”. Savings, family relationships and caring for others, work, housing, medical care, honesty and trust become overshadowed by the addiction to gambling and the warped thinking that “next time I’ll win”.

There are many places in the Christian scriptures that highlight concerns relating to the effects of greed. “Then he (Jesus) said to them (the crowd): “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a person’s life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions” (Luke 12:15).

Not all people caught in the gambling net are wealthy. Many are poorer people who look for distractions from the difficulties of daily life in the hope that gambling will lift their mood as well as their finances. It is important to be aware that gambling systems are designed for the gambler to lose, not to win.

An early account of gambling is found in Matthew 27:35 concerning the guards at the foot of the cross: “When they crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots”. The sacredness of the moment escaped the guards, who were preoccupied with dividing up the spoils.

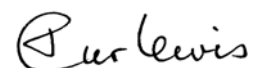
Similarly, in today’s world, we see many injustices that undermine the dignity of the person and unity of families and communities. The social evil of gambling, including the culture of greed that surrounds it, seems to have rendered our society blind to the human suffering before us and the sacredness of its many victims.

How can we as a society respond to the suffering of individuals and families whose lives have been destroyed by gambling? How can we as people of faith help to restore and protect the dignity of those most vulnerable to its effects?

This resource is offered in the hope of redirecting attention to the sacredness of daily life. Many church agencies are in the front line assisting gamblers to overcome addictions and rediscover the sacredness of life amidst the pressures of this world.

I encourage you to use the facts and information in this resource in ways that will raise awareness of gambling and its effect in our Australian community.

Grace and Peace



Tara Curlewis

National Council of Churches in Australia



Community for sale? **Wanna bet?**

Over the past three decades, markets – and market values – have come to govern our lives as never before... Today the logic of buying and selling no longer applies to material goods alone but increasingly governs the whole of life. It is time to ask whether we want to live this way.

Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy. The Moral Limits of Markets*, 2012.

The expansion of gambling in Australia has come at the same time as market values began to intrude on more and more aspects of our lives. There is a growing desire to get rich quick. For some this might be pursued through stock market speculation, but for the less well off gambling can offer the false hope of a quick road to riches. However, all forms of commercial gambling are weighted towards the gambling industry coming out in front.

My first attempt to deal with my addiction worked for about six months. Unfortunately, the urge to gamble was just too strong and I also found a partner in crime. My housemate and I gambled all over Melbourne. It was no surprise that at times we had no money for rent, phone and gas – much less new clothes. Forget dinners, birthday celebrations, going away for the weekend or holidays. I almost developed anorexia, could not sleep, and had difficulty coping at work. I lost connection with friends and family. Hiding my problem became a burden I didn't carry with ease. I was living in a world that no longer interested me; I wanted to end my life as I couldn't see a way out of my dismal situation.

An ex-gambler assisted by Gambler's Help City

Australians lost \$16.9 billion on gambling in 2012. The number of people with gambling problems is estimated to be around 150,000 people, which includes one in ten people who gamble regularly.

The gambling industry likes to argue that problem gambling is solely an issue of personal responsibility. The reality is that it affects all of us. For each person with a gambling problem, several others are affected — including family members, friends, employers and colleagues.¹ There is no shortage of cases where family violence has resulted from gambling problems or where someone has blown the family's life



savings on the pokies. Businesses too are affected, by the theft and fraud resulting from problem gambling.

The gambling industry strategically targets whichever communities will do the most to increase its profits. In the case of electronic gaming machines (i.e. "pokies" or poker machines) this has meant targeting lower socio-economic areas for new gambling development.

In addition to targeting vulnerable areas, the industry has sought to buy political influence and corrupt our democracy. In late 2009, former Clubs NSW chief executive, Mark Fitzgibbon, told the media Clubs NSW was able to use political donations to buy government access, which it used to influence policy. He said, "We did support political party fundraising, which was a legitimate activity, and it certainly assisted us in gaining access. I have no doubt it had some influence". At the time when the previous Labor Government was moving towards introducing the ability of gamblers to set themselves enforceable limits on pokies, the pokies industry ramped up its political donations. Together, Clubs NSW and the Australian Hotels Association gave more than \$1.3 million in donations for the final quarter of 2010. By an overwhelming margin these were directed at the Coalition.² The Coalition took a strong position opposing the limit-setting system and now in government has moved to repeal all the reforms on pokies introduced by the previous government.

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions."

Luke 12:15

The Christian community has an important role to play in challenging the dominance of market values in places they do not belong and in minimising the harm gambling causes in our society.

Mark Zirnsak

Director, Justice & International Mission
Vic-Tas Synod Uniting Church in Australia

¹ Productivity Commission 2010, Gambling, Report no. 50, Canberra, p. 16.

² Michael Safi, "Altruistic Political Donations? Wanna Bet?", *The Global Mail*, 16 August 2013, <http://www.theglobalmail.org/feature/altruistic-political-donations-wanna-bet/679/>

The growing reach of **gambling**

The reach of gambling, and consequently gambling harm, is growing rapidly, particularly from a global perspective, but also in Australia.

While actual gambling spending is difficult to measure, due to significant black market gambling activity, the *Economist* magazine reported on 3rd February 2014 that global gross spending (total amount gambled less payouts) was US\$44 billion for last year. Bricks and mortar casinos and lotteries accounted for about two thirds of global gambling activity, with the United State being the largest gambling market (\$119b), and Australia having the highest gambling spend per capita of about \$1100 per person.

Globally there are significant shifts in gambling industries. The casino industry is seeking growth in Asia and the Pacific, China is the second largest gambling market and supports the world's largest concentration of casinos in Macau, while casino operators also seek to build in the Pacific. There has been considerable tension in Samoa, for example, over active moves to build casinos there, while local churches lead the opposition to them. The casino industry is also targeting eastern European nations and the Caribbean, generally seeking locations where regulation is limited

The other area of major global gambling growth is on-line gambling, which includes virtual casinos and on-line sports betting. On-line gambling is currently strongest in Scandinavian nations and Ireland. About a quarter of the world's population own a smart phone, and on-line gambling

is now readily available on these devices. The phone as a gambling platform means that gambling industries can particularly target young people and emerging economies, including South America as well as Asia and Eastern Europe.

Designers of poker machines are looking to incorporate high quality graphics, video clips from popular movies or games as well as music into poker machines, to merge popular entertainment with pokies gambling.

Poker machines continue to dominate gambling in Australia as attempts to improve gambler protections have been thwarted by national and state governments. Gambling in Australia has developed in a series of waves over much of the last century. More recently casinos have become larger while on-line gambling activity is increasing, particularly amongst younger people. Previously state owned Lotteries have also been sold to commercial operators and allowed to offer on-line gambling activities

While the gambling industries continue to reach across the four corners of the earth and gambling activity is promoted more actively to women as well as men and to young people as well as older people, regulation to rein in gambling harm is thwarted by the gambling industries and governments' failure to act.

Mark Henley

Chair, Gambling and Public Health Alliance International

Member, Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce

Member, SA Churches Gambling Taskforce

Health Effects of Problem Gambling

Excerpt from the position paper by the Australian Medical Association, 2013

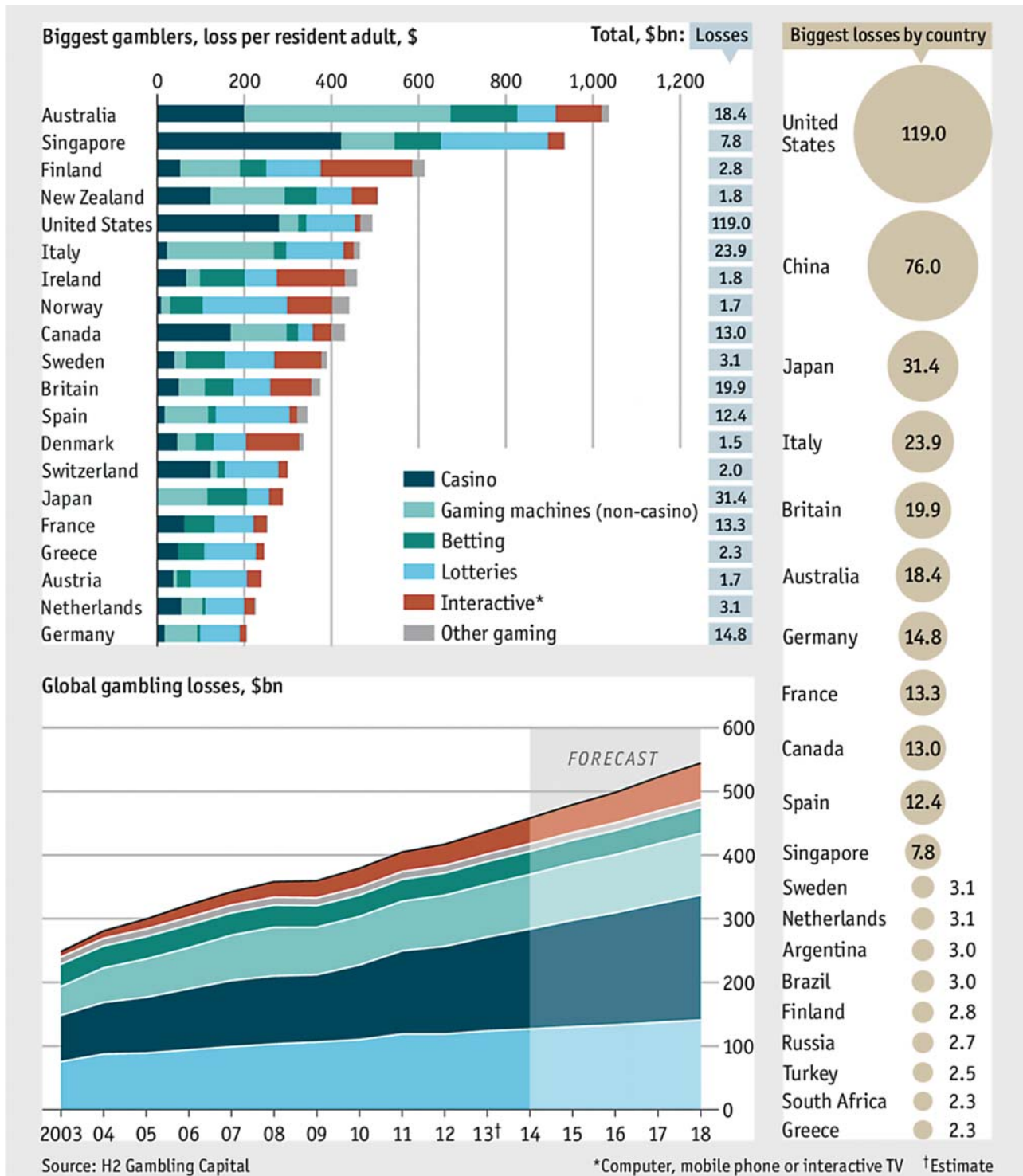
"Medical practitioners see first-hand the devastating consequences of gambling, which impacts not only on the physical and mental health of individual gamblers, but also on the well being of their families. Problem gamblers have a higher than average number of visits to a GP, and experience an increased incidence of physical illnesses such as hypertension, insomnia, migraine and other stress-related problems. Patients with problem gambling often present symptoms that appear unrelated to gambling, such as depression, anxiety, stomach upsets, headaches, and other stress-related symptoms of physical and psychological ill health.

The adverse consequences of problem gambling are not distributed evenly across the population. The prevalence and impacts of problem gambling are most pronounced among socially and economically disadvantaged individuals and communities, including Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, those with poor literacy people with pre-existing mental health problems, certain cultural and linguistic communities, and people living in regions or metropolitan suburbs with high levels of unemployment and economic hardship."

For the full paper and references:

<https://ama.com.au/position-statement/health-effects-problem-gambling>

Global Gambling 2013



Economist.com/graphicdetail

Global Gambling. Source: The Economist, 3 February 2014.

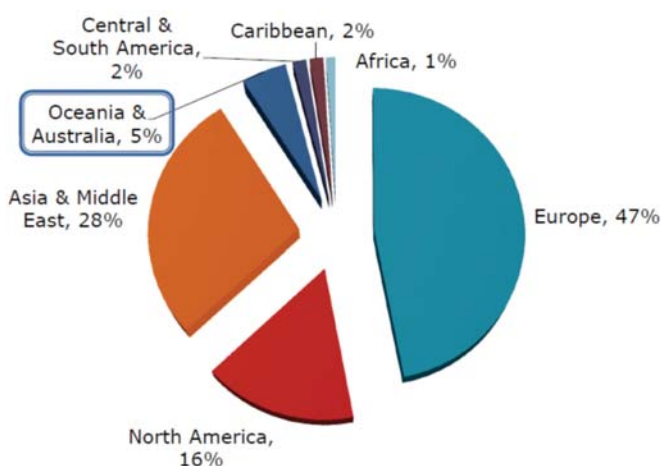
Gambling and **sport**

The speed of the internet and the sophistication of internet linked entertainment systems mean that a very large number of gambling opportunities can be offered to a person viewing a live sporting contest in their own home.

As an example of the rate of growth of sports betting, the London *Telegraph* reported on 12th August 2012; "Ladbrokes forecasts the (gambling) sector will turn over close to £80m for the two-week period, compared with £4m from the Beijing Games four years ago, while research from Coral shows that 3m people planned to place their first ever bet on the London Olympics." Sports betting companies are now major sponsors of almost all major sporting events in Australia and elsewhere, with many major sporting teams accepting sponsorship from these companies. Gambling is being presented by sports administrators, clubs and media commentary as inextricably linked with any sporting event.

Globally, on-line sport betting is estimated to be valued at about \$45 billion, about 10% of global gambling spending, but it is the fastest growing form of gambling, with Europe and Scandinavia the largest internet gamblers.

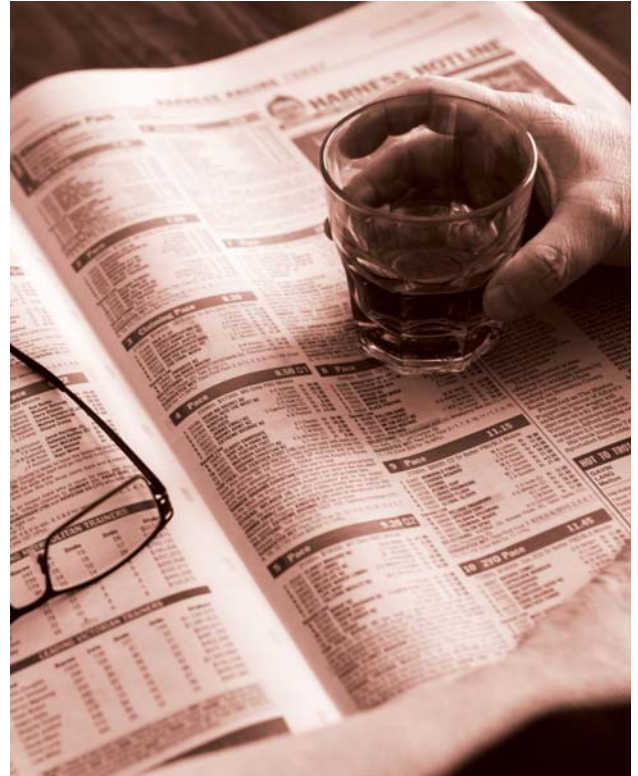
International Internet Gambling Market



Source: Sally Gainsbury, Centre for Gambling Education and Research, Southern Cross University

The growth of sports gambling creates two broad sets of concerns; firstly the risk to the integrity of sporting contests and secondly the heightened risk of gambling harm.

Sport integrity is particularly challenged by "exotic bets" —



that is, gambling on specific events within a sporting contest that may or may not influence the final outcome. These events are easier to "fix" through influencing an individual player or small group of members of a team. Sporting integrity is also challenged by the high volume of "black market operators" who operate with scant regulatory or even legal controls.

For gamblers there are a number of risks too. Firstly since on-line sports betting is invariably carried out through a credit card, it is difficult to keep track of the amount spent during a sporting match since every gambling event is "accepted" at the touch of a remote control.

Emerging evidence, particularly from Sweden¹, a nation with high on-line gambling prevalence, suggests that problem gambling rates associated with on-line sports betting are about double the problem gambling rates for other gambling forms.

All aspects of gambling policy and regulation needs to be based on a "public health approach" which puts emphasis on prevention, education and limiting environmental risk factors as well as treatment programs.

Mark Henley

Chair, Gambling and Public Health Alliance International
Member, Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce
Member, SA Churches Gambling Taskforce

¹ Jessika Svenson, Swedish Institute of Public Health, various publications.

From a financial counsellor at Gamblers' Help

Craig* lives alone in a high rise apartment in the city. He is in his early 30s, and has a good job; but he often felt lonely. It was easy to visit the nearby casino, mix with the crowds and try his hand at gambling. Before long he started on-line gambling as well. Gambling was taking over his life. He looked for help, applied self-exclusion** and banned himself from every casino. For a while things improved, but the addiction persisted. To reverse the ban, he needed to find a psychologist who would agree to support this. Finding this person from another state, it was not long before he returned to his habits. He spent hours at the casino and using on-line betting; he lost all track of time. Complicating the issue was the availability of pay-day lending. Within one hour, money could reach his account.

Craig's gambling resulted in complete loss of resources. Homelessness drew him to turn to a gambling support service. A psychologist and financial counsellor worked together to ensure there was no self-deception in the process of recovery. This involved a freeze on pay-day lending, self-banning again and working on social isolation issues. He voluntarily closed an on-line sports bet account, emailing his counsellor 18 months later to say: "I felt really proud because I haven't gambled since I met you".

Bans are the best option to start the road to recovery. Self-deception, denial, lying and secrecy are part of the behaviour which tricks the victim into believing: "I can win, this is my lucky machine, my lucky number". Intervention is needed to help overcome the deception, anxiety and depression that may result, along with social isolation and re-learning of social skills. It can take years to re-establish trust.

Has gambling changed in recent years? Though behaviour and symptoms of gambling addiction are similar over time, the pattern of gambling has changed. It is easier for many more people to gain access through on-line gambling, and invasive marketing is on the increase. Typically the younger male is more at risk, with on-line sites offering tips on how to win and leading players to believe that this is what everyone does. At the casino doors, a young man who had never gambled was offered a voucher for \$5 to have a go, coming away with a loss of \$200. He continues to receive vouchers regularly in the mail for \$30.

*not his real name

**<http://www.gamblinghelponline.org.au/accessing-support/self-exclusion/>.

Be honest with yourself. What unpalatable truths might you be evading? When you recognise your shortcomings, do not let that discourage you. In worship together we can find the assurance of God's love and the strength to go on with renewed courage.

From Advices and Queries, Religious Society of Friends in Australia, Quakers.



More Gambling Information

“Relationship breakdown leading to divorce and significant domestic violence is a major concern with 13% of people in counselling for problem gambling (or one in eight) reporting domestic or other violent incidents related to their gambling.

Suicide is also a major problem linked to problem gambling, but due to the sensitive nature there is not much recorded evidence. Blaszczyński and Farrell documented 44 examples of gambling related suicides in Victoria occurring between 1990 and 1997, in which the State Coroner identified the presence of a presumed gambling problem. Most were male... unemployed, and from a lower socioeconomic background.

A report commissioned by the Victorian Department of Justice, released in October 2010 showed a strong positive correlation between gambling and crime. It found that gambling is actually second only to drug offences as a predictor of crime within a local area. Gaming expenditure per capita is significantly positively associated with nearly every type of crime in all years of the analysis, with research showing that up to 70 per cent of problem gamblers may commit offences.”

‘Gambling’, Baptist Union of Victoria Background Paper, May 2013.



Resources

Search for: gambling help in your State or Territory to find links to local websites

Social Justice Resources in Australian Churches

Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce www.gamblingreform.org

<http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/en/Who-We-Are/Publications-reports-submissions/Reports--Submissions/Statements-for-the-Federal-Election-2013/8-Gambling-issues/>

<http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/en/find-help/Problem-Gambling/Responsible-gambling-tips/>

<http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/en/find-help/Problem-Gambling/>

<http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/en/find-help/Problem-Gambling/Signs-of-problem-gambling/>

Uniting Church VicTas (2010) *Victorian Election: Gambling Reform Information Paper*, Commission for Mission www.victas.uca.org.au (search gambling)

Baptist Union of Victoria Background Paper: *Gambling*, May 2013 (part of the information pack of the delegates dinner) Google Search will link to PDF

<http://www.buv.com.au/public-issues/gambling>

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<http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/social-justice>

Uniting Church in Australia <http://unitingjustice.org.au/>

Other Gambling Resources in Australian

Australian Medical Association

<https://ama.com.au/position-statement/health-effects-problem-gambling>

Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy. The Moral Limits of Markets*, 2012.

Michael Safi, 'Altruistic Political Donations? Wanna Bet?', *The Global Mail*, 16 August 2013,

<http://www.theglobalmail.org/feature/altruistic-politicaldonations-wanna-bet/679/>

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