



**The Rev Dr Keith Garner
CEO Wesley Mission
Opening remarks
NSW Legislative Council Enquiry into gambling in NSW
11 April 2014**

I am very pleased, on behalf of Wesley Mission, to be given the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Legislative Council Select Committee inquiry into Gambling in New South Wales.

Wesley Mission has been providing financial and gambling counselling for more than 25 years. It also established the Gambling Helpline, which is now run by government. It is a core service for us.

Wesley Mission works with hundreds of individuals each year for whom gambling has gone beyond recreation and has become an addiction. It also supports their families who suffer because of this addiction. We see the impact upon others.

A legal advocacy service provides vital support to those experiencing gambling-related legal issues. The service reaches across NSW and helped 125 individuals and families last year.

We stand not as the moral cop on the beat but as a Christian agency actively concerned about the well-being of damaged and broken people, and the wellbeing of our community.

We trust the enquiry will address the ongoing issues surrounding gambling and bring real and effective long-term benefits to the community, particularly those who are impacted by gambling.

Wesley Mission does not support gambling but recognises that, because of legislation, there will be gambling activities in NSW. Wesley Mission works with hundreds of individuals each year for whom gambling has gone beyond recreation and has become an addiction. It also supports their families who suffer because of this addiction.

Gambling has become a pervasive practice and lifestyle. From poker machines, to on-line betting, to sports betting, it's a numbers culture.

Sport, which is traditionally a family activity has become a marketing exercise for betting companies. **Sport commentary is just as likely to be talked about in terms of odds as sporting competition or athletic ability.**

It seems unlikely that this advertising barrage is for the benefit of existing gamblers. Rather, it seems mostly aimed at recruiting a new generation of gamblers – and many of them young people, who may not yet be old enough to legally place their first bet.

Gambling is socialising children and young people into a world view which makes gambling a mainstream activity with little social, moral or ethical consequences. It is portrayed as a purely natural part of life that requires little risk or effort. Gambling advertising does not present an accurate picture of the result. The message of winning is endlessly repeated with scant mention of the possibility of loss.

Hidden from public view is on-line betting made from a computer, tablet or phone device. Such a practice blurs the line between a public and private activity.



Current indications are that the global internet gambling industry has an annual turnover of about \$42 billion. A decade ago the annual turnover was about \$6 billion, which is a seven fold increase in a decade. Australia's share of this global market is about five per cent, significantly more than our share of the global population.

It is often said that Australians would bet on two flies crawling up a wall: **what would be far more revealing is what those flies are seeing in the homes of a growing number of Australian households where gambling has become an issue: financial stress, bankruptcy, family breakdown, theft, depression and anxiety, domestic violence and substance abuse.**

Our gambling counselling, financial counselling, and the staff of our two hospitals see the impact of addiction first-hand.

On-line and interactive gambling is increasing quickly with recent research indicating that problem gambling rates for internet gambling, once it is established, are higher than for pokies gambling.

The world of technology is rapidly changing and this is particularly evident in relation to gambling technology. Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs) in their present form are likely to change and develop into an inclusive online 'virtual reality' that can be played at home. This may include the ability to log onto the same game that is played on EGM's at clubs and hotels to allow a continuation of playing in privacy at home.

Gambling is regressive taxation: poorer people contribute proportionally more than wealthier people to taxation revenue via gaming. This to me is a main issue of social justice. The Local Impact Assessment (LIA) process undertaken by the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority is designed to assess the impact of additional gaming machines in a local government area. It shows that there are more electronic gaming machines and greater use of them in low-income areas.

As an organisation that cares for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the community, the prevalence of electronic gaming machines is a moral and social justice issue. Our poker machine market has some unique characteristics and more local research is needed to identify which harm minimisation measures are effective and which could do with improvement. In particular, further consideration needs to be given to the location and marketing of poker machine gambling in this State.

Wesley Mission strongly supports the current restrictions on poker machine advertising. It advocates tougher restrictions on the advertising of all forms of high intensity gambling. There is no doubt that gambling advertising contributes to the incidence of problem gambling and can trigger a relapse in recovering problem gamblers.

Much more could be said but I know that we will be able to expand on some of these views and those expressed in our written submission during question time. Wesley Mission thanks the Enquiry Committee for this opportunity to place this most important social and moral issue in the public space as it seeks to implement effective long-term legislation to deal with this problem.