

18<sup>th</sup> June 2012

The Secretariat  
Commerce Select Committee  
Select Committee Office  
Parliament Buildings  
WELLINGTON

## **Submission on the Gambling (Gambling Harm Reduction) Amendment Bill 2012**

### **Introduction**

Community Waitakere is a Charitable Trust, dedicated to achieving our vision of a sustainable Waitakere with strong, connected communities. We have a thirty year history of supporting and strengthening community organisations, building and maintaining relationships with central and local government and communities, undertaking and supporting community development initiatives and fostering collaborative actions that achieve our vision.

Community Waitakere is recognised locally, regionally and nationally as a key linkage between national, regional and sub-regional networks, enabling the sharing of resources, information and knowledge. We are the “glue” which joins diverse community organisations with each other and with local and central government agencies and funders. We work across the three Western Local Board areas (Whau; Waitakere Ranges and Henderson/Massey), and have established positive relationships with them individually and as a “cluster”, particularly in our roles of advocacy, leadership and connection.

As a registered Charitable Trust, Community Waitakere is dependent on grants and donations for some of the income to support our work in the community. Therefore we have robust accountability systems in place, we are professionally audited and we publish audited accounts each year.

The Government is currently considering amendments to the Gambling Act. This amendment presented as the Gambling (Gambling Harm Reduction) Amendment Bill has been passed to a Select Committee within Parliament for consideration under Law and will alter laws relating to gaming machines throughout New Zealand. There are some significant suggested changes to the Charitable Gaming landscape that are likely to have an impact on communities and community groups.

Community Waitakere supports the intent of the Bill to address key issues to reduce the harm from gambling but submits that there are some provisions of the Bill which need improvement or further thought.

<b>Purpose of the Bill</b>	<b>Community Waitakere’s Position</b>
1. To prevent and minimise the harm caused by gambling, including problem gambling.	Community Waitakere agrees that problem gambling causes major social harm in New Zealand and would totally support all reasonable measures to minimise it. We support a preventative and educative approach, utilising the combined strengths of local communities and existing networks.

<p>2. To ensure the maximum amount of money from gambling benefits the community from the geographic area from which the gambling venues operate.</p>	<p>Community Waitakere agrees in principle that maximum funds from gambling are used to benefit the community within the area they are raised. However the notion of distribution within the geographic areas from which the gambling venues operate needs clarification. How much evidence is there of people gambling in their own immediate location and secondly how is a geographic area defined in places such as Auckland (ie is it across Auckland, or within Ward or Local Board boundaries)?</p>
<p>3. To facilitate community involvement in decisions about the provision of gambling</p>	<p>We support community involvement in decisions about local gambling operations. Communities need to be included in finding solutions to local issues which affect them. Community involvement should also be sought when planning prevention, education and support services for problem gambling.</p>
<p>4. To give Local Government and communities the power to cut the number of poker machines in their area or eliminate altogether</p>	<p>We support this function being the responsibility of Local Government. In Auckland this should be at the Local Board level, as the Boards have firsthand knowledge of the social health and networks in their communities.</p> <p>However reducing or eliminating poker machines from areas where they are doing harm will not, on its own, address the issue. The bigger challenge is problem gambling itself which needs to have a more comprehensive and educative approach.</p>
<p>5. To phase out the Trusts which currently distribute poker machine earnings and replace them with local distribution committees similar to those set up for the COGS scheme or the Creative Communities Fund.</p>	<p>Community Waitakere opposes this change for a number of reasons. There is a direct conflict of interest in local government having the right to issue licenses and reduce or eliminate pokies in their area, as well as distribution of funds. It is also possible that projects traditionally funded through ratepayers' funds become funded through pokie earnings.</p> <p>The Auckland Council's Community Funding Policy has been put on hold because the complexities of the new Auckland governance model made its implementation unworkable without further consideration and discussion. The interface between funding from the Governing Body, the 21 Local Boards and clusters of the Local Boards needs to be untangled before any additional responsibilities for distribution of funds are placed on Local Government.</p>

	Community organisation are operating under increasing financial uncertainty. Funding through the existing Gaming Trusts is not so directly impacted by the fickle and changing nature of local and national politics. In saying that, there need to be tight and transparent processes in place if the distribution of funds is to stay with the Trusts.
6. To remove racing from the list of charitable purposes which may receive these funds.	We neither support nor oppose this change as we are not in a position to make informed comment.
7. To introduce player tracking and pre-commit cards, enabling gamblers to put controls on the amount of time and money they lose.	Community Waitakere supports this change in principle. As a community lead advocacy organisation we support the introduction of initiatives that are proven to prevent or reduce harm caused by gambling. However, sound evidence would be necessary to justify compliance costs.

In summary Community Waitakere agrees that this Bill makes significant progress towards better regulation of the gambling industry; attempts to increase the amount of community funding available for local communities, and introduces some initiatives to reduce harm from problem gambling, but in our opinion it does not go far enough.

We are, however, unsupportive of Local Government having the right to issue licenses and reduce or eliminate gambling machines *as well as* making decisions on funding distribution. If the Trusts are to be phased out and granting decisions are to be localised, independent multi-disciplinary local committees need to be established for this purpose. These would need to be time and cost efficient to ensure community funding is accessible and that responses to applications are not slowed down within the system.

Pat Watson  
 Chief Executive  
**Community Waitakere Charitable Trust**  
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