

BILLIARDS & SNOOKER ASSOCIATION A.C.T.(Inc.)

(INCORPORATED IN THE A.C.T.)

Patron: John Hargreaves JP
President: Mark O'Neill
Secretary/Treasurer: Bob Fraser

 A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
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GPO Box 983
Canberra ACT 2601
Website: BSACT.ORG
Email:

The Chairman

ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Accounts
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra City ACT 2601

The Billiards and Snooker Association of the ACT Inc, (B&SAACT) wishes to make submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Accounts in its Inquiry Into Elements Impacting on the Future of the ACT Clubs Sector.

This submission will contain an overview of our Association's activities, a general statement outlining the impacts that changes to the sector will have on our Association's activities and impact we see to our Association related directly to your Terms of Reference. We have also attached a number of recommendations for your consideration.

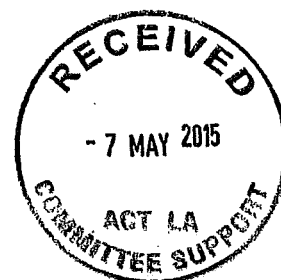
Overview of Activities

The Billiards and Snooker Association of the ACT Inc (B&SAACT) is an incorporated association formed in 1948 by a group of billiards enthusiasts. It was originally named the Canberra Amateur Billiards Association. Indeed there have been billiards and snooker competitions in the ACT since 1947.

Prior to 1985, the B&SAACT was affiliated with the Billiards and Snooker Association of NSW, which gave its competitors access to the national competition. In 1985, B&SAACT affiliated with the Australian Billiards and Snooker Council, who are in turn affiliated with the International Billiards and Snooker Federation giving Canberrans access to international competition.

Currently the Associations members and affiliates include:

- The Canberra Southern Cross Club Group (3 tables)
- The Raiders Club at Weston (3 tables)
- The Goulburn Soldiers Club (3 tables)
- The Canberra Highland Society and Burns Club (2 tables)
- The Canberra City Bowling Club (2 tables)
- The Hornsby RSL
- The Commercial Club of Albury



ACT Clubs have 10 tables available at the moment.

In the past there were tables in the following clubs:

- Norths Rugby Club (3 tables)
- Hungarian Club (2 tables)
- Manuka Football Club (1 table)
- Acton Football Club (2 tables)
- Kingston Narrabundah RSL (2 tables)
- Woden Valley RSL (2 tables)
- Canberra Workers Club (4 tables)
- Dickson Tradies (5 tables)
- Woden Tradies (3 tables)
- Canberra Services Club (2 tables)
- Canberra Club (5 tables)
- Canberra South Bowling Club (2 tables)

These 33 tables (two thirds of the available competition resource) have disappeared over the years as the clubs which hosted them became unviable for one reason or another. There is a table in the Braddon Bowling Club, soon to close.

There are other clubs which have changed from being independent clubs to being part of a larger club group which have reduced the numbers of their tables and these have not been detailed here.

The members and affiliates have approximately 150 players engaged in various levels of competition. Over the years, the B&SAACT has had interclub competition spread over several grades, with a peak of 6 grades comprising 10 teams per grade. The remaining membership engage in social billiards and snooker.

Individual members enjoy the sport for a variety of reasons:

- They are captivated by the science and the perfection of ability in a delicate sport;
- They enjoy the thrill of competition;
- They enjoy personal development as their skill level increases;
- They are engaging in social interaction;
- They are in a group of peers who are supportive in times of distress;
- They see the sport as an integral part of their social enjoyment in a family friendly club environment.

It is acknowledged that the smaller sports of eight-ball and pool, whilst having a similar visage, are supported by both the club and hotel sectors. It is also submitted that as these smaller tables are user pays per game and on a smaller table with less numbers of balls, the games are more viable as

revenue sources, albeit a small one than the larger billiard table based games.

General Impacts of Changes to the Club Sector

The sports are intrinsically dependent on the viability of the ACT Club system in that the sports are played exclusively in the venues of member clubs as the non-club hospitality sector does not host the tables and billiards rooms necessary for the enjoyment of the sports.

With the waning of the club industry in recent years there has been a parallel reduction in the number of venues prepared to keep the resources; rooms, tables, score boards, balls etc, as these are not significant revenue raisers for the venues.

Most venues in the Club sector which support sporting activities are sports specific and the sports are delivered off site at specific venues such as ovals, cricket grounds, and few support sports delivered on their own premises.

It is interesting to note the demise in the club premises of similar club based activities such as darts, carpet bowls and table tennis. These resources are rare in Canberra and shrinking in the club system, with the elimination of carpet bowls and table tennis from all venues. The shrinkage in billiards tables is regarded as a signal that the support from clubs cannot be guaranteed.

When the dramatic changes to the operations of clubs, resulting in as much as a downturn of 20% in revenue from the anti-smoking regime, a further and similar downturn due to the change in note acceptors, were introduced, the numbers of patrons in the clubs declined.

The introduction of the ticket in/ticket out system shows the ineffectiveness of the limit of a \$20 note into any poker machine. The limit of \$250 per transaction has meant that our playing members need to bring greater amounts of cash to have a meal with family or friends in association with their billiards or snooker competition. Credit cards are not regarded as an attractive option for some of our playing members, nor are EFTPOS.

It has been argued that these measures have been put in place to support reduction in problem gambling. It is argued by B&SAACT, that the clubs have regimes identifying problem gamblers and offering support, they have regimes identifying peoples suffering alcohol dependence and offer support, but the nature of a community club is that the community is jointly supportive and if the activities such as darts, billiards, snooker and associated facilities are reduced, the smaller and medium clubs will disappear and the larger club groups will become default casinos.

There is a place for small and medium clubs and too harsh a regulatory regime will kill these clubs and the resultant dysfunction in smaller communities will be rested at the feet of the legislators.

One of the imperatives facing clubs at the time was the reduction of non-revenue raising assets and the attempts by the clubs to maximise attractions to the clubs in the space available. The renovations at the Burns Club are cited as an example. The renovations involve the removal of a large entertainment space as it was underutilised and the introduction of a larger more attractive catering facility. Similar actions have been necessary at other venues resulting in the loss of resources for billiards and snooker.

If a community licensed club has a community spirit, if that club has an economic viability which means it is able to support community activities, if that club is able to sponsor sporting teams from within the club community, the sports of billiards and snooker can survive. If these aspects of club life are not present, the viability of our sports is under threat.

The dependence of the sports of billiards and snooker on the club system is total.

Terms of Reference

The Committee's terms of Reference are address below:

(i) Revenue and Profitability

Community clubs are not for profit institutions which are to return amenities and services to its members. If the profitability is unsustainable, clubs close, as we have seen with a number of small ethnically based clubs in Canberra. Once a club closes the amenities disappear, the services disappear and so too does the uniqueness of that club community. Members go elsewhere but they are forced to walk away from that which attracted them to the small club in the first place.

The viability of clubs is linked intrinsically to the regulatory regime within which they operate and their profitability is intrinsically linked to the level of support they can give to associated entities like billiards and snooker activities.

(ii) Legislation and regulation

It is acknowledged that some controls must be in place to deal with problem gamblers and alcoholics. But a sense of proportion must apply. It is unreasonable to have a legislative and regulatory regime impose such costs and prohibitions on club members such that the club closes and the resources previously available to members disappear.

Profitability is achieved through consumption of products. If that consumption is reduced such that the few benefit at the expense of the many, then the morality is questionable. If the minority are suffering with no commensurate effort to alleviate or remove the suffering, then that too is questionable.

The clubs do have programs to prevent and alleviate the problems of gamblers but they are trying to provide facilities and resources with an ever decreasing revenue base.

The laws around note acceptors, ATMs, withdrawal limits, have all contributed to a downturn in the industry with no relief in sight. Billiards and snooker will be casualties if these regimes continue.

(iii) Taxation and charges

The rate of community contribution for clubs when taken in the context of a reducing revenue base has immediate and detrimental effect on the supports clubs give to community activity. The resultant reduction in revenue for those activities has an attendant definite increase in health costs to our community and a decrease in the social cohesion of our society. The ACT Government has some role to play here and can achieve and respect its responsibilities through allowing an increase in the community contribution threshold to 10% of gross gaming revenue.

(iv) Land development and sales

Where the Assembly sees a reduction in dependence on poker machine revenue as a desirable end result, there needs to be in place other incentives to source revenue opportunities such as concessional treatment over the development on adjacent parcels of land.

(v) Problem gambling

The presence of problem gambling is acknowledged. So too should there be an acknowledgement that the club industry has regimes and processes in place to deal with this problem in their premises.

The Association also recognises that a patron may self-exclude from clubs and be club-excluded. The premise of this is the extraction of the patron from temptation.

It is submitted that the patron may then go to another club and start again, and if excluded from enough clubs, go to the TAB or bet on-line. On-line betting is seen as a much more destructive disease than poker machine addiction. Here there is no self-exclusion, there is no venue exclusion, there is no limit and there is only disaster. Patrons can go to the Casino and bet whatever level of funds they wish. There is an over emphasis on the clubs in this exercise.

There is no acknowledgement that engagement in peer activity can be seen as an alternative to gaming. There is no acknowledgment that engagement in an activity means that one is part of a group who can see when a problem is emerging and deal with it. The removal of activities such as billiards and

snooker will exacerbate the issue through the removal of an avenue of escape for the problem gambler.

The Association makes no comment on **terms of reference (vi – ix)**

Recommendations

The Association firmly believes that the viability of our sports is intrinsically linked to the viability of the club industry and recommends that the following steps be taken to ensure that viability of those clubs:

1. That parity with the regimes applicable in NSW be legislated to ensure that there is no benefit for patrons to go to NSW to spend their discretionary income outside the ACT;
2. That the community contribution threshold on gross gaming revenue be raised to 10%;
3. That the note acceptors in poker machines be set to receive \$50 notes;
4. That introduction of a global exclusion system be considered by Government and both clubs and hotels industries in relation to gambling and alcohol abuse, where the exclusion from one venue triggers exclusion from all venues, whether they be clubs or hotels.

Conclusion

The Association reiterates its dependence on the club industry and wishes it to be known that there are unknown consequences when regulatory regimes are imposed on this sector. The viability of the clubs affects not only the gambling community but also other affiliated sports and community organizations, which are dependent on the largesse of the clubs.

The Association thanks the Committee for considering this submission and stands willing to appear before it to elaborate on this submission, should the Committee desire such an appearance.

M O'Neill
President
10th May 2015

R Fraser
Secretary/Treasurer