

**ACT Government Submission to the Standing Committee on Public
Accounts on the Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report
*Monitoring and Minimising Harm Caused by Problem Gambling in
the ACT (Report No. 1/2012)***

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Recommendation 1: Review the Gambling Code of Practice

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission should initiate a review of the Gambling Code of Practice taking into account:

- a) Recent developments in other jurisdictions and research; and
- b) Means to encourage licensees to:
 - i. Undertake staff refresher training every three years;
 - ii. Provide routine briefings by Gambling Contact Officers to other staff who provide gambling services, particularly casual or part-time staff
 - iii. Prepare procedures to guide staff on the use of the Problem Gambling Incident Register and encourage consistency in reporting and recording incidents;
 - iv. Ensure all information relating to problem gambling is made available to patrons in 'a conspicuous way' and that this information presents accurate facts on the chances of winning major prizes, programs for exclusions from gambling, the availability of interpreter services, and the names and contacts for Gambling Contact Officers;
 - v. Improve the consistency of the content of signage and warning notices to patrons and ensure that these are also presented in 'a conspicuous way';
 - vi. Enhance the use of the Register of Excluded People maintained by licensees; and
 - vii. Restrict the capacity for gambling to reserve gaming machines in licensed venues.

Government Response: Agreed

The Commission has already commenced preliminary work on a review of the Code of Practice which will include consideration of work in other jurisdictions and will incorporate, where relevant, recent research findings. The inclusions suggested by the Audit Office for consideration will also be investigated as part of the review.

As with all reviews undertaken by the Commission, public consultation will be an important part of the review process before recommendations are made by the Commission to the Government for any legislation changes.

Recommendation 2: Improve the Commission's corporate planning and reporting

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission should improve its corporate planning and reporting by:

- a) Specifically reporting against the objectives and strategies included in its Strategic Plan;
- b) Better aligning information used in its Strategic Plan, Annual Reports and its Budget Papers/Performance Measurement Framework; and
- c) Supporting its Corporate Plan with an action plan or its equivalent.

Government response: Agreed

The Government agrees that the Commission should provide more specific reporting on its Strategic Plan objectives, and better align information used in its Strategic Plan, annual reports, and Budget papers. The Commission will develop a formal action plan to support its Corporate Plan.

Recommendation 3: Enhance the monitoring of research

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission should enhance its research and monitoring of the risks and costs of problem gambling in the ACT and gambling harm by:

- a) defining and documenting its procedures for reviewing and analysing research findings and recommendations;
- b) using a statement of consideration (or similar document) to explicitly show how research findings and recommendations have been considered by the Commission;
- c) undertaking studies of gambling prevalence in the ACT at a minimum every five years, and considering the value of reducing this to every three years;
- d) expanding its research program, to include fostering research aimed at establishing a performance measurement framework to assess the Commission's achievements against its requirements under legislation.

Government Response: Agreed

The Government, through the Commission, will enhance and formalise its research evaluation and implementation procedures to ensure relevant research projects are fully and consistently considered.

Prevalence studies are scheduled to be undertaken every five years based on effort and cost involved. This allows for further targeted research to be conducted based on prevalence study outcomes while providing for regular base-line data updates.

Where financial and technical capacity allows, additional research will be conducted to specifically test the effectiveness of particular harm minimisation strategies that have been implemented in the ACT.

Recommendation 4: ACT Government opportunities to integrate activities

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission and ACT Government agencies (such as the Health, Community Services, Education and Training, and Economic Development Directorates) should identify opportunities for integrating their activities to minimise harm caused by problem gambling.

Government Response: Agreed

Sharing of knowledge has already occurred across some areas, including education and community services. Further coordination of stakeholder activity will be jointly coordinated by the Economic Development Directorate and the Commission.

Recommendation 5: Guidance and recognition for gambling venues

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission should:

- a) Provide guidance to licensees in how best to meet the requirements of the Code of Practice through developing a 'Better Practice Guide' or using some other mechanism; and
- b) Acknowledge licensees that adopt better practices.

Government Response: Agreed

The Government considers that the provision of guidance material will assist licensees achieve an enhanced understanding of requirements to enable them to better utilise the tools provided under the Code of Practice for managing problem gambling. Acknowledging those licensees that are performing well and using those examples as incentives for others to follow is considered a positive step.

Recommendation 6: Mission Australia working with the gambling industry to encourage a consistent approach

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission should, in conjunction with Mission Australia, work closely with the ACT's gambling industry with the intention of:

- a) Increasing awareness and understanding among gambling venue staff of their roles and responsibilities in addressing gambling harm; and
- b) Encouraging more consistent implementation to the Code of Practice relating to minimising harm caused by problem gambling.

Government Response: Agreed

The Government agrees that increasing the awareness and skills of venue staff to enable them to better manage problem gambling in their venue is a positive step. Increased interaction with Mission Australia and between venues is considered to be useful in this area.

Enhanced information sharing and training opportunities will provide a more skilled workforce that is likely to result in greater consistency in the implementation of Code of Practice requirements and principles.

Recommendation 7: Implement an electronic exclusion database

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission should complete the redevelopment and implementation of the computerised exclusion database as high priority.

Government Response: Agreed

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission has commenced work in this area as a high priority.

Recommendation 8: Increase public awareness

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission should enhance its public awareness actions relating to responsible gambling and the risks of gambling harm. This could include:

- a) A direct link to the local counselling service provider website from the Commission's website, once Mission Australia establishes its website;
- b) Up-grading the Commission's website;
- c) Enhancing promotion of the Commission's website especially in gaming venues;
- d) Undertaking further research to inform targeting of different groups; and
- e) Making information on problem gambling symptoms available widely to assist people self-diagnosing gambling problems.

Government Response: Agreed

Within available resources, enhancing licensee and public awareness is considered a positive step to increasing the knowledge about potential gambling issues and encouraging early intervention for those experiencing problems with their level of gambling activity.

Recommendation 9: Set a time frame and strategy to reach the lower gaming machine cap

The ACT Government should set a time to achieve the 4000 gaming machine cap and implement strategies to meet the target.

Government Response: Not agreed

The Government's view is that a prescriptive timetable to achieve the reduced cap would be unduly disruptive to the club sector. Specifically; such disruption may potentially affect the services enjoyed by members of clubs, and the community activities that clubs currently support.

The Government notes change already underway in the ACT club industry, with many clubs wanting to diversify their sources of income, a process which is likely to be accompanied by the continuing voluntary divestment of gaming machines by clubs.