

Wong, Lina

From: Matters, Stephanie [Stephanie.Matters@fahcsia.gov.au]
Sent: Tuesday, 19 October 2010 10:31 AM
To: White, Damien
Subject: QTB PGT-04.05 - updated ~~[SEC-IN-CONFIDENCE]~~
Attachments: PGT-04 05 update 19 October 2010.DOC

Importance: ~~High~~

Damien

Please find attached our revised QTB that went up this morning. It includes coverage of the SA coronial inquest, and a stabbing death in Melbourne. It also acknowledges a NT report on child neglect that mentioned gambling.

(S22)

Stephanie

From: OSWALD, Robyn
Sent: Tuesday, 19 October 2010 9:47 AM
To: Question.Time; HOUGHTON, Deborah
Cc: Hambling, Helen; Matters, Stephanie ; FOULCHER, Deborah
Subject: QTB PGT-04.05 - updated ~~[SEC-IN-CONFIDENCE]~~
Importance: High

Updated cleared QTB attached.

Regards

Robyn Oswald
Branch Manager
Problem Gambling Taskforce
Ph: 02 6244 1357

(S22)
Email: robyn.oswald@fahcsia.gov.au

PROBLEM GAMBLING

(S47c)

Talking Points / Government Position

- (S47c)
- The Productivity Commission found there are between 80,000 and 160,000 Australian adults suffering severe problem gambling and an additional 230,000 to 350,000 people at moderate risk of becoming problem gamblers.
- (S47c)
- The 2010 Productivity Commission Report into Gambling found that a pre-commitment scheme is a strong, practicable and ultimately cost-effective option to minimise harm caused by gambling.
- Pre-commitment is a tool to help people make informed decisions to manage their money when playing poker machines.
- Pre-commitment requires some form of technology to identify the player and their chosen limits and preferences. Pre-commitment technology can take a number of forms; however, most of the Australian trials so far have used a card system.
- (S47c)
- (S47c)
- (S47c)
- On 21 September we announced the establishment of Ministerial Expert Advisory Group on Gambling, which will include representatives from the

clubs, hotels, casinos and gaming machine manufacturers, problem gambling counsellors and support services and technical experts.

- (S47c)
- (S47c)
- (S47c)

(S47c)

- The Australian Government has committed to implementing pre-commitment technology on all poker machines by 2014.
- The Productivity Commission report also recommends a full pre-commitment system for all electronic gaming machines, in all venues.
- (S47c)
- The first meeting of the Select Council will be held on 22 October 2010.
- (S47c)

Will the Prime Minister intervene to address problem gambling issues in the light of the Coroner's findings relating to the death of Katherine Natt?

- We note with sadness the findings of South Australian Coroner Mark Johns in his inquiry into the death of Katherine Natt.
- Mr Johns found that "Katherine's suicide was a direct result of her inability to cope with a poker machine addiction and the resulting financial consequences of that addiction including, particularly, her fear that the addiction may lead to her losing custody of her children".
- (S47c)

- The Commonwealth has committed to working with state and territory governments to try and minimise the harm caused by problem gambling.
- We are proposing to:
 - implement a best practice full pre-commitment scheme for electronic gaming machines, consistent with recommendations and findings of the Productivity Commission, which will help problem gamblers to set a limit before they start playing.
 - support the Productivity Commission recommendations in relation to electronic gaming machine dynamic warning and cost of play displays so that people playing poker machines are aware of the actual costs of playing these machines; and
 - implement a \$250 daily withdrawal limit for automatic teller machines in venues with electronic gaming machines (excluding casinos).

• (S47c)

•

- The Government notes the findings of the Coroner in Katherine Natt's case that "While it is clear from material tendered by counsel for Katherine's mother that statistically persons employed in the gambling industry are more likely to have gambling problems than other members of the community, there is no other basis on which to conclude that there was a particular link between Katherine's employment at the Casino and her undoubted gambling addiction using poker machines."
- The Coroner "decline[d] to make any comment upon the relevance, if any, of Katherine's employment at the Casino to her gambling addiction."

- The Government is working with the state and territory governments to pursue gambling reform as a priority.
- To this end, a meeting of the COAG Select Council on Gambling Reform is being held in Melbourne this Friday, 22 October 2010.

- (S47c)
- (S47c)
- A Melbourne man, Peter Lubik, allegedly fatally stabbed his wife during an argument about him going to the casino to gamble.
- The report "*Growing Them Strong Together*", co-chaired by Muriel Bamblett and Howard Bath, found that many basic needs of children were not being met, and that the causes of neglect included chronic gambling, illicit drug use and poor supervision.
- (S47c)
- Problem gambling destroys lives - not only the life of the problem gambler but also the lives of their families and friends.
- Yesterday, I announced an additional \$34 million to boost measures to protect children from neglect and abuse in the Northern Territory through changes to income management, where Northern Territory Child Protection Authorities can recommend to Centrelink that a family's welfare payments can be income managed if that is in the interests of the child.
- (S47c)

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

In July 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) called on the Productivity Commission to update its 1999 Inquiry with a particular focus on assessing the effectiveness of these harm minimisation measures in addressing problem gambling.

The Productivity Commission presented its final report into gambling to the Australian Government on 26 February 2010. The report was tabled in both houses of Parliament on 23 June 2010.

The report is a comprehensive study of gambling in Australia, containing 48 recommendations covering wagering, electronic gaming machines, online gambling and state and territory governance arrangements.

An initial Government response to the Productivity Commission report was released on 23 June 2010. This response was criticised for not responding adequately to the report and passing responsibility back to the states and territories (see *Macklin gambles on national action*, Australian Financial Review, 24 June 2010; *Hedging their bets on poker machines*, Daily Telegraph, 24 June 2010).

Following the election, the Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, entered into an agreement with Mr Andrew Wilkie MP to strengthen the Government's response to the recommendations of the Productivity Commission report. This included implementing a national pre-commitment system by 2014, restricting ATM daily withdrawal limits in gaming venues to \$250, and introducing dynamic warnings and cost of play displays on electronic gaming machines.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NSW Opposition leader Mr Barry O'Farrell and Clubs NSW

A number of articles in the media last week discussed an MOU between the NSW Opposition Leader, Mr Barry O'Farrell, and Clubs NSW. The agreement reportedly includes a commitment from the NSW Opposition, if elected to government in 2011, to introduce only a voluntary pre-commitment system in NSW and to lift the caps on multi-terminal gaming machines (*O'Farrell offers soft line on gambling*, Sydney Morning Herald, 16 October 2010; *Libs roll out gaming to clubs*, Daily Telegraph, 15 October 2010).

Multi-terminal gaming machines (MTGMs) are gaming machines that are designed to be played by more than one player at one time and are equipped with more than one terminal. There were 2,192 MTGMs in NSW clubs as at February 2009. In December 2007 the Government introduced a limit on the number of MTGMs in clubs so that no more than 15 per cent of gaming machines in a club could be MTGMs.

Pre-commitment

An article in *The Daily Telegraph* (*Fingerprint for pokies: playing pokies getting criminal*) suggests that poker machine players will be tracked by their fingerprints and memory sticks under the proposed Government gambling reforms.

The article states that Senator Nick Xenophon has confirmed that a USB fingerprint technology is an option for pre-commitment, however it does mention a number of less drastic options, including smartcards.

Anthony Ball from ClubsAustralia argues that the technology is treating gamblers like criminals and would cost billions to implement (not only in revenue but also in setting up and monitoring the system).

Western Australia

In an article in the *Western Australian* of 29 September 2010 (*Casino may avoid pokies curbs*), a spokesperson from the Western Australian Department of Liquor, Gaming and Racing has argued that the Burswood Casino may not be subject to the Commonwealth's commitment to introduce a pre-commitment scheme because their electronic gaming machines are not of the same intensity as the majority of machines in pubs, clubs and casinos in the Eastern States

Western Australia's 1,750 electronic gaming machines are confined to the Burswood Casino. These machines are of a lower intensity than those in other states in that they require a greater level of player interaction and it is not possible to play the machine without the player making a choice of strategy or predicting an outcome prior to completing the game. For example, a machine that draws playing cards may require a player to choose particular cards to 'hold' to continue to play.

Industry Criticisms

ClubsAustralia have launched a grassroots campaign against the introduction of a precommitment system for poker machines and a limit on ATMs (*Clubs set for battle on pokies, Australian 24/9/10*). Clubs Australia are targeting all 150 federal members of parliament (MP) urging them to oppose gambling reform.

The article also mentions that Clubs Australia is contacting the 10 million members of clubs in Australia urging them to write to their federal MP asking them to vote against the reforms. Arguments presented to club members include the loss of jobs, increase in food and drink prices and reduction in community support.

In an article in the *Canberra Times* on 20 September 2010, Anthony Ball, CEO of Clubs Australia, criticised the Government's decision to implement a national pre-commitment system. Mr Ball argued that pre-commitment will not address problem gambling and will result in a loss of \$820 million in gross state product, a decline of more than \$200 million in state taxes and a loss of 11,500 jobs in NSW (*Plan on pokies likely to fail, Canberra Times 20 September 2010, pg 17*).

The article focused on the paternalistic nature of pre-commitment ('license to gamble'), the potential for it to impact on recreational gamblers, and the possible migration to other forms of gambling.

(S47C)

This is based on Productivity Commission estimates that around 40 per cent of revenue comes from problem gamblers, and Clubs Australia estimates that pre-commitment will result in a 30 per cent loss of gaming revenue in clubs (*Anthony Ball, interview on Radio National PM, 3 September 2010 'Pokies curbs to hit gaming industry'*).

~~In-Confidence~~

PGT-04.05

Contact Officer's Name and Position: Deborah Foulcher
Phone/Mobile: 6244 6554 / (S22) [REDACTED]
FaHCSIA Input Cleared By (include Robyn Oswald, Branch Manager, Problem
position): Gambling Taskforce
Phone/Mobile: 6244 1357 / (S22) [REDACTED]
Clearance Date: 19 October 2010
MO Clearance Date: 19 October 2010



Australian
Friday 24/9/2010
Page: 5
Section: General News
Region: Australia Circulation: 131,246
Type: National
Size: 200.76 sq.cms.
Frequency: MTWTF

Index: 6.3
Brief: FACS-COM

Clubs set for battle on pokies

IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR CLUB MEMBERS

I regret to inform you that your club's future is threatened because of a deal made by the Federal Government with an independent member of parliament from Tasmania, named Andrew Wilkie ...
If you want to stop the Government from doing this to our club, please write to our Federal MP [enter name] and ask them to support our club and vote against these proposals ...

From the Clubs Australia letter being sent to its 10 million members

NICOLA BERKOVIC

THE nation's 4000 clubs have launched a highly organised grassroots campaign against Julia Gillard's deal with Tasmanian independent Andrew Wilkie to mandate smartcard technology in poker machines to dramatically limit gamblers' losses.

The clubs are targeting all 150 federal MPs, warning them that the new anti-gambling measures will slash jobs and community support. The MPs are being presented with details of the number of clubs and members in their electorates and the predicted hit to the clubs' bottom line.

Club managers have already met with 31 MPs across the country from both sides of politics and scheduled meetings with another 16, urging them to oppose the reforms. Yesterday, club managers met with seven MPs in

NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

In addition, the clubs will send a letter to each of their 10 million members warning that the anti-gambling measures will force clubs to cut jobs, increase the price of food and drinks and reduce community support, because of a 30 per cent hit to club revenue.

Under the deal struck with Mr Wilkie, Labor has vowed to deliver pre-commitment technology to all poker machines by 2014 and to limit withdrawals from ATM machines in poker-machine venues to \$250, other than in casinos.

The Productivity Commission earlier this year recommended pre-commitment technology, which requires gamblers to use smartcards to track how much money they spend and to limit their total losses, as the most effective way to target problem gambling.

But the clubs object to manda-

tory pre-commitment technology, saying it would effectively force recreational gamblers to obtain a licence to use poker machines.

The clubs' letter urges members to write to their federal MP and ask them to vote against the measures.

It says the reforms treat all members as irresponsible problem gamblers.

Clubs Australia executive director Anthony Ball said the reforms would have a dramatic impact on clubs and would not help problem gamblers, simply driving them to gamble online or at TABs.

"It will absolutely drive down gambling revenue (from poker machines), but it will drive down revenue from recreational or average punters," Mr Ball said.

"The problem gamblers will go and enjoy any other number of other gambling options."



Canberra Times
 Monday 20/9/2010
 Page: 17
 Section: General News
 Region: Canberra Circulation: 33,511
 Type: Capital City Daily
 Size: 241.33 sq.cms.
 Frequency: MTWTFSS-

Brief: FACS-COM

Plan on pokies likely to fail

ANTHONY BALL

The experience of being fingerprinted is generally reserved for those suspected of committing fairly serious crimes. Come 2012, Australians could be made to feel like criminals whenever they sit in front of a poker machine at their local bowling club or RSL and are asked for their fingerprint.

For those that haven't followed things closely, Prime Minister Julia Gillard has agreed to Independent Andrew Wilkie's demand that pre-commitment technology be fitted to Australia's 200,000 poker machines by 2014, and must be under way in two years time. Anti-gambling advocates say this will end the misery of problem gambling. The fact is it won't.

But first, readers need to prepare themselves for the brave new world where Australians must keep a USB key on their person if they wish to play a poker machine. The anti-gambling lobby call it "bio-metric technology" because it involves a scanner reading a person's fingerprint before allowing them to insert money. Generally speaking Australians are naturally suspicious of this technology and of the motives of those who want it introduced.

According to the manufacturer of this technology, "a backup copy of all gambling data on the Player Protection Key is stored on a central mainframe computer. The Government and/or government regulator can also establish its own overriding limits for all players."

Independent Senator Nick Xenophon said last year that USB keys with biometric ID can be made right now with little fuss.

Little fuss? Perhaps to those who

never gamble. But what about the 600,000 Australians who play a poker machine weekly and the millions more who enjoy the occasional flutter on the pokies at their local club? For them it means registering for a licence to gamble. Many Australians understandably will refuse to live in a nanny state and instead choose not to gamble - on poker machines. They will of course still be able to gamble online, at the TAB or even on the result of the next federal election.

Ironically it is everyone bar the problem gambler who will be deterred from playing poker machines knowing that their gambling activity is being recorded by the Federal Government via a USB key unique to them.

If the result of a mandatory pre-commitment system in Australia is similar to that in Quebec, where pre-commitment technology is now in place, the impact will be a reduction of \$2 billion annually in gaming revenue. Because clubs are not-for-profit organisations and recycle their money back into the community via employment, sporting facilities, taxation and donations to charity, the impact will be a reduction of \$820 million in gross state product, a decline of more than \$200 million in state taxes and a loss of 11,500 jobs in NSW.

Mandatory pre-commitment technology installed exclusively on poker machines will not achieve the reduction in problem gambling required to justify the enormous economic and social damage done to communities via the hurling of their local club.

I suspect the anti-gambling lobby is aware of the limited effectiveness of pre-commitment

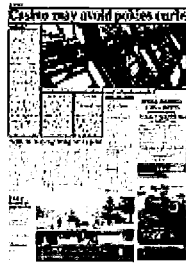
on problem gambling. It's why it has not attempted to quantify what the reduction in problem gambling will be because of the technology's introduction.

What has been stated publicly are the opinions of problem gamblers and counsellors on pre-commitment. Anthony Caruso, a Victorian gambling addict who is three months into a treatment program, said that if he was locked out of a poker machine because he had reached his daily limit, he would go to the TAB, the casino or gamble online. Addiction therapist Jason Quigley said recently that true problem gamblers needed absence and psycho-socio treatment, not a mandatory pre-commitment system.

The introduction of a USB key for poker machines is no more likely to stop problem gambling than a seatbelt stopping drivers from speeding. The only winner from mandatory pre-commitment is the anti-gambling lobby which I suspect is unable to differentiate between a problem gambler and a responsible gambler.

Clubs are not opposed to a venue-based pre-commitment system, but it must be voluntary and done in conjunction with other proven harm-minimisation strategies - such as effective support, counselling, education, mandated staff training and family intervention. For the Federal Government to force a national pre-commitment scheme on all Australians and present it as a magic bullet to problem gambling is simply guaranteeing the technology's failure.

■ Anthony Ball is executive director of Clubs Australia.



West Australian
 Wednesday 29/9/2010
 Page: 9
 Section: General News
 Region: Perth Circulation: 203,204
 Type: Capital City Daily
 Size: 462.01 sq.cms.
 Frequency: MTWTFSS-

Index: 6.5
 Brief: FACS-COI
 Page 1 of 2

Casino may avoid pokies curbs

ANDREW TILLET

Burswood Casino's 1750 gaming machines may evade tough new rules aimed at curbing problem gambling because WA authorities claim they are games more of skill than chance.

In a twist to Julia Gillard's promise to roll out so-called pre-commitment technology for poker machines by 2014, gaming officials claim Burswood's machines are not pokies.

They say they are electronic gaming machines, which may be excluded from a national clampdown on problem gambling requiring machines to be fitted with technology that will force players to set a limit on how much they want to lose.

"EGMs must have player interaction and it must not be possible to play the machine without the player making a choice of strategy or predicting an outcome prior to completing the game," a spokesman for the

Department of Liquor, Gaming and Racing said.

Conventional poker machines that dominate pubs, clubs and casinos in the Eastern States are games of chance, and can be played with one button press per spin, making it easier for players to race through cash.

Both the department and Gaming Minister Terry Waldron said they were waiting for more details from Canberra to see how the Prime Minister's pledge would affect WA's machines.

"The Gaming Commission is the gaming regulator in WA, it will respond to any Federal proposals and it will advise the State Government if a proposal is received," Mr Waldron said.

Burswood Casino, which is controlled by one of Australia's richest men, James Packer, declined to comment.

As part of a deal to hang on to power, Ms Gillard agreed to key

independent Andrew Wilkie's demand to mandate pre-commitment technology for poker machines by 2014, either in co-operation with the States or legislating over the top of their objections.

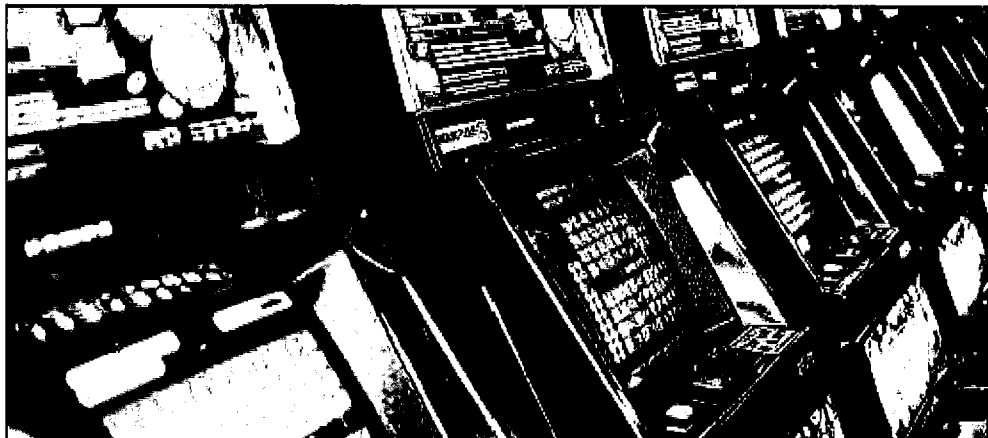
Mr Wilkie said it was unclear how pre-commitment technology would affect WA's machines, but he planned to visit the State to consider the different specifications.

"If there are any aspects of the WA EGMs that need to be reined in, then they will be," he said.

Burswood Casino is the only venue in WA allowed to have gaming machines, and recently applied to add another 250.

The machines are the casino's biggest money-spinner, raking in about \$210 million in 2008-09.

A Productivity Commission inquiry into gambling earlier this year found Australians lost \$19 billion a year on the punt.



Within line: Gaming machines in WA are known as electronic gaming machines, which may be excluded from a national clampdown

Pokies addiction blamed for young mum's death

By Rebecca Brice Updated Mon Oct 18, 2010 4:20pm AEDT

Coroner blames pokies addiction for Katherine Natt's death (ABC News)

A young mother-of-two killed herself because she could not cope with her poker machine addiction, the South Australian coroner has found.

Casino worker Katherine Natt, 24, took an overdose of painkillers in 2006, fearing she may lose custody of her children because of her gambling addiction.

The coroner had been told the woman started work at the Adelaide Casino at 18 and struggled for four years with her poker machine addiction.

Her father had told the court he understood many employees worked at the casino because it prevented them from gambling there, but many, including his daughter, would still gamble at other venues after work.

Ms Natt accumulated a debt of more than \$100,000 and her family never knew.

Coroner Mark Johns said given the the Federal Government was considering measures to help deal with problem gamblers, his only recommendation was that his findings be forwarded on to Canberra.

Outside court, Ms Natt's mother Christine Matthews said she felt let down by the findings.

"I feel like everybody's just failed her," she said.

Senator Nick Xenophon represented the dead woman's family during the inquest and has long campaigned for tougher gambling laws.

He had also hoped for more from the coroner, including recommendations about the responsibility of gambling venues to their employees and patrons.

"The system has failed Katherine and it's failed Katherine's family," he said.

Senator Xenophon said he believed it was the first death directly linked to poker machines in South Australia.

SA's acting Gambling Minister Grace Portolesi said she was saddened by the death.

She said Gambling Minister Tom Koutsantonis would raise the case at the Select Council for Gambling Reform, on Friday in Melbourne.

First posted Mon Oct 18, 2010 11:17am AEDT

Pokie addiction led to suicide, coroner rules

Sean Fewster, Court Reporter, AdelaideNow, October 19, 2010 12:01AM

A landmark finding has linked a casino worker's suicide with her poker machine addiction.

Vowing she would not die in vain, her mother - Christina Matthews - sought to protect others from the ravages of addiction.

Yesterday, Ms Matthews's heart was broken by a coronial finding that fell far short of her hopes.

State Coroner Mark Johns ruled Ms Natt's 2006 overdose was "a direct result of her inability to cope" with her habit.

But he declined to link her addiction with her employment, despite statistics showing gaming-venue workers are 10 times more likely to become addicts.

Ms Matthews said the coroner's announcement that his findings would be sent to Prime Minister Julia Gillard for consideration was no help.

"Governments are prepared to take money from gamblers, but they're not prepared to do anything to protect them," she said.

"I feel so disappointed that the coroner has done nothing to assist me protecting others from what we have gone through.

"Part of me thinks that the coroner has just passed the buck to the Prime Minister."

Ms Natt, a mother of two, overdosed on Panadol and Nurofen. A note in her journal said she "couldn't stop" gambling, and would withdraw as much as \$1400 a night at city hotels after finishing her shift.

Yesterday, Mr Johns said Ms Natt did not use SkyCity's in-house gambling counselling because she "was very secretive about her addiction".

Outside court yesterday, Ms Matthews said her daughter feared losing her job if she sought counselling.

"I would have liked (the coroner) to stipulate that stronger regulations need to be put into place in relation to how much people can take out of hotel ATMs," she said. "It was so obvious to everyone that Kat had a gambling problem but nothing was done to help her ... I feel like everyone has just failed her."

Independent Senator Nick Xenophon said the case highlighted the need for legal reform.

"If you work at a casino, the risk of becoming an addict is greater, so the duty of care to employees must be greater," he said.

Mr Xenophon will raise Ms Natt's death personally with Ms Gillard.

He will also speak to another independent, Andrew Wilkie from Tasmania, who campaigned against problem gambling during the recent federal election campaign.

Acting Gambling Minister Grace Portolesi said the case would be raised by the State Government at this Friday's Select Council for Gambling Reform in Melbourne.

People seeking support and information about suicide prevention can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or SANE helpline on 1800 187 263.

Coroner links mother's suicide to pokies

By Tim Dornin, (HeraldSun.com.au and news.com.au), AAP, October 18, 2010 4:01PM

A CORONER has found a direct link between a young mother's suicide and her addiction to poker machines.

Katherine Natt, 24, died in August 2006 after taking an overdose of paracetamol.

South Australian Coroner Mark Johns said a suicide note left by the Adelaide woman indicated she had been addicted to pokies for some time, losing thousands of dollars.

But independent senator Nick Xenophon and the dead woman's mother have criticised Mr Johns for not going far enough.

Before her death, Ms Natt worked at the Adelaide Casino and Senator Xenophon said evidence had been presented to the inquiry to show such workers were 10 times more likely to develop a gambling addiction.

"I was hopeful that there would be further findings made as to the responsibility of gambling establishments - of the casino to its employees and poker machine venues to their employees," he said.

"Clearly there is an issue of shifting the culture.

"And the evidence is clear, if you work for a casino, the risk of developing a gambling problem is much greater and therefore, the duty of care should be much greater."

Ms Natt's mother, Kristine Mathews, said she felt let down by the state government.

"The government is prepared to take money from gamblers, but is not prepared to do anything to protect them from themselves," she said.

"Sometimes people need to be protected from themselves.

"It was so obvious to so many people that Kat had a gambling problem and yet nothing was ever done to assist her.

"I feel like everybody has just failed her and now the coroner has failed me in trying to help other people."

Ms Mathews said the coroner should have recommended stronger regulations to control how much money gamblers could withdraw from ATMs at pokie venues after evidence showed her daughter repeatedly took out large amounts, often on the same day.

In his findings, Mr Johns said from Ms Natt's suicide note and other evidence it was clear she was addicted to gambling on poker machines.

He said she suffered heavy financial losses and became concerned that she would lose the custody of one or both of her children.

"In consequence of these matters, she took an overdose of paracetamol in what was a clear act of suicide," he said.

But Mr Johns said there was no basis to draw a particular link between Ms Natt's employment at the Adelaide casino and her gambling addiction.

He said the woman did not seek assistance from a counselling service provided by the casino and did not raise her problems with management.

Ms Mathews said her daughter did not go to management because she feared she would lose her job.

Casino general manager David Christian said staff regularly received information regarding its problem gambling assistance programs and how to seek help from its trained staff.

"Adelaide Casino goes well above and beyond current regulations as a gaming venue employer and ensures that it provides a safe workplace for our employees, as well as customers," he said in a statement.

"Katherine Natt was a popular and valued employee of Adelaide Casino and is greatly missed."

The coroner has recommended a copy of his findings go directly to Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Tasmanian independent MP Andrew Wilkie following recent indications the federal government may consider new measures to deal with problem gamblers and poker machines.

Readers seeking support and information about suicide prevention can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or SANE Helpline on 1800 18 SANE (7263) or visit www.beyondblue.org.au.

I feel like everyone failed her

Coroner passing the buck, says heartbroken mother

SEAN FEWSTER

UNABLE to cope with her chronic pokies addiction, SkyCity Casino worker Katherine Natt took her own life.

Vowing she would not die in vain, her mother - Christina Matthews - sought to protect others from the ravages of addiction.

Yesterday, Ms Matthews's heart was broken by a coronial finding that fell far short of her hopes.

State Coroner Mark Johns ruled Ms Natt's 2006 overdose was "a direct result of her inability to cope" with her habit.

But he declined to link her addiction with her employment, despite statistics showing gaming-venue workers are 10 times more likely to become addicts.

Ms Matthews said the coroner's announcement that his findings would be sent to Prime Minister Julia Gillard for consideration was no help.

"Governments are prepared to take money from gamblers, but they're not prepared to do anything to protect them," she said.

"I feel so disappointed that the Governments are prepared to take money from gamblers, but they're not prepared to do anything to protect them" she said.

I feel so disappointed that the coroner has done nothing to assist me protecting others from what we have gone through.

"Part of me thinks that the coroner has just passed the buck to the Prime Minister."

Ms Natt, a mother of two, overdosed on Panadol and Nurofen. A note in her journal said she "couldn't stop" gambling, and would withdraw as much as \$1400 a night at city hotels after finishing her shift.

Yesterday, Mr Johns said Ms Natt did not use SkyCity's inhouse gambling counselling because she "was very secretive about her addiction".

Outside court yesterday, Ms Matthews said her daughter feared losing her job if she sought counselling.

"I would have liked (the coroner) to stipulate that stronger regulations need to be put into place in relation to how much people can take out of hotel ATMs," she said. "It was so obvious to everyone that Kat had a gambling problem but nothing was done to help her... I feel like everyone has just failed her."

Independent Senator Nick Xenophon said the case highlighted the need for legal reform.

"If you work at a casino, the risk of becoming an addict is greater, so the duty of care to employees must be greater," he said.

Mr Xenophon will raise Ms Natt's death personally with Ms Gillard.

He will also speak to another independent, Andrew Wilkie from Tasmania, who campaigned against problem gambling during the recent federal election campaign. Acting Gambling Minister Grace Portolesi said the case would be raised by the State Government at this Friday's Select Council for Gambling Reform in Melbourne.

People seeking support and information about suicide prevention can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or SANE helpline on 1800 187 263.

Should the Prime Minister intervene?

Fatal argument over gambling, court hears

October 18, 2010

A MELBOURNE man fatally stabbed his wife with a kitchen knife during an argument in January last year about him going to the casino to gamble, a court has heard.

But Peter Lubik, who has pleaded not guilty in Victoria's Supreme Court to murdering his wife Barbara Lubik in the dining room of their home in Noble Park North, claims her death was a tragic accident.

The jury heard today that Lubik and his wife, who married shortly after meeting in 2006, became involved in an argument on the night she died after he told her he was going to the casino to gamble. Along with his drinking, Lubik's gambling had caused constant problems in their marriage, the court heard.

Advertisement: Story continues below

Prosecutor Daryl Brown said as a result of this confrontation, Mrs Lubik received a five centimetre stab wound to her throat which severed her carotid artery.

The prosecutor alleged that Lubik had phoned triple-0 at 9.42pm and told the operator that his wife tried to choke him and he hit her.

"He stated that she was conscious and breathing and that the incident happened about 20 minutes ago. He made no mention of the fact that there was a knife involved or that his wife had a knife wound."

After Lubik hung up, the operator phoned him back and he then stated he had used his fists. He said his wife was no longer conscious and breathing, Mr Brown said. He told the operator there was also a lot of blood on the floor.

Despite giving the operator the impression that he was complying with instructions to administer CPR by rolling his wife on to her back, Mrs Lubik was still face-down when police and paramedics arrived.

The jury was told there had been a history of alcohol-fuelled domestic violence in the Lubiks' marriage and at times, Mrs Lubik had fled the house to stay with friends or at a hotel to get away from her husband.

But she had also told friends that he was a loving and generous husband when he did not drink alcohol, which the friends also observed themselves.

She told them his "outbursts of violence, abuse and aggression" were largely due to alcohol. During such episodes he had thrown her clothes on to the patio at times in the past and cut her clothes and also damaged sentimental belongings, the jury heard.

A month after they married the accused had also physically assaulted her, the court heard.

Mr Brown said a security guard at the Dandenong Hospital - where Lubik spent several days after his wife's death for treatment of diabetes - would testify that Lubik told him his wife confronted him with a knife on the night she died. He is alleged to have told the guard, who was a friend he had lost contact with, that he tried to take the knife off her and he received minor cuts to his fingers while doing so.

"The accused told him that he then struggled with his wife and she slipped and lost balance," Mr Brown said. "As his wife was falling that is when it happened, her throat got slit."

Defence lawyer Benjamin Lindner told the jury Mrs Lubik's death was an accident.

“Peter Lubik did not murder his wife Barbara Lubik,” he said in his opening address.

“What we have here is a tragic accident set against the background of a relationship that had its problems... The death of Barbara Lubik was a terrible, terrible tragedy,” Mr Lindner said.

“One thing is crystal clear, this is not a case of some frenzied wild assault on another person, because you will hear that there was only one fatal injury, a single knife wound which had a tragically fatal consequence.”

He told the jury they would hear the triple-0 call Lubik made during which he could be heard weeping.

“You will hear his wailing, you will hear his cries for help and you will hear his screaming,” he said. “You will hear it all for yourself.”

He urged them to listen and decide if it shows "someone who has had an intention to injure his wife, far less as the prosecution wants to you think, to cause her really serious injury or to kill her?"

Mr Lindner reminded the jury to focus on what happened the night of Mrs Lubik's death rather than the problems in their marriage before then.

“Your verdict should not be based on suspicion,” he said.

“It's not to be based on guesswork. It's not to be based on speculation and it's not to be based on intuition. It's a rational, intellectual task. If the prosecution has not proven that the incident on 25th January 2009 was not an accident, and that he did not intend the outcome before he made that triple-0 call, then you would have to find Mr Lubik not guilty.”

The trial, before Justice Ross Robson continues.

Child protection fails again in Northern Territory

Lindsay Murdoch and Russell Skelton

October 19, 2010

THREE years after the shocking *Little Children Are Sacred* report, a new inquiry has found that almost 1000 children who are at risk of abuse or neglect in the Northern Territory are not receiving government help.

The inquiry concluded there was a "tsunami of need", and that immediate action was required to remedy the "overwhelming failure" of the child protection system in the NT.

Inquiry co-chairwoman Muriel Bamblett, releasing the report yesterday, called on the NT government to act urgently to deal with a huge backlog of cases. "If one of those children dies, that is something the government should be ashamed of," Professor Bamblett said.

Advertisement: Story continues below

The inquiry found the system had been swamped by children in need over the past two years. Between January and July this year, an average of 797 cases each month were not being investigated. Some child protection workers were dealing with 80 cases each - three times the norm - while the needs of 1000 children considered at risk were not being attended to at all.

Many more children whose cases remained unreported were also believed to be at risk.

The inquiry found many basic needs of children were not being met. Causes of neglect included chronic gambling, illicit drug use and poor supervision.

Within hours of receiving the report, NT Chief Minister Paul Henderson promised immediate reforms, backed by a \$130 million funding injection over five years.

He said a committee would oversee implementation of the most urgent of 142 recommendations, and make a detailed assessment of the others.

Ten interstate and overseas child protection workers would begin work immediately to tackle the backlog of cases, he said. An additional 42 professional child protection workers would be recruited, on top of 76 front-line and support workers announced earlier this year.

Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin linked the findings of the report in part to increased reporting of child abuse, which she said had grown with extra police on the ground in Aboriginal communities.

She said the 2007 government intervention in 73 remote NT communities had improved community safety. "Of course there is much more to be done and we are committed to continuing to progress much needed change on the ground," she said in a joint statement with Indigenous Health Minister Warren Snowdon.

Ms Macklin announced tougher income management rules to target abusive parents in Aboriginal communities while committing an extra \$34 million for child protection.

It is believed Canberra will also monitor closely NT spending on child protection following claims of underspending and misdirection of funds.

Criticising the 2007 intervention, which was prompted by the *Little Children Are Sacred* report, Professor Bamblett said Aboriginal people felt disempowered and "their capacity to parent their children has been taken away." Men in particular "don't feel they have to be parents any more", she said.

Professor Bamblett said the NT child protection system was simply not working. "Children aren't being parented," she said.

"There are no support services like parenting programs. You have an absence of parents in communities looking after children. You have a government that has to step in to be the public parent. It can't. It can't replace the role of families and parents in communities."

Howard Bath, who co-chaired the inquiry, urged the NT and federal governments to fund programs that focus equally on prevention of child neglect and abuse as well those dealing with reported cases.

The inquiry was set up 18 months ago after a series of scandals, including the death of a 12-year-old girl who lay in the dirt in her foster carer's backyard for eight hours.

The current system was "completely overwhelmed", the inquiry found, with the workload dangerously degrading the system's capacity to respond to children in need.

But the inquiry defended child protection staff who are "unable to cope with limited resources".

It found workers were being forced to work across areas that should be the responsibility of other staff.