

6.2 CORRESPONDENCE TO AUSTRALIAN LEISURE HOSPITALITY GROUP

Submitting Councillors: Josh Fergeus and Geoff Lake

MOTION

That:

Council write to the Australian Leisure and Hospitality Group (ALH Group) and Woolworths to seek to understand whether certain reported alleged acts continue to, or have previously occurred, within any of the 8 ALH Group owned pokies venues located within the City of Monash, including:

- whether ALH Group and Woolworths monitor or have monitored regular customers of these venues;*
- whether ALH Group and Woolworths have compiled, stored and/or distributed personal information of these individuals with or without their consent;*
- whether ALH Group and Woolworths use or have used this information to try and keep patrons gambling in their venues for longer periods of time.*

BACKGROUND

On January 28 2018 in the House of Representatives, Mr Andrew Wilkie MP alleged that ALH Group venues that operate Electronic Gaming Machines (EGM's) have been spying on patrons in an effort to raise profits and gambling losses in the community. Numerous sources and insiders were cited by Mr Wilkie, with many describing the routine practises as unethical and that many staff felt uneasy about what they were required to do.

Numerous alleged strategies were cited, including keeping regular customers in the gaming rooms for as long as possible by supplying free food and alcohol. It has also been alleged that detailed databases of personal information were kept and shared with venues with the aim to use this information to increase customers gambling. Alleged actions also includes directing staff to bond with certain customers, and to target patrons when they had obtained an increase in disposable income.

These actions, if undertaken, work against conditions of their gambling licenses. Businesses are required to adopt and adhere to codes of conduct that are intended to stop unsafe gambling practices being promoted. In recent months, the method of operation for EGM's in the industry in Victoria have continually been under question. Crown Casino in Melbourne was recently found guilty and it is expected that they will be given a fine for illegally altering buttons on poker machines and as a result it has been ordered to update its compliance framework.

DISCUSSION

City of Monash currently has eight (8) venues located within its municipality that are owned and operated by ALH Group. These venues control 464 EGM's which had a combined total of \$61.5 million in losses taken directly from the community

in 16/17. This puts City of Monash in the top two local government areas in Victoria in terms of amount of losses attributed to ALH Group venues.

ALH Group is Australia's largest pokies provider, with more than 12,000 poker machines. Due to this, Woolworths reaped \$1.55 billion in revenue from its hotels' business in the last financial year, creating a \$232 million profit before tax and interest.

CONCLUSION

Monash Council has made a commitment to limiting gambling-related harm, through the City of Monash Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016-2020. Furthermore, City of Monash has included gambling-harm prevention as a focus within the key priorities outlined within the newly endorsed A Healthy and Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan 2017-2021.

This motion is a continuation of Council's work aiming to prevent gambling-related harm across Monash.