

6.6 POKIES FREE HAWTHORN FOOTBALL CLUB – FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Submitting Councillors: Cr Fergeus & Cr Lake

MOTION

That Council:

- i) Congratulates the Western Bulldogs Football Club on their plan to withdraw the club from any financial interests attached to the gaming industry;*
- ii) Notes the long relationship between the Hawthorn Football Club and the Monash City Council;*
- iii) Notes that venues associated with the Hawthorn Football Club continue to be responsible for more pokies losses than any other AFL Club in the 2017-18 financial year¹, topping \$24.3 million;*
- iv) Notes that \$10.95 million of pokies losses occurred at the Hawthorn Football Club gaming venue Vegas at Waverley Gardens in the 2017-18 financial year.*
- v) Calls on the Hawthorn Football Club to follow the example of the Western Bulldogs Football Club and withdraw the club from any financial interests attached to the gaming industry.*

BACKGROUND

On 4 October 2018, Western Bulldogs Football Club announced that it had taken action to completely remove itself from the gaming industry. As a result 10 out of the 18 AFL clubs will be completely free of Poker Machine entitlements and a reliance of revenue generated from localised gambling harm. Monash City Council still has one venue owned by an AFL Club operating Electronic Gaming Machines (EGM's) within our municipality; Vegas at Waverley Gardens, owned by Hawthorn Football Club.

Of all venues currently owned by Victorian AFL Clubs, the two venues with the highest rate of user losses are both owned by Hawthorn Football Club, with Vegas at Waverley Gardens ranked second, with \$10.95 million lost in 2017/18. As detailed in the Notice of Motion considered at the August 28th Council meeting Hawthorn Football Club currently operates 165 gaming licences across its two venues, with an average of \$147,273 lost per machine, topping a whopping \$24.3 million in 2017/18. In comparison Carlton Football Club ranks second in terms of losses generated from AFL club owned EGM's with \$18.4 million lost over 4 venues and 300 gaming licences, or \$61,333 per machine. This highlights that Hawthorn FC owned machines are currently generating the most harm compared to any other location in Victoria which is owned by an AFL club.²

¹ http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/afl_action

² <https://www.vcgr.vic.gov.au/CA256F800017E8D4/VCGLR/2C4FB00D26AF1EFFCA257B320078D3F5?OpenDocument>

DISCUSSION

Monash City Council is frequently recognised as state leaders in the prevention of gambling harm as a result of our history in successful advocacy and prevention project work in the community. In line with Council's Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016-2020 and ongoing leadership in this space, Monash has a firm commitment to the prevention of gambling harm normalisation.

We firmly believe that if Hawthorn Football Club were to follow the lead of the other AFL clubs in exiting the gaming machine industry, the potential non-renewal of their gaming entitlements at Vegas at Waverley Gardens venue could save our local community millions of dollars in potential losses through those EGM's and importantly, the health and wellbeing issues associated with harms from gambling. In keeping with the previous Council resolutions, Monash City Council therefore should continue to strongly advocate again for the Club to take this step.

In April and August 2018, City of Monash raised a Notice of Motion seeking Hawthorn Football Club to cease their reliance on EGM's. As more football clubs turn their back on owning EGM's they are accepting and adopting the long held view of Monash Council which rejects the notion of responsible gambling and that the duty of care from gambling harm rests solely on the individual. Evidence supports that three out of four people being harmed by gambling principally use poker machines. EGM's are designed to extract as much money as possible, using well known principles of behavioral psychology to create addiction³ including disguising losses as wins.

As per the September 2018 resolution, Council is endeavouring to meet with Hawthorn FC CEO Justin Reeves to discuss the clubs ownership of Electronic Gaming Machines. The purpose of this meeting is to urge Hawthorn FC to consider the introduction of measures to support their future withdrawal from the gambling industry, and hence their ownership of EGM's within the municipality at the Vegas Waverley Gardens venue. This would demonstrate that Hawthorn FC has made a clear commitment to harm-minimisation, reducing gambling normalisation and acknowledging the negative impacts of gambling harm in line with their other current commitments to 'Love The Game' and Beyond Blue.

We urge our fellow Councillors and our community to hold Hawthorn Football Club to account and continue to call on the Club to become EGM free and relinquish their reliance on the gambling industry.

CONCLUSION

Monash has made a commitment to limiting gambling-related harm, through the *City of Monash Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016-2020*. Consistent with Council's previous commitment to harm minimisation, we urge our fellow Councillors to continue to strongly advocate on behalf of its residents for Hawthorn Football Club to follow the lead of Collingwood Football Club, Melbourne Football Club and now the Western Bulldogs Football Club and withdraw any of their financial interests that are involved in the gaming industry.

³ http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/the_damage_done

Council is best positioned to effectively advocate for the improved health and wellbeing of our community. A commitment from Hawthorn Football Club to withdraw from the gaming industry would send a powerful, positive message to both its members and the local community around the harmful impacts of gambling and EGM's. Council will also request a meeting with the Hawthorn Football Club board to progress this action.

A strong stance taken by the Hawthorn Football Club to distance themselves from the gaming industry will lead to increased opportunities for better health outcomes for all Monash residents, as well as the broader football community.

ATTACHMENT – OFFICER REPORT