

6.5 POKIES FREE HAWTHORN FOOTBALL CLUB

Submitting Councillors: Cr Fergeus

MOTION

That Council:

- i) Congratulates the Collingwood 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 City of Monash; and writes requesting to meet with the Hawthorn Football Club board about their potential exit from the gaming industry;*
- 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 Mulgrave in the 2017-18 financial year; and*
- v) Highlights a potential conflict in commitments and comments made by Jeff Kennett, President of the Hawthorn Football Club in relation to the exposure of their fans and members to sports betting, whilst still operating Electronic Gaming Machine venues.*

BACKGROUND

On 18 July 2018, Collingwood Football Club announced that it had taken action to completely remove itself from the gaming industry. As a result, nine (9) out of the eighteen (18) Australian Football League (AFL) clubs will be completely free of Poker Machine entitlements and a reliance of revenue generated from localised gambling harm. Consequently, the City of Monash will still have one venue owned by Hawthorn Football Club operating Electronic Gaming Machines (EGM's) within our municipality; namely Vegas at Waverley Gardens, Mulgrave.

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. 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

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

Football Club owned machines are currently generating the most harm compared to any other location in Victoria which is owned by an AFL club.²

DISCUSSION

The City of Monash 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.

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. Monash City Council therefore strongly advocates again for the Club to take this step.

In April 2018, we raised a Notice of Motion seeking Hawthorn Football Club to cease their reliance on EGM's. Following this meeting, Council wrote to the Hawthorn Football Club calling on them to follow the example of the Melbourne Football Club and withdraw the club from any financial interests attached to the gaming industry. In response to this letter, the Hawthorn Football Club President Jeff Kennett made comments in May 2018 regarding the worrying trends associated with sports betting. He stated that the real impact of the harm may not be known 'maybe for 10 or 15 years, but by then it's too late and it will lead to other problems as well'³. The Club President also outlined what he believed distinguished the difference between this and other forms of gambling. In regards to Hawthorn Football Club owning gaming machine entitlements, he stated 'What adults do is their business', and sports betting is being marketed to young people.

Monash City Council continues to reject the notion of responsible gambling and that the duty of care from gambling harm rests solely on the individual. Gambling activities continued to be normalised however evidence supports that three out of four people being harmed by gambling principally use poker machines. EGM's with are designing to extract as much money as possible, using well known principles of behavioural psychology to create addiction⁴ including disguising losses as wins.

It is important to highlight this potential conflicting opinion as there are negative impacts from Electronic Gaming Machines being felt right now in the Monash community and it is not only financial, but also through the proven negative impact EGM's can have on a person's health and wellbeing. With Councils proud association and membership with the Alliance for Gambling Reform (the Alliance), we firmly support their position that as the former Premier of Victoria and former Chair of BeyondBlue, "you would think *he [Jeff Kennett] would be concerned that approximately one suicide a day is linked to poker machine harm and that*

²<https://www.vcgr.vic.gov.au/>

³ <http://www.afl.com.au/news/2018-05-07/kennett-warns-of-indoctrination-of-sports-betting>

⁴ http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/the_damage_done

pokies cause depression, addiction, family breakdowns, poverty and increased family violence and act to get the Hawks out of pokies”

Hawthorn Football Club have already made a commitment to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundations ‘Love the Game’ program. This involves pledging a commitment to reducing exposure of their fans and members to sports betting. To compliment Hawthorn Football Club’s work with the indigenous community and in Mental Health, through partnerships with Epic Good Foundation and Beyond Blue, we assert that being aware of the harm associated from Poker Machines should be evident. The impact of Poker Machines on Mental Health⁵ and our local multi-cultural⁶ community is well documented, and any continued relationship with the gaming industry undermines other community outreach work.

Given that the Club have made a clear commitment to harm-minimisation, reducing gambling normalisation and acknowledging the negative impacts of gambling harm, 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 City Council has a made a commitment to limiting gambling-related harm through the *City of Monash Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016-2020*. In the best interests of our residents and ratepayers, we urge Council and our community to continue to strongly advocate for Hawthorn Football Club to follow the lead of both Collingwood and Melbourne Football Clubs and divest itself from any financial reliance that is associated with the gaming industry.

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 Electronic Gaming Machines. We also seek 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 – OFFICERS’ REPORT

⁵ https://www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/12944/problem-gambling-and-depression-beyond-blue.pdf

⁶ <https://www.insidegambling.com.au/editions/7/feature/gambling-in-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-communities-in-australia>