

6.1 GRANTS FROM COMMUNITY SUPPORT FUND AND MONASH COUNCIL'S GAMBLING POLICY

Submitting Councillor: Cr Saloumi

MOTION

That Council:

In line with Council's resolution on 31 May 2016 to adhere to City of Monash Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016 – 2020, Council must return all monies sought and provided through the State Government's Community Support Fund since 31 May 2016 in order to commit to its resolution to maintain independence from the gambling industry.

BACKGROUND

On 31 May 2016 at Item 2.2. Monash Council resolved to endorse the City of Monash Public Health Approach to Gambling Statement 2016 – 2020; and noted the incorporation of the Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement into the Health & Wellbeing Partnership Plan 2013 – 2017 and Access & Equity Framework 2013-2017.

Clause 2.7 of the City of Monash Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016 – 2020, states *"Council will maintain independence from the gambling industry. Council will not accept financial contributions from gambling venues..."* And the Statement continues *"The Policy is to have whole-of-Council ownership and provides Council with a clear, consistent and decisive position on this major public health issue"*

The Community Support Fund (CSF) was created in 1991 and is a trust fund currently governed by the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. *"As prescribed by the legislation the CSF receives revenue generated from electronic gaming machines in hotels."* Ref: <https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/funds-programs-and-policies/community-support-fund>

Council, by accepting monies from the Community Support fund is accepting financial contributions derived from gambling activities originating in hotels with electronic gaming machines (pokies).

DISCUSSION

Monash Council has been proactive in promoting its public stance against gambling, particularly focussing on electronic gaming machines (pokies) and the venues that host them. Community groups that meet in these venues are excluded from receiving grants from Monash Council. Community groups using/leasing Council facilities are forbidden to promote social events that involve any activities perceived as gambling, or are booked at venues with pokies.

Council has promoted its opposition to gambling by distributing postcards pre-addressed to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, The Hon. Marlene Kairouz; erecting banners and posters that label electronic gaming machines as *Misleading, Addictive and Deadly* and *Pokies Play You*.

Council joined the Alliance for Gambling Reform, which bears the slogan *Pokies Play You*. The City of Monash Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016 – 2020 outlines in detail Council’s public health approach to gambling with nine policy priorities. Below are excerpts from the Policy Statement 2016 – 2020:-

“So, with this Statement, we will continue to facilitate free or low cost community activities that have nothing whatsoever to do with gambling.” Ref: (Forward) 1. Mayor Geoff Lake’s Message

“The Policy is to have whole-of-Council ownership and provides Council with a clear, consistent and decisive position on this major public health issue”

“The Policy Statement is poker-machine specific”

“Council will not provide community grants, funding, sponsorship, Council facilities, publicity or promotion for community groups/organisations that promote gambling. All relevant Council guidelines will align with this policy position.”

“This Policy Statement articulates in detail Monash Council’s public health position to gambling which will continue to be enacted through leadership, policy, advocacy and community action.”

“State and territory governments rely heavily on gambling tax for revenue, despite it being a major public health issue.⁴⁶ Large spending programs of state and territory governments, including hospitals, schools and infrastructure, leads governments to source revenue where they can. Gambling tax revenue is a lucrative avenue.⁴⁷ Due to this, Government policy on gambling is severely compromised.⁴⁸

Local government concern about the social harm to communities caused by poker machines increasingly puts councils at odds with state government, which rely heavily on taxes and licence fees paid by the gambling industry.⁴⁹”

However, by sourcing grants from the Community Support Fund, Council’s budgets have benefitted from poker machine revenue. For the CSF does, and always has received (its) income from taxes on electronic gaming machines (pokies)’ revenue generated in Victorian hotels.

Monash Examples of Community Support Funding

- At Item 7.11 on 31 May 2016 Cr Lake submitted a Motion to delay the WA Scammell Reserve Pavilion Upgrade Project in order to secure more funding. This motion was carried. The Scammell Reserve Pavilion Redevelopment consequently was allocated \$50,000 from the Community Support Fund.
- The Monash Gallery of Art’s e-news published on 25.02.2020 and 10.03.2020 included the following statement: *“Council is undertaking a feasibility study to consider improvements for the MGA with funding support from the Victorian State Government through the Community Support Fund.”*
- Monash Council accepted a total of \$400,000 from the Community Support Fund via two tranches in consecutive years 2018/19 and 2019/20.

By securing Community Support Funding in the past, and currently using income derived from this source to enable the feasibility study for the MGA / Wheelers Hill Cultural Precinct, it appears Monash Council is relying on a business funding model that *“relies on the tainted income flowing from poker machines¹”*. Is Council *“comfortable receiving benefits funded from the human misery caused by their (pokies) everyday operations?²”* (Ref: excerpts ^{1,2} from Cr Lake’s column in Councillor News, Monash Bulletin, May 2019)

CONCLUSION

Apparently, Council is in violation of its own resolution regarding its Gambling Policy.

Council, in order to recover its credibility and to portray consistency in all its decisions that relate to gambling, must adhere to its own City Of Monash Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016-2020 by demonstrating its own independence from all aspects of gambling industry.

Council should not be the willing recipient of money sourced from taxes on revenue* derived from electronic gaming machines (also known as *participants' losses).

Consequently, Council should return monies accepted and/or sought from the Community Support Fund from 31 May 2016.