

**TOPIC AREA – STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES, SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The Australasian Gaming Council is a national gambling industry body which was established by leaders of the Australian gambling industry after the 1999 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Gambling. The organisation's charter is to maintain a sustainable industry in Australia and New Zealand through promoting:

- responsible gambling initiatives;
- robust gambling research;
- gambling education; and
- industry participation in public policy debates and forums.

A list of the AGC's Directors and membership is available on the AGC website, [www.austgamingcouncil.org.au](http://www.austgamingcouncil.org.au).

Recent comments from Minister Macklin and Prime Minister Rudd suggest the issues around gambling in Australia are complex and involve many stakeholders. The AGC Board has broad and senior sector industry representation, works collaboratively with other associations and is well placed as a body to be consulted by and work with government on this important issue.

While the background papers for the topic area 'Strengthening Communities, Supporting Families and Social Inclusion' say that the papers intend to tell an "evidenced-based story about how Australia is faring", the AGC finds that page 16, which outlines problem gambling information, contains both errors of fact and out of date material.

The AGC discussion paper, *The Gambling Environment 2007 Changes since 1999*, was referred to extensively by Gary Banks in his 2007 address to the Australian Gaming Expo Conference as a source of updated and accurate facts and figures. The paper notes that the Australian gambling environment and culture has fundamentally altered since 1999 with the delivery of responsible gambling at the forefront of change. Changes are aimed at reducing the risk to those who choose gambling as an enjoyable and legitimate form of entertainment. The task is complicated; balancing the development and implementation of harm minimisation strategies for individuals who may be at risk while not unduly impeding those who gamble for entertainment within a social setting.

Recently, responsible gambling has gained a much higher profile in the community than it enjoyed previously. This needs to be maintained and strengthened as awareness of the risks involved will assist in reducing problem gambling. Care needs to be taken, though, to ensure that there is a balance in communication.

An overemphasis on problem gambling in advertising communications tends to stigmatise gambling, discouraging those who are adversely affected from presenting themselves for counselling and treatment. Collaboration among key stakeholders, namely the gambling industry, government and community groups, is another fundamental that must be further developed. That this has already begun is testament to the commitment by all stakeholders to reduce the prevalence of problem gambling and should be commended.

Education is another major area of focus. Ongoing effort in this area will ensure that the message that gambling should be conducted responsibly by all involved is maintained and strengthened.

The AGC believes that it is important for any future discussions about the gambling industry to be held in forums where all stakeholders can be involved.