

# **DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH**

**3 Aug 2022**

## **Parton PMB – Point of Consumption Tax and Racing**

Thank you, Madam Speaker. In speaking today – I do not support Mr Parton's motion.

I have worked intensively in the gambling field for 16 years now. The industry, the governments, the media, the services, the researchers, those people that enjoy a punt or a play on a poker machine and those people and families impacted by the harms of gambling have been my job – these are the people and experiences I have lived and breathed for all of my adult working life.

What I have learnt and what I understand very clearly – is that people need to be put first. All these debates that swirl parliaments and the media, are around different ideological and political positions – but none of them put the people who were harmed first. I think this narrative has been so distorted.

I moved a motion in this Assembly to address online gambling harm a couple of months ago, calling on the ACT Government to explore options for funding to address harm – such as the Betting Operations Tax.

However, my motion was completely hijacked by Mr Parton and Mr Braddock for their own political purposes. This makes me extremely frustrated that I can't get support for a motion, the first motion in this place that seeks specifically to support people harmed by online gambling.

What I would like to remind colleagues in the Assembly – is that when the headlines come, when the debate ensues, the conversations that I have, are with, for example – a mother who describes her 24 year old son as a shell of his former self, (Assembly colleagues, a young man who is a shell of his former self – do we accept that in our community) he has lost everything through online gambling, and this poor mother is at her absolute wits end to support him.

I speak to a man in his 40's who has survived two suicide attempts – and has lost his family, livelihood and assets as a result of his online gambling, and now lives in basic poverty – a broken man.

I also speak to the partner of a gambler – a young woman in her 20's with two very little children, who cries every time she speaks to me, desperate for help for her husband (another young man) who has systemically eroded her

trust and their finances over the past two years. These are the people that I talk to, that I say – sorry motion wasn't passed, politics got in the way.

I have been advocating strongly for an increase to the Betting Operations Tax – because I believe the online wagering providers have exploited our community over COVID – I believe, that similar to the ACT clubs that are taxed to ameliorate the harm they cause, I believe that some revenue from the Betting Operations Tax should be allocated to harm reduction.

In 2019, 9.7% of the ACT's adult population bet on sports and special events within 12 months. Of those people, 38.5% were classified as at-risk gamblers, of which 3.2% were problem gamblers.

Further, 14.3% of the ACT adult population bet on horse and greyhound racing, 21.8% were classified as at-risk gambling, 2.8% problem gamblers.

The harm caused by sports betting – is approaching double that of the harm caused by horse racing.

80% of people who bet on sports in the ACT, bet online, however, only 50% of people who bet on horse racing bet online.

Revenue from the BOT in the ACT would predominately come from online sports betting. And significantly more harm comes from the sports-betting than the horse racing.

This is why I do not support Mr Parton's motion. I believe that any 'reasonable proportion' of the BOT should go to online gambling harm minimisation.

While we continue to live an environment where gambling advertising floods our TV's, and social media, or sports grounds – which I strongly believe needs to be addressed – but while we live in that environment there needs to be education and an anti-dote the advertising. We know the advertising works.

Which is why we have a major public health problem in the ACT of online gambling harm in the age group of 18–45-year-old males in the ACT.

Again, to try to put this in perspective – compared to Victoria – we have higher sports betting participation rates – however, what is really stark is that in Victoria, 48% of people who gamble on sports are under 44 – in the ACT its 80% - and its very significantly skewed to men.

I have said this before – but if you are a male under the age of 45 and do not have a tertiary education in the ACT – you have a 1 in 5 probability that you will experience gambling harm. I can't say it enough – we have a major public health problem of gambling harm in young men in the ACT.

As I said in my original motion a couple of months ago – I strongly believe that the ACT Government needs to consider evidence-based ways to raise community awareness (particularly targeting groups in the population susceptible to online gambling harm) around the risks of online gambling and very urgently and proactively explore options to fund this from the increased Betting Operations Tax to ameliorate the harm caused by online gambling in the ACT community.

And I just hope that into the future – we can all reflect on the harm that comes to our community when we speak on this issue.

Thank you.