**SkyCity ‘International Convention Centre’ Bill**

**Submissions to the Commerce Select Committee are due by 22 August**.

For electronic submission s go to the following and scroll to the bottom < <http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/pb/sc/make-submission/50SCCO_SCF_00DBHOH_BILL12309_1/new-zealand-international-convention-centre-bill>>

**Some main points of the bill**:

In exchange for SkyCity building a Convention Centre there will be:

* An additional 230 pokie machines and 40 more gaming tables that are being permitted by this legislation
* An extended 35 year permit (until 2048) for gaming
* The purpose of the bill is defined as being for economic benefit of New Zealanders (obscuring the extension to gambling provisions of the bill)

**Arguments against the bill include:**

* Extension of the SkyCity license to 2048 means that the SkyCity will not have to undergo the required renewal process in the two renewable peiorids of 2021 and 2038. The license renewal requires an independent report of social and economic impacts on casino operations (or closure). The public is invited to make submissions with the opportunity for public hearings before the license is renewed. Thus the usual opportunity for independent assessments and for public and local body input into license renewal will not be required. Accountability to the public for the operations of the casiono will therefore be removed.
* Overall, the Government is making laws for one company at a time (in this case SkyCity) – and another example is Tiwai Point NZ Aluminium Smelter)
* Social impacts of additional gambling facilities
* Research shows that for every 10 additional gaming machines there is an average increase of 8 problem gamblers (this means there will be more more problem gamblers
* The 230 additional pokie machines and 40 extra gaming tables goes against the sinking lid policy of reducing gambling harm
* The impacts of gambling harm are felt by gamblers and their families
* The bill extends the notes accepted in pokie machines from $20 to $100 notes. It also introduces cashless card based technology (needing cash provides a brake on spending)
* Impacts include economic effects (not enough money for food, health care and housing), and social effects on relationships, children and communities. Suicide, depression, family violence, loss of employment are included in the risks of problem gambing.
* Poor communities are much more impacted by problem gambling with the high concentration (53%) of pokie machines in low socio-economic areas (decile 8-10) (The legislation is SkyCity specific so this argument is not so clear in this case)
* Maori and Pacific people are more likely to be negatively effected – corresponding with the demographic correlation with low income communities
* A theological argument based on the Common Good. Principles of the Common good include wellbeing for all wiith assurance of participation and social inclusion; it includes an idea that power is to be exercised to serve the Common Good, with ethical principles of equity, rights and responsbilities to be given weight alongside economic considerations.

Giving priority to the Common Good takes account of all aspects of any proposed change – economic, social and environmental and cultural. Economic advantage must be balanced with social justice; individual rights with community wellbeing and public health. An excerpt from Pope Benedict provides a guide to a theology of the Common Good:

Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of “all of us”, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community ([*http://www.vatican.va/holy\_father/benedict\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\_ben-xvi\_enc\_20090629\_caritas-in-veritate\_en.html*](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html)>

The bill specifically states that the purpose is for economic benefit for New Zealanders through NZ being able to host international conferences. The concessions for gambling are so that Skycity can meet the costs of the Convention Centre ($402m). SkyCity was chosen because the costs of a convention centre will not be borne by taxpayers (but by the proceeds of gambling). These exclusively economic arguments not only ignore moral principles of the common good such as a the giving priority to social wellbeing with, in this case, responsibility to minimize harm from gambling. The agreement specifically gives concessions to increase gambling facilities in the full knowledge of the social impacts.

**Information of interest**

We can join with the Salvation Parliamentary Unit is to lobby National Party MP’s to oppose the bill (as it is likely to be a conscience vote). We can also Labour to make a public statement that they will legislate to reverse the extension of the license.

At the same time as the Convention Centre bill is being heard, the Gambling (Gambling Harm Reduction) Amendment Bill is before Parliament. The purpose of the bill is to give communities more say in the location of pokie machines, and to give communities more say in the distribution of proceeds of gambling. Since the second reading of the bill in July 2013 the bill is being amended to set in place mandatory tracking devices and pre-commitment cards which are designed to encourage responsible gambling. Pre-commitment enables gamblers to set the amount of time and money they spend before they start gambling. (<http://pgfnz.org.nz/news/problem-gambling-foundation-applauds-amendments-to-reduce-gambling-harm/>)

There has been a cut in funding for problem gambling services. Should funds problem gambling services be extended until 2048?

**Some information from the Salvation Army Report on ‘Problem Gambling’:**

In New Zealand gambling is an emerging public health issue with social, health and economic implications. Electronic gaming machines such as pokies are the most hazardous form of gambling with pokies as the most harmful with the greatest concentration in low income communities. A Ministry of Health study of gambling in 2003 and 2005 showed that 53% of all non-casino gambling machines were located in deciles 8–10. Similarly TAB’s are unevenly distributed with about half in areas of the highest deprivation. Because of the high proportion of Maori and Pacific peoples in higher deprivation communities these communities bear higher rates of problem gambling. Gambling problems are experienced by 3.3% of Maori and 3.8% Pacific peoples compared to .8% of the general population.

The harm of gambling effects the gambler, as well as their partner, family, children and wider community. Harmful effects extend to people’s finances, health, relationships, children, employment and communities. This means that families might not get enough food and that there is not enough money for heating, transport, health care and housing. The Salvation Army found that about 14% of people who come for their services are involved with gambling and 32% are from families affected by problem gamblers.

Pokie machines have moved from coin games to notes, and to cashless machines. The SkyCity legislation includes a change from $20 notes to $100 notes, and the introduction of

**Information on the Salvation Army website** – An artcle on problem gambling < <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/our-community/faith-in-life/christian-ethics/problem-gambling>>

Commentary on the bill < <http://salvationarmy.org.nz/research-media/media-centre/local-news/the-real-cost-of-skycity>>

**Quote from Treasury Regularity Impact Statement**:

1. Reportedly, only a fraction of those affected by problem gambling seek help and the cost of intervention services is in any case only a fraction of the costs (harms) associated with problem gambling (such as suicide; family violence; children inadequately clothed and fed, and other examples of deprivation and poor parenting; costs to the justice system, to businesses, and to community groups of gambling-related crime; lost productivity etc.).

94.  Intervention service statistics indicate that about 10 or 11 per cent of those who seek help cite problems with casino machines, and 6 to 8 per cent cite casino tables.