

7 August, 2018

Submission re Christchurch Casino Renewal of Licence

I write to oppose the renewal of the Christchurch Casino Venue Licence.

I read the Casino Impact Report which is overwhelmingly positive in its affirmation of the Casino and which projects hardship for the city if the Casino were to function no longer. The only area of reporting the paper was lax in was the most important one – the harm done by offering easy gambling to the susceptible (and lets face it, how many people leave a Casino in the long term taking out more than they took in).

It would appear from the anecdotal evidence in the appendix that most businesses and charities would survive if the Casino was closed. (Indeed, they all did before the Casino came along). The point is clearly made that the Casino is run as a model business and I note that the CEO is much appreciated for his effective running of the ship and his very good relationships with partners and stakeholders. However, I point out that these things do not mitigate that harm done by the nature of the business itself.

It is surprising that while on page 26 we are told that the Gambling Commission may specify the research to be undertaken in preparing the casino impact report, on page 22 in the summary we are told that “direct data for numbers potentially harmed by gaming at the Casino ... do not exist”. Surely this should be a key factor in granting a licence? In another place in the document a figure of about 4,000 at risk people (5% of the 72,000 that gamble each year) is given, and a figure of about 5,000 added as those who are affected through the gambling habits of those who cannot stop. That is 9,000 people in our little Christchurch (half the AMI stadium on the day of a sports match). The report says nothing about the at risk 4,000 people except that the Casino has measures in place to identify them and give them information about where to go if they think they have problems. If they don't recognise when to stop the Casino can help with that too by excluding them for 6 hours or 24 hours! (Anyone who sits and gambles for 6 hours straight to fit the 6 hour exclusion criteria clearly has a problem that an enforced 6 hour break is not going to help. Likewise anyone who stays at the casino for 24 hours straight needs a lot more than a 24 hour break). It defies logic that exclusion as practiced could be a helpful deterrent to those with problems or addictions. What would be revealing would be to know how much money self-excluding or Casino-excluding individuals lose before they are excluded and how much they lose over a year between exclusions. (If we can tell how much they win, how difficult would it be to tell how much individuals lose?) Comparing that amount of money to the \$163,000 (what, not even half the value of a Christchurch house?) that the Casino gives away to charities would be, I do not doubt, a reality check. In fact, a comparison of what problem gamblers lose to the Casino with the amount the taxpayer pays through the Government support

of problem gambling organisations (not to mention the social cost in health and other interventions to gamblers and their families) would probably be decisive enough to make the closing of the Casino a no brainer. But alas, the “relevant data is difficult to obtain.”

The profit for the Casino is about \$16 million and the benefit of this is spread through the community if I read the report correctly. I rather think the net positive economic impact (and definitely the profit) of the Casino is skewed to high end households exacerbating the social divides that have only grown since November 1994. What the money is not doing is providing more than a bandaid for those who should not be allowed in casinos in the first place but who probably provide a good deal of the profit.

The report also tells us what a good employer the Casino is, employing about 500 people. The survey results of the report would have us think that the Casino is a great place to work, not a few people have been working there for 15 or more years. People are relatively well paid and the customers rave about the attentive service they get. Yet the 28-36% staff turnover is glossed over. Any business that has more than 10% staff turnover (and many that have less) are doing something majorly wrong. On the account of staff turnover alone, the Casino should not have their venue licence renewed.

As to the effect on the neighbourhood, while the Casino is glossy and sparkling, enticing with cheap food and a ‘safe’ environment to be ‘entertained’ it has a not so pleasant underbelly and it attracts decidedly unsavoury companions. The opening of the Mashina Bar was an opportunist venture that reveals the real motivation of casinos – money at any price. The businesses which flourish in its shadow are shameless in their flaunting of this ideology – people don’t count, only what use you can make of them, what money you can suck out of them. Is this what we want? Really?

The renewal of the Casino venue licence will not result in a net benefit to the city because the social and economic impacts of the business do not warrant a renewal. On this basis therefore, renewal should be declined for the good of the city and the people who live here.

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