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Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation
(To be lodged on-line)

20 March 2019

Dear Commissioners,

**Application by Hogan's Hotel Pty Ltd,
Wallan Gaming Machine Increase**

FamilyCare opposes the application by Hogan's Hotel Wallan to increase the number of gaming machines in the venue from 45 to 65.

FamilyCare is the main provider of child and family services in the Goulburn region of Victoria. We host the Child FIRST intake and distribution system across the region and Chair the Alliance which includes representatives from key government and non-government service providers. We also provide disability and carer support services, as well as conducting community development activities.

With its main base in Shepparton, FamilyCare has offices in both Seymour and Wallan in the Mitchell Shire. Our Wallan office is located at 45 Wellington Street – around 500 metres walk from Hogan's Hotel.

In preparing this submission, we have discussed the application with community sector colleagues at Nexus Primary Health (Nexus) and Primary Care Connect (PCC). Both Nexus and PCC provide gambling financial counselling, to support people experiencing harm from gambling and their families, friends and financial dependents. We have been provided with a copy of a submission objecting to the application lodged by Nexus and endorse the comments made in that submission.

FamilyCare has regular communication with Mitchell Council in the delivery of services and in planning to keep pace with the needs of rapidly growing communities in the southern end of the shire. We understand a Special Council Meeting on 12th March resolved unanimously to oppose the application. In preparing this submission, we note that Mitchell Council commissioned a Social and Economic Impact Report, which concluded an increase in poker machines of the type requested by Hogan's Hotel would likely "...generate a net economic and social detriment for the Mitchell Shire community."¹

General Observations:

There is a significant body of evidence that confirms the social, health, wellbeing, and economic problems associated with poker machine gambling. There are specific negative outcomes for

¹ S G S Economics and Planning Pty Ltd; 'Hogan's Hotel: Social and Economic Impact Assessment of Application for Additional Electronic Gaming Machines'; Prepared for Mitchell Shire Council; March 2019; p vi.

those experiencing harm from gambling, which in turn impact families, friends and people who are financially interdependent. They also impact whole communities.

The Commission is no doubt aware of this evidence. We believe the evidence confirms:

- Poker machines cause harm and
- Increasing the number of poker machines increases the harm caused.

The specific considerations for Wallan and surrounding communities:

There are a number of important local and regional considerations relevant to our objection to this application.

a) Population growth and demographic mix:

Wallan is a high growth area. Population information available through the Mitchell Council website notes the current population of the shire as 46,038 and estimates that it will increase by almost 180 per cent to 128,727 by 2041.

The anticipated increase for Wallan is even more dramatic. The current population of 12,923 is anticipated to rise by almost 240 per cent, to 43,712. The rate of population increase in the bordering townships of Beveridge, Kilmore and Kilmore East is expected to be even faster.

The majority of the expected population growth will be in younger families with low-to-moderate incomes. That is a common experience in growth corridors of this type and as Nexus has noted, these young families will likely be carrying significant debts, particularly in relation to home mortgages.

It is precisely this group of people who are amongst those most at risk from the impacts of harm from gambling.

b) Location and proximity of gambling facilities:

The location of Hogan's Hotel is right in the heart of Wallan township. It is just across the road from the Wellington Square Shopping Centre and adjacent to the main High Street shopping strip and transport hub. It is highly visible, prominent and accessible, not just to Wallan residents but to people from close townships who use Wallan for shopping and community connection.

Accessibility has been recognised as a key geographical risk factor for problem gambling (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Risk Factors for Problem Gambling, May 2015).

c) Inter-relationship with family violence and child safety:

There is research that suggests a statistically significant correlation between poker machine density and recorded incidents of family violence². Wallan and Seymour already

² F Markhan, B Doran, and M Young; 'The relationship between electronic gaming machine accessibility and police-related domestic violence: A spatio-temporal analysis of 654 postcodes in Victoria, Australia, 2005-2014'; *Social Science and Medicine*; No 162, 2016, pp 106-114.

have the highest incidence of family violence across the Mitchell Shire with more than 300 reported incidents per 100,000 based on Estimated Resident Population³.

Given the likely population increase and the demographic weighting to young families, increasing poker machines is likely, in our view, to exacerbate existing problems.

Self-evidently, high rates of family violence expose children to increased risks and trauma.

Conclusion:

FamilyCare has no issue with Hogan's Hotel. We actively support the development of strong local businesses. Growing a business on the back of increasing the number of poker machines will however harm the community that Hogan's Hotel seeks to serve.

There is nothing family or community friendly about poker machines.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Tennant', is centered on the page.

David Tennant
Chief Executive Officer

³ M Davern, R Roberts and C Higgs; 'Neighborhood Livability Assessment of the major townships of the Mitchell Shire: Beveridge; Broadford; Kilmore; Seymour and Wallan'; RMIT University, Melbourne; 2018; page 124.