



# Casino reform campaign

## Have you had a gutful of gambling?

Despite recent shocking revelations in public hearings into casinos in three states, clear evidence of criminal behaviour both facilitated on the gambling floor and undertaken by senior casino staff, and conduct that a Royal Commissioner described as “disgraceful... illegal, dishonest, unethical and exploitative”, no casino in Australia has yet been stripped of its licence.

Ordinary citizens have quite rightly wondered – *How bad do you have to be to lose a casino licence in NSW?*

Regulators and governments have let us down. Although forced into action by the recent inquiries, the government in NSW is focused narrowly on addressing money laundering and the influence of organised crime at the casino. It is ignoring the terrible costs of gambling which should be addressed as a public health crisis.

Wesley Mission has a long tradition of advocacy to prevent gambling harm, but now we are moving to a new phase of active campaigning for genuine, community-led reform to reduce and prevent community harm. If the government does not act, Wesley Mission will.

**Wesley Mission is calling for the NSW government to address gambling harm in the current round of casino reforms by:**

- **Accepting all the recommendations of The Star Review report**
- **Imposing an independent Responsible Conduct of Gambling code (RCG) on the casinos, developed with the input of non-industry stakeholders and lived experience experts**
- **Ensuring cultural change by embedding in that new RCG a standing Lived Experience Accountability Panel to which the casinos must report on their efforts to minimise harm caused by gambling in their venues.**

Wesley Mission invites its friends and allies to join in this campaign. It is time the government acted on behalf of the community and not on behalf of casino owners.

### **Why this action?**

Media focus and government inquiries have focussed on money-laundering and organised crime. But Wesley Mission knows, through its gambling counselling and legal services, the scale and cost of gambling to individuals, their families and the community. This does not appear to be addressed in the proposed reforms.

### **Why now?**

The appalling behaviour of casinos has been revealed – and it is clear it is systematic across states and owners. Casinos have no right to argue now about the increased costs to obtain a social licence from the community, and that price now will include genuine action to protect individuals from the dangerous products it provides.

### **Why us?**

Together, we can work with MPs across the political spectrum to achieve real change – because those MPs can hear that the community has had a **#gutfulofgambling**.

## Background

Beginning in 1956, NSW legalised poker machines. From a handful of clubs, these machines – which are designed to addict – have spread through every suburb and every town to the point where NSW is home to 35% of the world’s non-casino poker machines. And every day, over \$20 million is lost just through pokies.

While there are only two casinos in Sydney (Barangaroo, the end product of an unsolicited proposal and the handover of public land, is for all practical purposes a casino), recent inquiries have clearly demonstrated that they have been allowed to freely breach laws, allow themselves to be used by organised crime to launder money, and pay no regard to the harm caused by their products.

More than 20 years ago, two Productivity Commission reports warned us of the dangers of the relatively unregulated and unrestricted gambling industry, and almost nothing has changed since then. This is because all arms of the industry – pubs, clubs, casinos, racing clubs, sports bookmakers – are significant donors to many political parties. They do not hesitate to invest heavily to interfere with the results of state elections to protect their income stream. Legislation in NSW has been written to allow gambling venues to do as they please, with self-regulation the norm, the prioritisation of profits the aim, and little effective public policy to protect individuals and the community from harm.

The Bergin inquiry, the Victorian Royal Commission into Crown, the Perth Casino Royal Commission and now The Star Administrative review have shown that the management of casinos across the country have been prepared to break the law, lie under oath, facilitate international financial transgressions, refuse to cooperate with regulators and to pay no regard to the impact of their gambling products. His Honour Mr Finkelstein said of Crown’s conduct that it was “disgraceful... illegal, dishonest, unethical and exploitative”. The public hearings into The Star casino in Sydney have revealed similar behaviour, and most of its board and senior executives have resigned before or during the hearings.

Despite all this, the casinos have been allowed to stay open. Although Crown was found in three states to be unsuitable to hold a licence, operations have been allowed to continue, and Crown Sydney at Barangaroo has been given a provisional licence to operate even before Crown Melbourne has proven itself to be rehabilitated.

It is true that new regulators are being established with greater powers. Crown in Melbourne has a government-appointed Special Manager to oversee every detail of its operations, and quietly, a similar external monitor exists for Crown Sydney. At the same time, a foreign private venture firm is on the point of taking control of the Crown casino chain. The very opaque level of reporting on activities in casinos is set to become worse unless the community demands reform.

The capture of the state by the powerful gambling industry means governments are reluctant to act unless we show them the depth of feeling in the community that outweighs and neutralises the threats of the industry. This is why we must speak up now.

## Resources

- [The 60 Minutes/Fairfax investigation three years ago that started the dominos falling](#)
- [The Bergin Report into Crown, The Victorian Crown Royal Commission report, the WA Crown Royal Commission report, The Star Review transcripts and public hearings](#) (report due August 30 2022)
- [The NSW government’s response to Bergin, the Crown Special Manager’s Activity report](#)
- Human Rights Law Centre report: [Selling Out: How powerful industries corrupt our democracy](#)

