

# **INQUIRY INTO ONLINE GAMBLING AND ITS IMPACTS ON THOSE EXPERIENCING GAMBLING HARM**

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Submission by:  
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Dear Committee,

I write to you as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the electorate of Murrumbidgee in the Australian Capital Territory. Prior to entering politics, I was a gambling researcher and Director of the Centre for Gambling Research at the Australian National University. As someone who has worked in the gambling field in Australia for the last 17 years, I can't stress enough the urgency for reform in this space, with the most urgent reform being that gambling advertising on television needs to be banned.

I would like to remind the Committee of the Tom Waterhouse advertising over a decade ago that sparked significant outrage at the time. I would suggest that this was the first glimpse of what has now been 15 years of sustained, pervasive advertising - largely by international wagering companies that extract billions of dollars from our communities, contributing nothing in return.

I welcome the timeliness of this inquiry and the opportunity to write a submission. I would also be very happy to appear before the Committee to give evidence.

This submission will primarily address the below term of reference:

“the effectiveness of current gambling advertising restrictions on limiting children's exposure to gambling products and services (e.g. promotion of betting odds during live sport broadcasts), including consideration of the impact of advertising through social media, sponsorship or branding from online licenced gambling operators”

This submission makes one recommendation – **That gambling advertising be banned on free-to-air TV.**

I believe that if this recommendation was legislated, it would have the single biggest impact.

Through this submission, I wanted to present to the Committee one communities views on the advertising as a case study for what I believe is a consistent view across the country.

Since the inquiry into online gambling was announced, I started a grassroots campaign in Canberra, ACT – and this submission is designed to give you a comprehensive picture of how frustrated and angry people are about the level of gambling advertising, and the impacts that this advertising has on our community.

## Why is gambling advertising a problem?

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The last decade has seen a great shift in focus of gambling research in order to keep up with the pace of technological and market changes as gambling has transformed to an activity that is accessible any time of day or night and you can bet on just about anything in respect to racing, sports, and entertainment. The online gambling market is worth billions of dollars in Australia, with many of the big international wagering companies declaring Australia as a substantial growth market.

As the market has grown, the advertising of online gambling on TV has become pervasive, overbearing, and predatory. Children in Australia can list online gambling companies, just as they can their favourite sports teams. The advertising is on TV, it's all through social media (including just recently TikTok), it's sponsored advertisements of the odds which are often presented as sports commentary, our stadiums are named after betting companies (e.g. PointsBet Stadium), our sporting codes are dependent on these companies sponsorship, the players jerseys have betting companies written all over them, and if you want to read about your sport in your local newspapers (online or in print) - you won't miss the advertising there either. The list goes on.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation revealed that during 2021, in Victoria alone, an average of 148 gambling advertisements were broadcast on free-to-air TV between the family viewing hours of 6:00pm and 8:30pm every weeknight.<sup>1</sup>

We know the advertising works.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) published data in February 2022, finding that more than 1 in 10 (11%) Australians have reported participating in online gambling at some stage in the previous 6 months. This figure is up from 8% in 2020.<sup>2</sup>

People are participating in online gambling at substantially increasing rates because they are being advertised to. Online gambling is being normalised and presented as part of our 'Aussie culture' and sports.

The problem is the harm that stems from this type of gambling. To use the ACT as an example, 35% of people who bet on sports and special events experience harm from their gambling. This is in comparison to 26% of people who bet on poker machines, experiencing harm.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (2022) *948 gambling ads daily on Victorian free to air TV in 2021*, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. Available at: <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media/948-gambling-ads-daily-on-victorian-free-to-air-tv-in-2021/>.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority (2022) *Online gambling in Australia*. Available at: <https://www.acma.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-02/Online%20gambling%20in%20Australia.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Paterson, M., Leslie, P. and Taylor, M. (2019) *2019 ACT Gambling Survey*. Available at: <https://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2019/10/2019-ACT-Gambling-Survey.pdf>.

In 2019, the ACT Gambling Survey found that one in four adult males in the ACT gambled online. Further, males under the age of 30 in the ACT, who do not have a university degree (21.1% of male gamblers) were more likely to be at-risk gamblers than any other group in the population.

Young people, particularly males, are the principal target of the advertising. They have grown up watching Australian TV with pervasive gambling ads. This is not a problem for the future, it is a problem now.

In 2020, a New South Wales (NSW) Government gambling study found that almost 30% of kids aged 12 to 17 had gambled in the past year and had first gambled when they were either 11 or 12.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the data highlighted that 3% to 4% have a gambling problem or were at risk – a number which equated to one kid in every classroom.

This problem is not something the community is unaware of. For over a decade there have been sustained calls for the advertising to be banned. Recently, the Australia Institute undertook a nationally representative survey and found that 71%, or 7 in every 10 people, agreed that gambling ads on TV should be banned.<sup>5</sup> A Canberra based publication, Riotact, also ran a poll finding 86% (1,505) of Canberrans believe that gambling ads should be banned as they are normalising gambling and harming our community.<sup>6</sup>

There are countless GoFundMe campaigns that have garnered tens of thousands of signatures to end gambling ads over the years. The Alliance for Gambling reform's petition has 35,000 people signed up who want to see the gambling ads banned.

The evidence is clear, and the community is clear, that gambling advertising on our TV needs to be banned.

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<sup>4</sup> *Effect of gambling advertising on children and teenagers* (2020) Gamble Aware. NSW Government. Available at: <https://www.gambleaware.nsw.gov.au/learn-about-gambling/gambling-and-young-people>.

<sup>5</sup> (2022) *Polling - Advertising on TV*. The Australia Institute. Available at: <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Polling-Advertising-on-TV-Web-1.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Jacobs, G. (2022) "POLL: Bicycle lanes and banning gambling ads," *Riotact*, 10 October. Available at: <https://the-riotact.com/poll-bicycle-lanes-and-banning-gambling-ads/598999>.

## Community views on gambling advertising

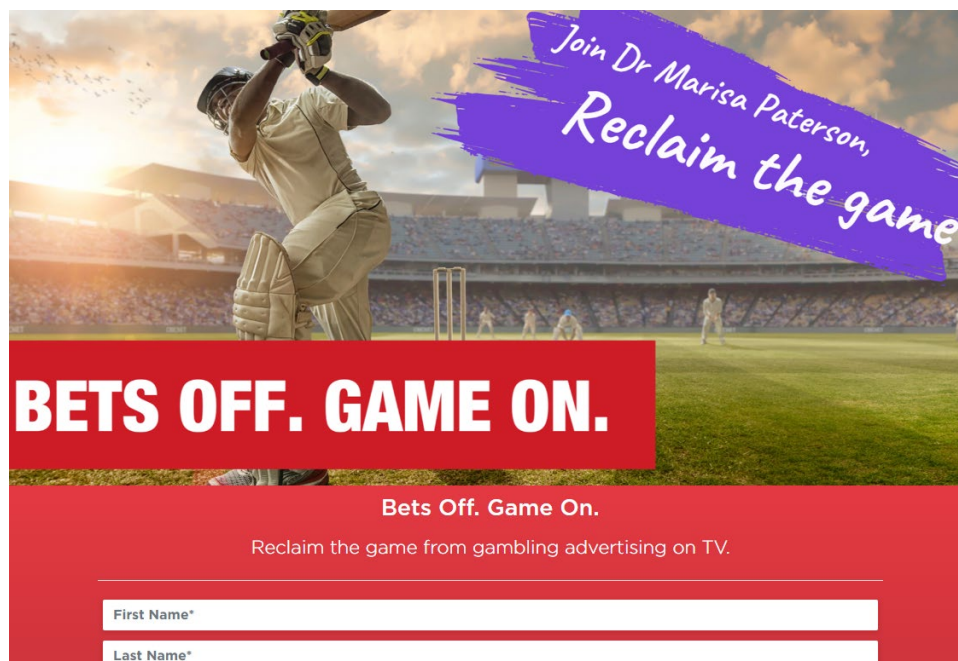
As stated in the introduction, I wanted to present to the Committee a case study of community sentiment, garnered over the past 6 weeks. This is a snapshot of views, predominately from Canberra, but I do believe that these views are consistent across the country.

I started a grassroots campaign called the 'Bets Off. Game On' campaign. The primary focus of the campaign was a petition calling on the federal parliament to 'ban gambling ads on TV'. The findings from this campaign will give you a comprehensive picture of how deep the concern is about the advertising.

### ***Public support for banning gambling ads***

I promoted the 'Bets Off. Game On.' petition on my social media and through local ACT media over the course of six weeks.

Figure 1: Website petition



We aimed for 1000 signatures, which is basically spot on for what we achieved (total number – 1019). The list of petitioners, their comments, and anonymous stories can be found in [Attachment A](#).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> As the petitioners were not privy to this submission, their signatures are endorsements of the call to end gambling advertising on TV, not necessarily the content of this submission.

I also received many emails from constituents expressing everything from frustration with the ads, to stories of families that have been broken apart by the impacts of online gambling. Below are some excerpts from community members:

*“Gambling has become so normalised through the advertising that my 6 yo talks about the odds when watching football. It’s abhorrent.”*

*“I feel like we are drowning in gambling ads. They are all over commercial TV, sport on TV, YouTube, and public spaces.”*

*“I think the volume of betting ads on free to air TV is excessive, even outside live sport telecasts. Recently my daughter asked me what a “same day multi” was. She had been watching cooking shows on a free to air catch up service and when I watched it with her they were showing these ads every break. She is 10.”*

*“I’ve worked in hospitality and have been surrounded by gambling advertising and gambling. I’ve seen it destroy people and their relationships and I watch my parents take my siblings money to gamble. It’s time to do something with all forms of gambling.”*

*“I have very close friend who own has been terribly affected by gambling since he was a teenager he is now in his 20’s but everywhere he looks there is gambling advertising trying to lure vulnerable people like himself through clever and addictive advertising campaigns. It needs to stop.”*

I also shared a story in the ACT Legislative Assembly on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October. The mother of a young man named Harry wrote to me in distress regarding the impact that online sports gambling has had on her family. She wrote:

*“Our son, Harry, started online gambling six years ago, at the age of 19. We had no idea that he was gambling. It was hidden by what we considered typical behaviour of a young person being attached to their phone. The truth came out after an ultimatum from his girlfriend that he needed to tell us. He was scared, embarrassed and frightened to tell us, and we are his parents. We, as his parents, felt gutted, angry, devastated and frightened for his future and that of his relationship.*

*We also felt embarrassed that Harry had lied to us so many times over the years, saying that tools had been stolen when, in fact, he had sold them to get more money*

*to gamble, and we had of course paid for new ones. He would also tell us that his boss had not paid him that week, so we would give him money, which of course went on gambling. Being in the building industry, we believed that at times not being paid immediately was commonplace.*

*As time went on, we felt ridiculously gullible and the trust that we had in our son was shattered, and who could we turn to? We felt embarrassed at how easily our son manipulated us. Our relationship is strained due to this lack of trust, and we feel helpless. He is, in turn, embarrassed and distraught that his relationships with those who he loves so dearly have been compromised.*

*We arranged for Harry to go to a private rehabilitation centre in Sydney last December, but it was not tailored to gamblers and, sadly, despite having high hopes that there would be strategies that he could put in place, Harry came home with more ways to con us. The saddest part of Harry being in rehab for all of us was the sense of relief we felt by his absence from the home. We did not have to put up with the lies or the mood swings, and we could all breath out for three weeks.*

*Since coming out of rehab, he has stolen money twice, and this is to pay for a bank loan he used for gambling and was not able to repay. Harry has excluded himself from the TAB and clubs, but that then compromises social activities with his mates who want to go and have a meal and a drink, and Harry cannot join them.”*

The stories that I present as part of the submission don't capture the responses that have come through social media in response to the campaign. I received feedback from parents and teachers who describe children in schools and around dinner tables, discussing 'multis' and 'bets' in everyday discussion. Children in school playgrounds organising their own Melbourne Cup sweeps.

Members of the community have also expressed their ongoing concern specifically to the nature of online gambling and its accessibility. One constituent said to me:

*“My daughter who is a real NRL fan regularly bets on-line on NRL games. She would never bet if she was required to physically go to a bookmaker. It is only at a minor level, but is consistently encouraged by pervasive tv advertising, especially during games where 3 or 4 different bookmakers are being advertised in addition to the gambling sponsors of various team and the NRL overall.”*

It has also been shared with me that some of our more vulnerable members of the community are being deeply affected by these adverts. Here are just a couple of quotes that highlight the issues:

*“This also targets our vulnerable neuro-diverse young people. They seek social acceptance and this rubbish tells them they will get ‘mates’. They also struggle with understanding budgeting and limits.”*

*“I have a Disability and I been gambling since I was like 10 years old started when I went to bingo with my mum at the club in Canberra and when I turn 18 years old It got worse and I was gambling 7 day’s a week and nether won a lot of money. And with those gambling ads on TV them need to stop so I am happy to sign the petition to stop young people from gambling harm. I been excluded from clubs and Casino in Canberra over the years it has been helping me . But on my phone google is promoting online gambling as will as TV ads so we need to get google and Apple to stop with pokies apps as will because them are a waste of time . And I was homeless here and there as will because of gambling. But my next goal is to give up smoking but when you have a disability it makes it hard for me to break bad habits it does so it took me a long time to give up gambling. Thank you for reading my story.”*

The pervasiveness of this advertising and its impact on the most vulnerable members of our community is evident and extraordinarily concerning.



## ***Political support for banning gambling ads***

The 'Bets Off. Game On.' campaign calling on a ban of gambling ads on TV received full support from the entire ACT Labor caucus. You will see below the signed support of the ACT Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and colleagues:

# **BETS OFF. GAME ON.**

**The ACT Labor caucus supports the 'BETS OFF. GAME ON.' petition and campaign to ban gambling advertisements on TV.**



Andrew Barr  
Chief Minister of the ACT



Yvette Berry  
Deputy Chief Minister of the ACT



Tara Cheyne  
Member for Ginninderra



Mick Gentleman  
Member for Brindabella



Chris Steel  
Member for Murrumbidgee



Rachel Stephen-Smith  
Member for Kurrajong



Joy Burch  
Member for Brindabella



Suzanne Orr  
Member for Yerrabi



Marisa Paterson  
Member for Murrumbidgee



Michael Pettersson  
Member for Yerrabi

This support extends more broadly than the ACT Labor Party in the ACT Legislative Assembly. On 19<sup>th</sup> October, I asked the ACT Minister for Gaming, Shane Rattenbury MLA, (leader of the ACT Greens) whether he supported the calls to ban gambling advertising on TV. Minister Rattenbury stated:

*“Yes, I do. I think that this is an area that is really problematic. Frankly, if you just chat to people in the community now, when you ask ‘What do you think about gambling advertising on TV?’ the answer, almost universally, is ‘It is out of control.’”*

The momentum from the 'Bets Off. Game On.' campaign has contributed to the ACT Minister for gaming to begin to consider what can be done locally to ban gambling advertising on TV in the ACT.

See: <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7968351/act-government-considering-tv-gambling-ad-ban/>

South Australia also appears to have these restrictions on local TV. While I congratulate the SA Government's move on this, and the ACT Governments exploration of localised bans – they are just patch-fixes. What is truly needed is reform from the Commonwealth Government.

### ***Community sector support for banning gambling ads***

As part of the 'Bets Off. Game On.' campaign I spoke to a broad range of community sector organisations, local businesses, unions, sports teams and peak bodies that represent industries that are significantly impacted by gambling harm (for example the building industry). Again, the feedback from these sectors of the ACT community was strongly in support of either banning or extensive restrictions on gambling ads.

Below provides an overview of groups that provided support for the campaign:



There were also other groups and organisations online who supported the campaign through social media.

Anglicare provided a quote about their experience working with people who are impacted by gambling:

*“Having a ‘flutter’ is often portrayed as a harmless part of our larrikin Aussie culture. Sadly, what we see every day in our services is the devastating end result of that seemingly harmless ‘flutter’ having become a full-blown addiction. Unfortunately, it is an addiction that destroys lives and tears families apart.”*

One particularly important factor that came through the support from the Australian Federal Police Association and the ACT Domestic Violence Crisis Service was the recognition of the harm that gambling causes and the potential for this issue to be a contributing factor in domestic violence situations.

The AFPA issued a press release highlighting that:

*“...the campaign was well overdue, as it was most often police officers who responded to family and domestic issues caused or exacerbated by gambling”*

Furthermore, AFPA President Alex Caruana outlined that:

*“If supporting this campaign can lead to a ban on gambling advertising on television and ultimately prevent just one family violence incident from occurring; then it’s something the Australian Government needs to strongly consider.”*

However, discussions with the community sector and sports groups also revealed a troubling aspect of the infiltration of the gambling industry in our community. Many organisations felt they could not publicly pledge support the campaign because they received funding/grants from clubs or from sporting teams that were sponsored by online betting companies.

Despite the acute awareness of these organisations of the impacts of online gambling harm, their inability to speak publicly on this issue is highly problematic.

## ***Campaign media coverage***

The ‘Bets Off. Game On.’ campaign received a steady amount of local media attention. Again, I believe this highlights the importance of this issue to the ACT community. See a summary of the media related to the campaign below:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>Type</b>
26/09/2022	Canberra Times	Print & Online
26/09/2022	Riotact	Online
26/09/2022	ABC	Radio - Adam Shirley
26/09/2022	Canberra FM	Radio
26/09/2022	2CC	Radio - drive program
28/09/2022	Canberra Weekly	Online
02/10/2022	2CC	Radio - Sunday morning
13/10/2022	Riotact	Online poll & article
17/10/2022	Canberra Weekly	Online & socials
01/11/2022	ABC	Radio

A selection of these articles is linked below:

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7916663/bets-off-as-mla-calls-for-end-to-tv-gambling-advertisements/>

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7943245/act-labor-backs-campaign-to-end-gambling-advertisements-on-television/>

<https://canberraweekly.com.au/marisa-paterson-mla-calls-for-tv-gambling-ad-ban/>

<https://the-riotact.com/poll-bicycle-lanes-and-banning-gambling-ads>

<https://the-riotact.com/should-gambling-ads-be-banned-from-sport-on-tv/596628>

## **Conclusion**

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Online betting companies target young Australians, they normalise gambling, extract billions of dollars each year from our economy, contribute nothing to our community, and cause extraordinary harm to Australian families. For this reason, the petitioners and I strongly encourage the Committee to recommend that the Commonwealth Government pursue legislation to ban gambling advertising.

We have done this before in respect to smoking advertising. We can do it again for gambling advertising. Like the purchase of cigarettes is a legal, the purchase of gambling products online is too. However, we understand the importance of not having widespread cigarette advertising, not having children exposed to cigarette ads and not having the product intertwined with our sport.

**Recommendation: That gambling advertising be banned on free-to-air TV.**