



CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN A SECULAR WORLD

Draft Gambling Bill Consultation
Gambling and National Lottery
Licensing Division
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London, SW1Y 5DH

27 February 2004

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response by The Christian Institute: Draft Gambling Bill Consultation

The Christian Institute is a non-denominational charity established for the promotion of the Christian faith. We have over twelve thousand supporters throughout the UK, including 2,000 churches and church ministers from almost all the Christian denominations.

We wish to record at the outset our opposition in principle to gambling. Gambling directly appeals to covetousness and greed, which the bible teaches is a form of idolatry¹. Covetousness also breaks the Tenth Commandment.² In 1950 the Church of England defined gambling as "*an agreement between two parties whereby the transfer of something of value from one to another is made dependent on an uncertain event in such a way that one party will gain and the other lose.*"³ Gambling therefore explicitly involves making a profit from someone else's loss. It removes the link between effort and reward and encourages irresponsible stewardship of resources. Furthermore, people gamble because of the thrill from uncertainty. The more this thrill takes hold, the more gambling becomes an addiction.

It has been a longstanding public policy, endorsed by all governments and enshrined in the 1958 Royal Commission and 1960 Betting and Gaming Act, that demand for gambling should not be stimulated. If the National Lottery breached this principle in 1994, this Bill dramatically ends it. We therefore object to the general principle of the Bill, which encourages and promotes gambling by removing many restrictions and safeguards.

Gambling is a destructive force in any society, fuelling crime, poverty and addiction. It is said to be the fastest growing 'leisure activity' in Britain. We reject the view that gambling is a harmless 'leisure activity'. Addictive gambling is increasing with more than 400,000 addicts⁴ and is now recognised as a psychiatric disorder.⁵ By removing

restrictions on gambling we believe the Bill can but only increase gambling and the problems it brings. The government does not seek to encourage or make it easier for people to take drugs or alcohol and neither should it do so with gambling. We therefore have particular concern with the following:

- **Protection of Children and Young Persons: Part 4, Clause 36.**

We welcome the government's statement "gambling is for adults only"⁶ and the offence for allowing a young person to gamble. However there can be no exceptions if this statement is true. Allowing 16 and 17 year olds to continue to use the national lottery, football pools and category 'D' gaming machines simply because they are low risk is flawed logic. It dilutes the message to young people by implying gambling is acceptable if the amount of money or risk involved is low.

The government states there is no support for banning under 18s from gambling. Yet, a recent poll by NOP found 82% of the population believe children under 18 should not be allowed to play fruit machines.⁷ We are also concerned that the term 'Family Entertainment Centres' (Part 10, Clause 197) by definition implies that gambling is a family activity for both parents and children. This undermines the message that gambling is for adults only.

- **Remote Gaming: Part 5 clause 72.** We consider remote gaming as extremely addictive and do not think it should not be licensed. Whilst internet gambling is accessible in the UK through websites registered abroad, the government should not endorse such gaming by licensing it. A recent American study found the majority of people who use internet gambling have the highest levels of addiction. The study warned that the explosive growth of the internet would increase the problems of online gambling.⁸ We are also concerned about increased credit card debt levels if remote gambling is legalised.
- **Removal of Membership requirement: Part 5, Clauses 73 (5)(a) and 74 (4)(a).** The 24-hour membership rule for casinos and bingo halls is a vital protection, preventing vulnerable persons walking in straight off the street to gamble. It should not be repealed. Furthermore, 'self-banning', whereby a gambler can ask a club or casino to ban him for a set time period provides a measure of self-protection for problem gamblers. Removing the membership requirement will make this system virtually impossible for premises that decide to end their membership scheme.
- **Operating Licences: Part 5.** In order to stop a proliferation of gambling premises in specific areas causing a destabilising impact, we believe licensed operators should continue to have to prove unmet demand and ensure they are within a permitted area designated in secondary legislation. We believe that the concerns of local residents should be a consideration and that licences not be granted in close proximity to residential accommodation or facilities for vulnerable groups. We would welcome a system of licensing which operates along the lines of the provisions for sex shops.

- **Gaming Machines: Part 8, Clause 142 (4)(c).** We oppose allowing casinos an unlimited number of prize gaming machines, noting the concern mentioned in the Budd report, that such a move will increase levels of problem gambling.⁹ The Bill adopts a ratio of three machines for every one gaming table for casinos with fewer than forty tables. We appreciate that this is more restrictive than the eight to one ratio in the Budd report, but we would wish to see the *three to one ratio* remain for all casinos, *or at least for all with fewer than eighty* rather than forty gaming tables. We also oppose repealing the limits on stakes and prizes on Category ‘A’ machines, and allowing the linking of these machines within a casino (Part 10, Clause 203). This is a huge deregulation and will inevitably increase the temptation to gamble. We are also concerned that Regional Planning Bodies are to actively plan for large casinos. Such developments will lead to increased acceptance and participation of gambling throughout the UK.
- **Alcohol and gambling Part 13:** We consider alcohol and gambling should not mix. Even the intake of a small quantity of alcohol can affect a persons ability to make judgements about risk, on which gambling is based. We therefore oppose automatically allowing two gaming machines on alcohol-licensed premises (Clause 239). We believe the principle of alcohol licensees having to opt-in and actively to apply for a permit should remain.

We also have concerns regarding Clauses 236 and 237. We fear allowing alcohol licensed premises to offer ‘soft gaming’ will encourage and increase the amount of gaming beyond the provisions of the 1968 Gambling Act. As yet there is no guidance on stake and prize limits or firm guidance qualifying what constitutes ‘soft gaming’.

- **Repeal of Provisions Preventing Enforcement of debt: Part 15, clause 256.** We do not think the statutory bar on enforcing gambling debts should be removed. We note that the government states that the exclusion of gambling from the normal laws of contract in the past probably reflected a moral objection to betting. We believe betting is still morally wrong.

No doubt this law was also intended as a measure of protection for the worst cases of addiction, such as a desperate man gambling his family house or all the family savings on bets. Whilst we welcome the proposal to give the Gambling Commission power to void unfair bets, we are concerned that repeal will remove protection from such instances as the above example, which should surely be treated differently from normal credit.

- **Betting:** We strongly oppose the lifting of the prohibition on racing on Christmas Day and Good Friday. We believe this would greatly undermine the special nature of these days. The proposal is in conflict with the government’s policy of keeping Christmas Day special, as stated in the DTI consultation on banning large stores from Christmas Day trading, published in April 2003. The Consultation paper stated: “*Christmas remains a special day for all UK citizens, and the Government wishes to maintain its special nature. Opening by large stores would have a direct impact on the quality of national life as well as on the employees concerned.*”¹⁰ We note that 97% of respondents supported keeping Christmas Day special.¹¹ The

Christmas Day (Trading) Bill, which will ban the opening of stores over 3000 sq ft, is currently going through parliament with government support.

Lifting the ban on racing on Christmas Day and Good Friday would have adverse effects on employees, increase the need for other services linked to racing and cause disruption on days that are an important time for families to spend together. It would represent a further dramatic erosion of the character of these important Christian holidays, which are special to the overwhelming majority of the population. 72% of England and Wales claim to be Christian.¹² Finally, we consider 363 other days of the year are more than sufficient for betting to take place.

We also oppose lifting the ban on betting tracks offering bets on non-race days. We believe this will stimulate and increase betting.

- **Advertising of gambling products:** We strongly oppose repealing the prohibitions on the advertising of lawful gambling. The government states “It does not make sense to continue general prohibitions on advertising gambling if it is to be treated as a normal leisure activity (even if one that requires thorough regulation)”.¹³ However we believe gambling should not be treated as a normal leisure activity and therefore oppose this entire assumption on which the Bill is based. The very fact it requires such thorough albeit weakened regulation is testimony to the fact that gambling is highly addictive and harmful to society. The government should protect society and not use the law to encourage and promote such activity.

Yours faithfully,

Colin Hart
(Director)

¹ Colossians 3:5

² Exodus 20:17

³ Report of the Social and Industrial Commission of the Church Assembly, *Gambling: An Ethical Discussion*, Church Information Board, London, 1950, page 7

⁴ *The Independent*, 9 September 2003; *The Times*, 8 September 2003

⁵ Mental Health News Bulletin, 16 February 2004, Mental Health Foundation

⁶ *Draft Gambling Bill: The Policy*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Gambling and National Lottery Licensing Division, November 2003, pg 49, Para. 6.23

⁷ *A response from The Salvation Army*, Written evidence, Joint Committee on Draft Gambling Bill, December 2003

⁸ Ladd, G T, Petry N M, 'Disordered Gambling Among University-Based medical and Dental Patients: A Focus on Internet Gambling', *Psychology of Addictive Behaviours*, Vol.16, no. 1, 2002, pages 76-79

⁹ *Gambling Review Report*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Gambling Review Body, 2001, pages 132-133

¹⁰ *Sunday Trading Act 1994: Christmas Day Trading – a consultation on a proposal to regulate the opening of large shops (internal floor area of over 280 square meters or 3,000 square feet) on Christmas Day*, Department of Trade and Industry, April 2003, Para. 3.3

¹¹ See <http://www.dti.gov.uk/ccp/consultpdf/xmasresp.pdf> as at 26 February 2004

¹² *Census 2001, National Report for England and Wales*, Office for National Statistics, The Stationary Office, 2003, Table S103, pg 127

¹³ *Draft Gambling Bill: The Policy*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Gambling and National Lottery Licensing Division, November 2003, page 46, Para. 6.7