

Letter from Gavin Fineff for the Parliamentary Friends For Reducing Gambling Harm Group Meeting 22/03/2023

Hello chairpersons, Mr Wilkie and Ms Sharkie, members of Parliament, Carol Bennett from the Alliance for Gambling Reform, and of course supporting others in attendance.

My name is Gavin Fineff, I have been married to Carly for 17 years and we have 2 amazing children together, Emily and Oliver. Since coming forward with terrible gambling and debt issues in early 2020, I was diagnosed as having a Gambling Disorder from late 2015, which was classified as severe 12 months later. In the few years after, I lost millions in online gambling, on racing and sports, mostly, which I owed to innocent people.

Firstly, I applaud you for bringing into formation this important group of gambling harm reduction soldiers, **wow**, what important objectives you will achieve! Whilst our time together today is short, I am here with you, and for you, in whatever capacity is needed to achieve a gambling experience in Australia underpinned by integrity, enjoyment, and safety.

Secondly, I am currently in custody awaiting sentencing for offences committed during my experience with Gambling Disorder, I apologise that I am unable to attend personally, but I am extremely grateful that my mum can read this letter from me.

The belief, when having Gambling Disorder, is we are fixing problems, and **we will win**. We keep going because every part of us believes gambling is the solution, which is why a customer with Gambling Disorder won't stop – it makes sense to do it, and that's the delusion.

It might be insightful to share with you a letter I was asked to write whilst a patient at South Pacific Private hospital, in 2020.

Dear Gambling Addiction

There are fewer great days than a few beers and bets with mates, cheering for your horse or team on the odd occasion with friends is what I imagine gambling should just be about. Why is it so different for me? When I am around you, I just get this explosion of energy and unbreakable focus.

You gave me belief like I have never felt before. I was going to make some extra cash, Then, it was to make my money back, then it was to make other people's money back. On every bet, you told me I can win. That is all you ever said, "It can win, get it done for your kids, you can repay everyone, you deserve it, why wait, doesn't help to think of losing, don't miss out on easy money. When it wins, we will then bet on that, then this, get that match going over there while we do this race over here" Do you then know what it feels like to lose even a single bet? A tidal wave of shock, confusion, frustration, and grief. You were always there to

take that away, “you can fix it, be positive, let’s go…….” I did everything you said, I believed you.

Every part of my being believed I would make it all back and more for everyone. You had no problem with me pursuing this delusion to complete destruction. I am asking myself; how could such insanity feel rational? I know why, you are a baffling, cunning disease without a conscience. How dare you use my weaknesses, strengths, and people I care about to get what you want!

I know you are part of me. I have caused so much pain, it is agony, and not right. I refuse to fix it with you anymore. I will not listen to your plans anymore. I do not want you anymore. I will be taking it from here.

There is so much to share about the details of my gambling experience, gambling disorder rehabilitation experience, and gambling harm reduction experience that may assist with substantiating your reform objectives. I look forward to sharing these details over deeper conversations I hope we can soon have. For now, I will simply say my desire is for the prevention of the ‘destruction’.

If prevention of gambling destruction is an objective, then important elements to be achieved are:

1. Gambling Disorder must be accepted and understood as the mental illness it is.
2. Regulatory reform, commencing with abolishing voluntary compliance, and establishing an independent audit mechanism on operators.

I have learnt so much; I know that a customer with Severe Gambling Disorder will not stop without intervention. Psychiatry explains that the brain impairment fosters distractions that wittingly erodes the sufferers ability to voluntarily control impulses. I truly believe that submissions to regulatory decision makers must include this science next to lived experiences.

I think it’s important to raise, that it is the customers with Gambling Disorder that generates the majority of revenue for operators and Government. The industry has taken advantage of the profit taking opportunity and appreciated the ‘poor eyesight’ of regulators. The evidence I have of both failures is described to me as shocking and jaw dropping to me, it is just sad. I should have been stopped, and it would have been so easy. Why wasn’t I stopped? Why was I given millions of dollars of free bets? Why were the red flags and monitoring alerts ignored? What needs to happen so the next me is stopped, because I promise you, he, or she, in their minds is fixing a problem, not making one far worse?

I have reflected deeply, read deeply, and engaged deeply with other sufferers of the disorder. In my opinion, the solution starts with the regulators accepting and understanding Gambling Disorder as the mental health issue it is.

Presently, the Australian Government is completing the ‘Parliamentary Inquiry into Online Gambling’ and the ‘AUSTRAC’ Inquiry into the Online Gambling Industry’. These are unique

opportunities that may take several years to review again. Now is the time to strive mightily and effect real change. I wish I could do more.

On behalf of all sufferers of Gambling Disorder and especially their loved ones and communities, please inspire members of the Parliamentary committee and Directors of AUSTRAC to show their leadership to prevent the destruction from so easily occurring.

I know gambling experience underpinned by integrity, enjoyment, and safety where operators and Government make a fair profit is achievable. I have so much faith in this outcome, but radical intervention is required.

Thank you so much for listening to my letter. I respect and appreciate you all so deeply for prioritising gambling harm reduction, thank you.

Finally, for details, please let me know if you would like a copy of my submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry, AUSTRAC, and the Northern Territory Racing Commission.

Sincerely, Gavin

Gavin has asked me to pass on his best wishes to you all, and I would like to thank you, for the opportunity in honouring Gavin by sharing this letter with you.