

Response to Linda Hancock's article published in the Sunday Herald Sun on 4 September 2005, "Pokies losses shock, Community Ignored"

ClubsVIC is the umbrella organisation for some 450 clubs, about half of which have poker machines (EGMs), and we are justifiably proud of the Victorian Club network.

The article in last Sunday's Herald Sun headed "Pokies Losses Shock, Community Ignored" indicated a total misunderstanding of what the not-for-profit community clubs are all about.

Clubs ARE the community. They are organisations run for and by the community, by hard working voluntary committees, and 100% of what they do is for the community.

Clubs do not pay dividends to shareholders or owners or to anyone. All the surplus from the operations at Clubs goes directly back into the community to support the Clubs' football, netball, cricket, bowls, golf, tennis, basketball, soccer, bocce, and a myriad of other sports and competitions for participants of all ages, as well as social infrastructure for ethnic, aged, in fact, all common interest groups. Clubs with pokies are able to do this at a time when Councils are closing sporting and social facilities for lack of public funding. Clubs are keeping people connected, healthy and involved. Ask the Hoppers Crossing netballers if their Club's contribution is "miniscule".

It is simply trite for Linda Hancock to say that "only about 1 per cent actually went to outside causes and groups" – what about the teams and groups that are integral parts of the Club? What about the "inside" local ladies bowling team, the aged care facility being set up for old Italians, the junior golf clinic, the development baseball competition, the Danish Cultural Society etc? Aren't they worthwhile causes? They are community benefits that are "causes and groups" that are "inside" Clubs. Why shouldn't they qualify as community benefits?

As well as the "inside" activities funded by gaming at Clubs, the Victorian Community Clubs also provide funds for myriad other "outside" causes and groups. I would recommend a trip to Horsham Sports and Community Club or to Red Cliffs Club if you are interested in seeing how social Clubs benefit the "outside" community. These are examples of how our Clubs see themselves as integral to the community, not "outside" the Community.

Say what you like about hotels, the fact is that Clubs ARE the community – clubs in themselves are community benefits.

Further, it is elitist and offensive for Linda Hancock to suggest that employment in Clubs is not a community benefit. The staff in community clubs may not be university professors, but they take pride in their work and provide a service that is completely benign to more than 98% of the community. The community benefit to the working mums of Orbost of flexible part time work at

the Club is invaluable. Ms Hancock's attempt to denigrate the employment benefits offered by gaming is typical of academics using statistics to prove anything they want to show.

Hancock's statement that "\$1million on gaming results in 3.2 staff compared to 20.2 jobs in retail" is statistical nonsense. Mildura Golf Club turns over much less than \$1 million a year, and employs many more than 3.2 staff in its gaming operation. The real statistic is that every pokie venue must have a minimum of 10 staff to cover shifts, regardless of turnover. I wonder how many of the staff at the Ouyen Club would find work in retail in Ouyen if the Club closed, how many shops are there in Chalambar to employ the staff from the Club?

Despite what Linda Hancock thinks of the people who do this work, they have real jobs and it is a real benefit. 98% of people do not have a problem with this product, much less than those who have a problem with alcohol. But Linda's set drink, and doesn't advocate to restrict their pleasure. Instead Linda Hancock and other wowsers anti-gamblers would destroy other people's pleasure of having a flutter on the pokies – a pleasure indulged in safely by a third of adult Victorians.

When the wowsers stop trying to bring down the industry, and concentrate on helping people with gambling problems, they might actually have some effect – to date the ONLY really effective program for problem gamblers is the self exclusion program run by the industry!

Leon Wiegard
President