



**Ross Cranston QC MP**

Member for Dudley North

House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA



Our ref: 2004/RC/Mis

The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell MP  
Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport,  
DCMS, 2-4 Cockspur Street,  
London, SW1Y 5DH

Department for Culture, Media and Sport			
DATE RECEIVED		06 FEB 2004	
Minister	A. McIntosh		
Lead	E. Grant		
Action	Active & Draft Reply to	20/2	(Tick)
ENLLO	Appropriation	1	✓
For information only			
Permanent Secretary	Ach		
Director	GM		
Director of Strat & Com	GM		
Director of Res	GM		
04/02/2004		03/12/113	

Dear Tessa,

I am writing to highlight some concerns over proposals contained in the draft Gambling Bill. I realise it is currently before the Joint Scrutiny Committee.

I appreciate that the modernisation of the gambling industry is necessary to deal with the explosion of new gambling technologies. However, I am concerned about the impact that the proposals may have on vulnerable groups in our society. As you are aware there are already an estimated third of a million problem gamblers in Britain, whose addiction impacts on their health, housing, job prospects, debt levels and family relationships. I have seen the same problem first-hand in Australia.

I am disappointed by the decision not to take up the recommendations of the Budd Review and tackle the problem of children and fruit-machines. The continuing presence of slot-machines in unregulated venues, such as cafes and laundrettes, is particularly worrying. As you will know, evidence suggests that the majority of people who end up with serious gambling problems, started gambling at an early age, and that some studies have highlighted a worrying prevalence of problem gambling amongst young players. We appear to be the only jurisdiction allowing children to gamble. The proposed reclassification of slot-machines into "gaming machines" for adults and "amusement machines" for children implies that slot-machines with a certain stake and prize level are safe for children. I hope that the Government will reconsider this proposal, and affirm that gambling is an adult activity by prohibiting children from any fruit-machines.

The higher value slot-machines also cause me concern. People will be able to play the new "jackpot" machines in casinos without having to become members in advance, and the new "mega-casinos" will be able to have an unlimited number of these machines. I know you have stated that you wish to "make haste slowly" over deregulation. I fear that we will face a worrying proliferation of these highly addictive machines in casinos, and to limit the number of machines available in larger casinos, at least until research has been completed into the impact of deregulation upon levels of problem-gambling.

I am pleased to see the emphasis on social responsibility in the draft Bill, and would welcome the requirement for the gambling industry to operate in a socially responsible way. I am aware that certain parts of the industry have already started to draw up voluntary codes of social responsibility, but for many operators this will still require a significant leap of practice and policy. In order for social responsibility to be placed at the heart of the new regime, I believe it is important that organisations should be required to show a demonstrable commitment to social responsibility before being awarded a licence. A commitment to social responsibility should become one of the conditions the Gambling Commission would have regard to - alongside the integrity, competence and financial circumstances of an applicant - before granting a licence.

I know you do not want to see a rise in the misery caused by problem-gambling as a result of deregulation. Therefore, I believe that it is vital that the Government gives a commitment that it will commission and fund a new Prevalence Survey into problem-gambling to identify the benchmark before deregulation occurs. Deregulation could then proceed cautiously. It should be accompanied by demanding tests of social responsibility.

I note that an opinion poll commissioned by the Salvation Army found that 93% of the population believes there are already enough opportunities to gamble in Britain. It would seem unfortunate for the Government to proceed with a significant programme of deregulation, without apparent public demand or support and which had a detrimental impact on the public health of the country.

Best wishes,  
Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ross', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

**ROSS CRANSTON QC, MP**