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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **COVID-19 AND GAMBLING**

**For immediate circulation**

According to religious leaders in New South Wales, coronavirus restrictions have now impacted on the area of gambling addiction. Religious leaders have come out and raised their concern that the lockdown has increased the risk of gambling and therefore enhanced the social pathologies that are connected with it. Below is the text of an Adjournment Speech which Rev. Nile delivered yesterday before the Legislative Council, extracted from the parliamentary *Hansard*, in which he quoted from a letter sent to all Members of Parliament.

### **COVID-19 AND GAMBLING**

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE (00:24:50):** Tonight I refer to an open letter from faith and church leaders to the New South Wales Parliament. I printed the letter on the front page of myFamily World News and sent a copy to every member of Parliament, but members may not have had time to read it. The letter is from 15 church leaders, organised by the Most Reverend Dr Glenn Davies, Archbishop of Sydney and metropolitan New South Wales and also President of the NSW Council of Churches. He was supported by the Most Reverend Anthony Fisher, OP, Catholic Archbishop of Sydney and metropolitan New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, and another 13 church leaders. The letter reads:

*Dear Members of the NSW Parliament,*

*We share a commitment to the wellbeing of everyone in New South Wales. During this difficult time of pandemic, as friends and family meet and re-connect, we all want to be safe, not just from COVID-19, but from the terrible damage caused by poker machine gambling and associated criminal activity.*

*When the machines were turned off, people in NSW saved \$1.2 billion. For thousands of residents and their families, having a break from gambling was a genuine silver lining to an otherwise dark cloud of coronavirus.*

*When the 90,000 machines were turned back on in June, losses in the first week were almost a million dollars a day higher than June last year. We're back to \$18 million being lost to the machines, every day. The losses are so much more than financial. The distress can fuel family violence, homelessness and people taking their own lives.*

...

*We write to you as a matter of urgency as the NSW Government is seeking public feedback on the proposed 'Gaming Machines Amendment (Gambling Harm Minimisation) Bill 2020', which would update the current Gaming Machines Act 2001. While this Bill would go some way to reducing the damage caused by gambling, it goes nowhere far enough. It is vital that the Parliament seize this opportunity to include the introduction of a cashless gambling card which would turn the Bill into an historic reform.*

*A cashless system will empower people to monitor their gambling, set a limit on how much they are prepared to lose, and exclude themselves from all poker machine gambling if they want to. Furthermore, it would prevent the criminal activity of laundering money through poker machines.*

*The Bill has already attracted significant support. Predictably, the gambling industry will strenuously resist the removal of cash from poker machines, arguing that now is not the time to introduce such changes. As leaders of faith communities,—*

*and churches—*

*we strenuously argue that it is always the right time to prevent money laundering, and especially to stop the exploitation of vulnerable people, to save families and to save lives.*

*We encourage you, in the best interests of your constituency, to support this bold reform which must include the removal of cash from gaming machines and an overhaul of the current sub-standard approach to harm minimisation. The people of NSW will be grateful for your support.*

As I said, I have quoted two senior church leaders, and 13 other leaders of all other denominations supported that open letter to members of the New South Wales Parliament. I commend the letter to all members and fully support it. I know that other members will support it as well. I look forward to a positive response when the legislation comes before the House.

**Media inquiries:**

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