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ALLIANCE FOR
GAMBLING REFORM

21 April 2021

Deadline looms for submissions to Victorian Crown Royal Commission

There are just five days before submissions close to the Victorian Royal Commission into Crown Casino, which represents the best chance of real gambling reform in the state in decades.

The Royal Commission has recently confirmed on its website that it will ensure both the anonymity and confidentiality of those making a submission.

Alliance for Gambling Reform Chief Advocate, the Rev Tim Costello, said he believed some earlier ambiguity around confidentiality and anonymity had unfortunately troubled some people.

"Ideally there would have been absolute clarity around anonymity and confidentiality from the very start of submissions being open to the Royal Commission," he said. "Unfortunately that was not the case and it prevented some people from having the confidence to make a submission.

"With this all resolved I hope those people will now come forward. The Alliance has raised concerns with the Royal Commission about the lack of translations and accessibility for the submission process. In response we have been told we can help people in being able to tell their story to the Royal Commission if they want to contact the Alliance first to make things easier. We have people on staff who themselves suffered harm at Crown, so we can ensure their comfort.

"It's important everyone who has a story to tell about Crown Casino can be heard. Age, language, physical and other barriers should not exist and we are trying to ensure these are removed for all. We appreciate this may be a daunting process for some, and we are doing our best to ensure it is easier. Importantly, we have been told it is possible to seek an extension for a submission if it's requested."

Rev Costello said there would be thousands of people who had stories to tell about harm at Crown, and many of them probably didn't even realise it.

"All the people who get bussed into Crown for gambling are vulnerable to gambling harm -- that's really an inducement to gamble," he said. "All the free parking, the free lunches, the free drinks, the free footy tickets -- they can all lead to people gambling more than they wanted to, or could afford.

"And then there are the devastating stories we've been hearing for years about people who die by suicide at Crown. The Coroner must have data on that. No doubt there are current and former staff at Crown who know about these completely avoidable deaths. They need to speak up, knowing they are protected by anonymity. A light must be shone on the devastation wreaked by Crown.

"Crown isn't a 'world of entertainment'. It's a world of pain for many and must be exposed."

Anna Bardsley, who gambled at Crown before her recovery and becoming a gambling reform advocate, said she would be happy to speak to anyone who wanted to come forward.

"One of the best protections the gambling industry has is the shame and stigma that comes from discussing gambling issues," Ms Bardsley said. "I know all too well how prevalent gambling harm is, because as soon as I even mention that I was a gambler people will have a story to tell about themselves, or a loved one. It's like opening a door to let people speak about gambling harm.

"So many of those people have stories about Crown. I know mine includes the seemingly innocuous offer of free VIP parking. But that wasn't innocuous. That made me feel special when I needed it, and it meant I would go and gamble when I had no intention of doing so. There are thousands like me.

"I encourage anyone with a story to speak up. It is incredibly empowering to take back your own story and do something positive, to be part of change. I'm happy to help anyone through this process, I'll respect your story and privacy. United we are bigger and stronger than the behemoth that is Crown. We can end their reign of harm and exploitation together and put the gambling industry on notice."

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See here for a gambling language guide for journalists.