

Clubs going up in smoke

Productivity_ Commission
POB 80.
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

Australia's Gambling Industries

The *Opinion*, alongside, from the Sydney Morning Herald of Monday 28 April 2003 reflects a nation wide increasing awareness of the harms of environmental tobacco smoke and increasing concern at the continued presence of active smoking in clubs, bars and gaming houses.

If environmental smoke was harmful in restaurants, where it is no longer allowed, it is likely to be even more harmful in bars and gaming houses where smoking is more intense.

A mandatory distance lighted cigarettes from bars and service counters, even if observed, is of little help. The smoke drifts. And it spreads from room to room through doors and through ventilation systems. Providing smokefree zones for non-smokers is of no help to staff required to work in smoking zones, does little to protect for those in the smokefree zones. The smoke drifts

Smoke from the burning end of a cigarette, inhaled like it or not, by the environmental smoker is more toxic than the filtered smoke inhaled by the active smoker.

Clubs are supposed to be for the benefit of their members., and to be good employers. Not a source of injury to non-smoking members and staff, who if smoking is permitted suffer more than the active smokers.

Real or imagined loss of business by Caringbah RSL is no justification for re-imposing, or continuing to impose an environmental hazard upon staff, members and visitors to Caringbah RSL or to any club.

Has Caringbah RSL no remorse for the harm inflicted on barmaid Marlene Sharp at Port Kembla RSL?

The resumption of smoking at Caringbah RSL and its continuation at other clubs could prove of great cost, in reputation, membership, and financially.

The reintroduction of smoking at the Caringbah RSL is a blow to patrons attracted to membership by the club's bold decision 11 months ago to voluntarily declare its premises smoke-free. Worth contemplating, however, is whether the Caringbah reversal is much ado about very little. Wrongly interpreted, it would bolster dubs and pubs protesting too loudly that smoking restrictions - and several are on the way - will bring financial ruin.

Fact one: Caringbah RSL borrowed \$3 million to expand its premises. Its membership more than tripled to 7000, poker machine numbers nearly doubled to 80 and revenue jumped by 30 per cent The dub lost \$455,000. Other dubs, without smoking bans, have suffered similar financial misfortune. It's just possible Caringbah over-extended itself financially.

Fact two: Caringbah didn't pioneer non-smoking in dubs. Mosman Rowers, for instance, has been successfully smoke-free for two years, boasting of booming trade since smoking was banned in its bar and gaming room. Some dubs claim similar success; others, particularly in Victoria, say their experiences mirror Caringbah's. Either way, the evidence is inconclusive.

Although mandatory enforcement will not apply for six months afterwards, from July 1 **NSW** dubs and pubs will be required to ban smoking at all serving counters, including bars, and designate a non-smoking bar area. From July 1 next year, those with two or more bars will need to make one non-smoking. They'll be urged to do the same with other facilities, such as pool rooms and gaming areas. With justification, caterers and the anti-smoking lobby regard these prohibitions as half-hearted. Certainly, the restrictions are inconsistent with the ban on smoking in restaurants and dining areas (including those in dubs and pubs) since September; Fortunately, the 2001 promise by the then state health minister, Craig Knowles, to preserve "drat great Aussie tradition" of "breasting the bar with a beer and a cigarette" has been dispensed to the rubbish pile it deserves. If passive smoking is dangerous to restaurant staff and patrons, it is dangerous to those who work in a bar.

Perhaps the market will unravel this inconsistency. Large damages have been awarded for a bar worker's passive smoking injury. Employers face the prospect of steeper workers' compensation premiums if passive smoking continues. That would better place clubs and pubs to calculate the financial costs of remaining smoke-filled, rather than smoke-free.

The Sydney Morning Herald
Monday 28 April 2003
Opinion : page 10

Geraldine Spencer
life member Canberra ASH Incorporated
former editor *ASHES TO DUST*