



Victorian Local Governance
Association

EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY TO HAVE THEIR SAY ON POKER MACHINES

Dr Susan Rennie

Project aim

- Ensure that all communities are empowered to have a voice in planning matters relevant to the placement of poker machines and other gambling venues within their neighbourhood
- Learn about the supports required by community to enable full participation in relevant planning processes
- Develop resources that will assist communities beyond the life of this project

Theory of change



- Access to dangerous gambling products is the biggest determinant of gambling harm
- Stopping more pokies is one of the most powerful interventions that we can implement
- Community pressure and campaigning has been more effective than Councils at times in fighting EGMs
- Encouraging and supporting community participation is likely to lead to communities getting better results (less poker machines)

Cases

- Valley Inn Hotel, Geelong
- Glenroy RSL
- Warragul Country Club
- Commercial Hotel, South Morang

Valley Inn Hotel

- Geelong pub with no pokies, application for 30 EGMs
- Minimal community engagement prior to project action
- Engagement strategies:
 - ▣ Letterbox drop
 - ▣ Article in local paper
- Results:
 - ▣ 30 community objections received
- Decision: Council decision to grant planning permit



Glenroy RSL

- Existing RSL venue in Moreland with 40 EGMs, seeking additional 10 machines
- No objections received when this project started, formal objection period already over
- Engagement strategies:
 - ▣ Email to AGR database of Moreland residents
 - ▣ Word of mouth
 - ▣ Article in local paper
- Results:
 - ▣ 45 objections received by Council
 - ▣ 3 objectors have followed up with statement of grounds to VCAT
- Outcome:
 - ▣ Council rejected planning permit
 - ▣ VCAT hearing in December
 - ▣ A word of caution...



Warragul Country Club

- Existing venue seeking to increase EGMs from 60-80
- One interested community member got in touch
- Engagement strategies:
 - ▣ Petition
 - ▣ Email councillors
 - ▣ Partnership with AGR
- Results:
 - ▣ 50+ people signed petition, emailed councillors or objected
 - ▣ Church groups involved
- Outcome:
 - ▣ Council approved the planning permit – disappointing!
 - ▣ Members of church groups looking to create a social justice working group to strengthen their capacity to respond in future.



Commercial Hotel

- Woolworths pub with no pokies seeking to introduce 50
- Engagement strategies:
 - ▣ Assistance to community agencies to write submissions
 - ▣ Letter box drop
 - ▣ Community meeting
 - ▣ Petition
 - ▣ Email councillors
 - ▣ Partnership with AGR
- Results:
 - ▣ 100+ objections received
 - ▣ Community making short film
- Case going to VCGLR in November, Whittlesea Council likely to reject planning permit → VCAT hearing likely



Learnings

- High levels of support are required
- Navigating legal processes is inherently difficult and some people will always require assistance
- When left unassisted to put in objections many people make arguments that are not likely to be successful
- The legal nature of documentation is overwhelming for many community members

Thank you

- Get in touch or refer community members to me at:
 - susan@vlga.org.au
 - 0425 706 978