

Friday, 10 September 2010  
Please quote our reference: 135:PN

Mr Michael Lavorato  
Chief Executive Officer  
Campbelltown Catholic Club Ltd  
PO Box 133  
CAMPBELLTOWN NSW 2560

Dear Michael,

I write to you in disgust following the announcement by Prime Minister Julia Gillard about new policy commitments on gaming machines made to woo Tasmanian Independent MP Andrew Wilkie to support Labor and keep her in Government.

This decision contradicts a written commitment given to ClubsAustralia by the Labor Government on 5 August before the last Federal election. A Prime Minister has just reneged on an agreement to 4,000 Australian community clubs, their 80,000 employees and 10 million members. They have been sold down the drain on an issue that was never raised by Labor during the election campaign. These events were out of our control and we did all we could before the election to secure written commitments from both Labor and the Coalition on our main concerns including gambling policy. This we did for what it was worth.

At 8.30am last Thursday I recorded a ClubNEWS segment to go to air on Sky Channel the next day. During that interview, I was asked whether commitments from politicians were worth the paper they were written on. Clearly, in this case, they were not.

To appease Mr Wilkie, Ms Gillard has announced that a Labor Government would introduce a maximum daily ATM withdrawal limit of \$250 in venues with poker machines. Never mind that in Mr Wilkie's own State of Tasmania – where ATMs are not in clubs or pubs – there is a higher rate of problem gambling than in NSW, Queensland or South Australia, where they are permitted. So, the logic here just escapes me. Never mind that in some communities the club ATM is the only means available of securing cash. Never mind the safety and security aspects. Never mind increased transaction costs. Never mind the gross inconvenience to people who have every right to access their own money for whatever legal purpose they choose. This is a disgraceful decision we oppose.

As well, the Agreement with Mr Wilkie would see the introduction of compulsory precommitment technology by 2014. That well may mean every single person, including the 99.6 per cent of people who have no gambling problem, will require an "Australia Card" type licence containing expenditure limits (which also well may be dictated by the Government and its anti-club supporters) before being permitted to play a gaming machine. This is treating every single person as a problem gambler and smacks of a Nanny State.

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Simply by surveying Members in my own club overnight, I have no doubt a large number of club patrons will elect not to be part of a compulsory precommitment regime and simply walk away. Of course, that is just the outcome the prohibitionists and anti-club brigade, whom Ms Gillard has now embraced, want to see. They would be delighted to see our community clubs fail.

As well, Ms Gillard has said if the Australian States and Territories do not “play ball” on this issue, she will try to use Commonwealth powers to bludgeon them into submission. So much for State rights. This is subject to legal advice. Should they be legislated, both of these proposed measures will lead to club closures and job losses, I have no doubt whatsoever.

We have posted a copy of the Agreement signed by Ms Gillard and Mr Wilkie on our website at [www.clubsnsw.com.au](http://www.clubsnsw.com.au) and I urge you to read it.

Interestingly, I noted in a media interview, after signing his Agreement, that Mr Wilkie said he did not wish to see harm come to community based not-for-profit clubs. But, in the same interview, he said he would like to see poker machines outlawed altogether in his State of Tasmania, painting him as an out-and-out prohibitionist no different to his puppet-master Senator Xenophon. What contradictory statements.

Needless to say, ClubsNSW and ClubsAustralia are disgusted by this announcement which demonstrates a clear willingness to sell down the drain our clubs, their people and communities for sheer political expediency in an unashamed grab for power at any cost.

I can assure you we are not taking this lying down – and I ask each of you to carry this fight to your local Members of Parliament and to bring it to the attention of your Club Members, via this letter if you so wish. Our industry and the many people and communities it supports have much to lose.

In this regard, it is worth noting that Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott, the two Independent MPs who decided to assure Ms Gillard a Minority Government, have guaranteed to support her in two areas – supply and in the event of any no-confidence motion against her Government. This means they have not agreed to necessarily vote in support of any particular legislation her Government or others may bring forward – and that includes the anti-club measures which concern us so much. So we will be pointing out to all MPs, including the Independents, that the future of our great Club Movement rests in their hands.

For the record, ClubsNSW and ClubsAustralia have said publicly they do not oppose precommitment as such, but require that it be:

- voluntary – in other words, a patron may elect of his or her own free will to put in place a mechanism to limit his or her spending if it is felt this would assist them to control an irresistible gambling urge. This would not be a big brother “Australia Card” licence to play a gaming machine required by everybody;
- affordable to clubs and cost-effective; and
- venue-based – in other words, not imposed on the industry by some all-embracing mechanism such as a CMS which could be changed to “mandatory” at any political whim. The Government is well aware of this position.



Since this announcement, ClubsNSW, ClubsAustralia and a number of individual clubs and community leaders and commentators have carried our message to the Australian people through many media contacts and face-to-face contact. We have been in contact with executive members of the Federal Coalition, Labor representatives, the NSW Government and Opposition, the ACTU and individual Trade Unions whose members' jobs are at risk. Our affiliated club associations and the Club Managers Association Australia also are playing their part in airing this disgrace.

Like other struggles we have faced through the Club Industry's proud history, this also will require unity and strength of commitment by us all. I look forward to your ongoing support as the future of our community clubs becomes clearer in these uncertain times.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Newell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

PETER NEWELL OAM,  
Chairman

