

Wolfville Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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John F. Hamm, Premier of Nova Scotia
PO Box 726, Halifax, NS B3J 2T3

Dear John Hamm,

As Premier of the province it is your primary responsibility to protect the health and welfare of the citizens of Nova Scotia. Only by eliminating Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs) can you carry out this mandate. Anything less will continue to contribute to the bankruptcies, family breakups and suicides that are a direct result of VLT operation.

The Wolfville Quakers ask you to take immediate steps to permanently remove all VLTs from the province. While Quakers have traditionally opposed all forms of gambling (see quote below), we are particularly concerned about the devastating effects of VLTs, which do proportionally much more damage than other extant forms of gambling (see attached fact sheet).

Friends' testimony against gambling is rooted in concern for the moral and spiritual well-being of individuals and of society. From early days, gambling has been seen as inimical to this because it engenders greed, covetousness and sloth. It is also perceived as an example of a minority of people benefiting from the hopes and fears of a less well-off majority. This is at odds with Quaker notions of social justice and right sharing of resources. ...

The attempt, which is inseparable from gambling, to make profit out of the inevitable loss and possible suffering of others is the antithesis of that love of one's neighbour on which Jesus insisted.

From: Role Over: National Lottery Funding and the Quaker Testimony against Gambling
Quaker Peace and Service, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2004

We have heard the arguments of your government that you have become dependent on the revenue from VLTs and also that you are concerned that if they are outlawed there will be a greater problem of illegal operation of VLTs.

On the first issue, revenue, sufficient taxes should be levied to sustain required government services. More to the point, however, is that operation of VLTs in the province creates huge expenses not only to Social Services, but to the community organizations and families that bear the brunt of the damage that these machines cause. The idea that operation of these machines creates wealth is an illusion. They are a major liability to the government coffers and to the public at large.

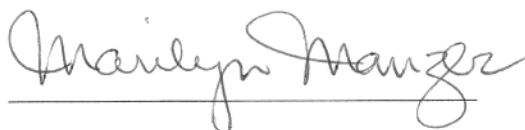
With regard to the second issue, impact of illegal operation of VLTs, we can not find any research to support the claim that this will do more damage than the government is already inflicting on its citizens. In the United States, Utah and Hawaii have a ban on gambling and have no serious social problem with illegal operations. South Carolina's ban on VLTs has been very successful. Even though there are some illegal operations, their impact is minimal compared to the 35,000 that were operating legally at one time. According to CBC News (Apr 8, 2005): "In South Carolina, the fine for operating an illegal gambling machine is \$500 for a first offence; in Nova Scotia, it is \$10,000." This makes it much less likely that people will risk operating them. State sanctioning of the machines creates an atmosphere of legitimacy that may encourage people who would not otherwise have tried the machines to become problem gamblers.

There are several reasons why VLTs are more damaging than other forms of gambling. Among these: payoff schedules, speed of play, interactive sounds and images are carefully designed to exploit human psychology to induce users to continue to gamble. The machines promote an isolated, non-social interaction where there are no others there to provide checks and balances to a user's excesses. Making VLTs available in establishments that serve alcohol increases the likelihood that users will make choices about inserting their money while in an impaired state. *Statistics Canada recently reported that 25% of those playing VLTs were at risk for problem gambling, or already were problem gamblers.* We do not believe that the strategies you have outlined to implement later this year will be sufficiently effective.

We do not need more studies – we need leadership and effective action from our government. Remove the VLTs!

Sincerely,

Wolfville Quaker Meeting



Marilyn Manzer, Clerk

July 27th, 2005

Nova Scotia Gambling Fact Sheet¹

- Since 1996 there has been an expansion of gambling in Nova Scotia. This includes the opening of an expanded Casino site in Halifax, Expansion of the ALC Sport Lottery, Sports Select Pro Line, and the introduction of daily Draw Game.
- Concurrently a number of initiatives have been directed specifically at Video Lotteries: including the 1998 capping of machines at 3,234, the Retailers Responsible Gaming Program, and introduction of Modified VLTs with on-screen clocks, which pop up messages at 60, 90 and 120 minutes of continuous play along with mandatory cash out at 150 minutes of play created with other features such as enhanced graphics, new games and bill acceptors.
- Gambling in Nova Scotia and elsewhere in Canada is a common activity. Almost all adults have wagered at some time (96.8%) during the last year, spending on average \$645.00. The vast majority of this goes to government operated gambling in the province (approx. \$610.00).
- 6.6% of adults who **regularly take part in VLTs and Casino Gambling each month** spent on average \$3,760.00 in the past year, contributing **43% of the annual gambling** expenditures in Nova Scotia.
- VLTs continue to be associated with over half of all past and current self-reported gambling problems (approx. 6,500 adults) despite the fact that only about 5% of adults are regularly involved in the activity each month.
- Overall, 20% of adults in Nova Scotia (approx. 150,000 people) are **personally aware** of someone they believe is currently having a problem with gambling. Video Lottery is mentioned most often in association with gambling problems (17.6% of adults personally know someone who is having problems with VLTs)—what these numbers mean is that 86% of those who personally know someone with a gambling problem cite VLTs as being involved.

Profits and Losses:

- In NS, total gambling wagers have increased by 46.5% since 1996 (\$1.2 billion versus \$844 million). In 2001/02 bets were approximately \$1.2 billion with 47% (or \$564 million) being spent on a cap of 3,234 machines. When this is translated into actual losses to Nova Scotia Citizens (total wager-winnings less losses to wagers) there has been an increase of 35% in the same time period.
- Since 1996 there has been an increase of 44% in **Net Gambling Profits** returned to the province of Nova Scotia. **VLTs** continue to rank the highest, having **contributed 60% of these profits** to the government.

Problem Gambling Prevalence:

- It is estimated that approximately 50,000 adult Nova Scotians are at some risk for problem gambling, with 1/3 of these or 12,000 adults currently identified as being at problem levels.
- Approximately **40% of gambling expenditures come from 6.9%** of adults in this province!
- Problem gambling is 1.5 times higher for males than females. While males are more likely than women to participate in Weekly Draw Games, VLTs, Sports Betting and Casino Tables, women are more like to play Scratch ‘n Win, Break-opens and/or Bingo. No differences were noted for Slot Machines or charity Raffles of Draws.
- Adults under 35 years of age (19-34) are significantly more likely than those over 35 to be regularly involved in VLTs, and adults at all levels of annual income are equally likely to be “at risk” or score highly for problem gambling.

¹ Information has been taken from the 2003 Nova Scotia Gambling Prevalence Study conducted and reported from the Office of Health Promotion and Addiction Services. These facts were compiled into this fact sheet by Dale Gruchy for Wolfville Quaker Meeting.