

March 3rd 2011

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Re. ERA and its impact on gambling research

I am writing on behalf of the National Association for Gambling Studies (Australia) that would like to take the opportunity to express our collective concerns about the existing ERA process and the potentially deleterious effects that it may have upon our area of research. Although we understand and accept the importance of having an exercise that systematically assesses levels of achievement in Australian research, we have significant reservations about the current status and use of journal ranking as part of the ERA process. As set out in our constitution, the purpose of NAGS is to:

- Promote, conduct, commission, develop and co-ordinate opportunities for research into gambling and activities associated with gambling;
- Act as an agent for the collection and dissemination of information and data related to gambling and associated activities;
- To develop, encourage and provide improved research standards and better facilities for research and analysis so as to assist and encourage members to achieve improved research skills; and
- To further knowledge and understanding of gambling and gambling-related issues in the community.

NAGS members play a very important role in Australian academic and policy discussions. Many are advisors to State and Federal Government authorities and several NAGS members are currently members of the Ministerial Expert Advisory Committee that is advising Hon Jenny Macklin (Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), and Hon Bill Shorten (Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services) in the responsible gambling reforms that the Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Senator Andrew Wilkie had introduced. Academic members of NAGS have always considered our role to be twofold. As academics, we have sought to produce high quality research of an international standard in peer-reviewed journals, while also producing material in a wider range of outlets (e.g., Government reports, national journals, bulletins and conference proceedings) so that our material will be read and utilised by government policy-makers and counsellors/ clinicians working in the field of harm minimisation. For non-academic members, NAGS has served the purpose of providing a way in which to obtain information concerning developments in gambling research, policy and interventions.

In our opinion, the current strategy of ranking journals has been very problematic for NAGS members for the following reasons.

1. Gambling research is, by its very nature, very multidisciplinary. Although many of the most published researchers are in the field of psychology, the area spans tourism, leisure studies, sociology, cultural studies, and economics.
2. The ERA has left us with no A ranked specialist gambling journals in which to publish. The *Journal of Gambling Studies* and *International Gambling Studies*, our two leading journals, are ranked B and C respectively. The former has a high H-index (H = 68) on Harzing's *Publish or Perish*, whereas the latter is a relatively new journal that has not had the time to be listed

on the major citation databases or attract high numbers of citations. However, both are considered prestigious journals and are edited and reviewed by the top researchers in the field. The only journals in which we feel we can publish our articles in order to attract A ratings in the ERA are *Addiction* and the *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, both of which are heavily biased towards psychological and/ or addiction approaches to gambling. Apart from the fact that these journals are so few in number, they also would not be suitable outlets for many gambling researchers working in fields such as economics or tourism.

3. We believe that it would be deleterious to the field if researchers begin spreading their articles across a wide range of other more traditional mainstream outlets in order to attract A or A* ratings when there are recognised and specialist journals already available to which NAGS have annual subscriptions. The effect of the current ERA journal ranking system to the gambling research community in Australia is very worrying. It would make Australian gambling literature more difficult to find and therefore less likely to be read and to attract citations, e.g., many psychologists will not read economics, geography or business journals.
4. We believe it would hinder a sound development of an interdisciplinary area, timely dissemination of research findings, and open communication process between academics, practitioners, policy makers, and gaming industry representative. The field of gambling research, by definition, is multidisciplinary – highly rated mainstream journals are not good fora for publishing our research because we encounter significant difficulties in publishing the subject matter which is regarded “peripheral.” We fear that gambling researchers may have to face a difficult decision between an obscure research career as a reward for the loyalty to the field and a fast-track research career by abandoning gambling research to safer territory acceptable in the eyes of the mainstream establishment.
5. NAGS has its own national journal, *Gambling Research*. This has provided researchers with a forum in which to publish nationally relevant gambling research which is then disseminated to NAGS members and to the wider public. A danger of the current ERA journal ranking system is that journals of this nature will be increasingly overlooked by researchers in their focus on higher impact outlets. This will therefore undermine our purpose of being able to disseminate research findings to our membership, policy makers and practitioners. We believe that the ERA system needs to be modified so as to take policy impact and engagement with the community and government much more of a focus as was done in the previous RQF exercise.

In summary, we believe that the journals in our field should be more strongly recognised in the ERA process, perhaps with greater attention given to the fact that many articles in these journals attract significant citation impact- often as high as articles published in journals such as *Addiction*. We would encourage the reconsideration of the existing classifications so that the *Journal of Gambling Studies* is rated an A because it is clearly one of the leading outlet in our field. *International Gambling Studies* should be elevated to at least a B and arguably an A because its editorial board is filled with many of the leading researchers in the world and it publishes articles from international authors for an international audience (which elevates it above the specifications outlined for a B journal). It could even be suggested that journals such as *Addiction* and the

Psychology of Addictive Behaviours could be further elevated to A* if greater differentiation is required because these are clearly the two top general addiction journals in the field in which gambling researchers might expect to publish some articles.

Yours sincerely

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Dr. Keis Ohtsuka, Victoria University

On behalf of the National Association for Gambling Studies (Australia)