# Did you know? – General

**Australian rates of gambling**
Between the financial years 1995 and 1999, the gambling industry expanded more than twice as fast as the general economy. National gambling expenditure trebled in the 15 years to 1999.

In the 1999 financial year gamblers lost $12.4 billion in Australia, more than $886 per adult – the equivalent of about 2% of Gross Domestic Product. In the process, Australians spent $103 billion gambling (more than $7300 per adult).

**The luck of the rabbit's foot**
Depend on the rabbit's foot if you will, but remember it didn't work for the rabbit.

~ R.E. Shay

**Betting with fat pigs and snake-skin shoes**
Some 300 pounds was bet on a cricket match at Hyde Park, Sydney, on 7 May 1832. The match was watched by 2000 spectators, 'among whom were several well-dressed females'. The game itself was played for a prize of 20 pounds. The betting was in both cash and kind, with wagers made in sawn timber, fat pigs, maize, butter, salted fish and snake-skin shoes.
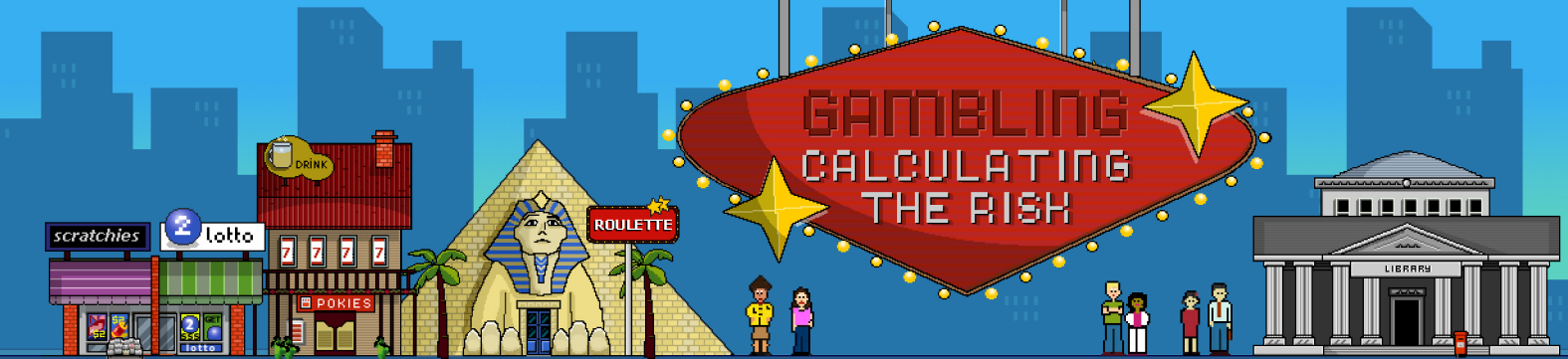
**Problem gambling statistics**
The Australian Productivity Commission's 1999 Inquiry into Australia's gambling industries stated that about 2.1% of the Australian adult population, or around 293,000 people, have a significant gambling problem. These people account for more than one third of Australia's gambling losses.

**Betting strategies can't work in games of pure chance**
With games of pure chance (ie, involving no player skill), such as roulette, poker machines, lotteries, lottos and scratchies, you cannot affect the percentage return by your betting strategy. No lucky numbers or analysis of most/least frequently drawn numbers or lucky feelings or lucky charms can affect the pure chance result over the long run.

**Problem gambling**
The Australian Productivity Commission's 1999 Inquiry into Australia's gambling industries stated that on average around seven other people are affected by a severe problem gambler's behaviour. That's around 2 million people.

**The 'house advantage'**
The 'house advantage' is the precise mathematics to ensure that the house (or whoever is running the game – whether it's a casino, a club, the local bingo game or the lotteries) is always going to be ahead over the long run.

**Probability – somewhere between impossible and certain**
Probability lies between impossibility and certainty, where 0 = impossible and 1 = certain. Probabilities are represented by fractions (eg, ½ [a 1 in 2 chance that an event will occur – eg, heads or tails], ¼, 2/3, etc) or as decimal numbers between 0 and 1 (eg, 0.5, 0.25, .66666, etc).

**The beginnings of horse racing in Sydney**
When Governor Macquarie announced Australia's first official, organised horse race in 1810 at Hyde Park in Sydney, he envisaged a carnival to strengthen community feeling in the colony. Although the elite mingled in privileged enclosures, separated from the masses, the Hyde Park carnival was as much about people as it was about horses and betting. Australian horse racing started out as a community event.

**One definition of gambling….**
Gambling: The sure way of getting nothing from something.

~ Wilson Mizner

**Decisions**
If you must play, decide upon three things at the start: the rules of the game, the stakes, and the quitting time.
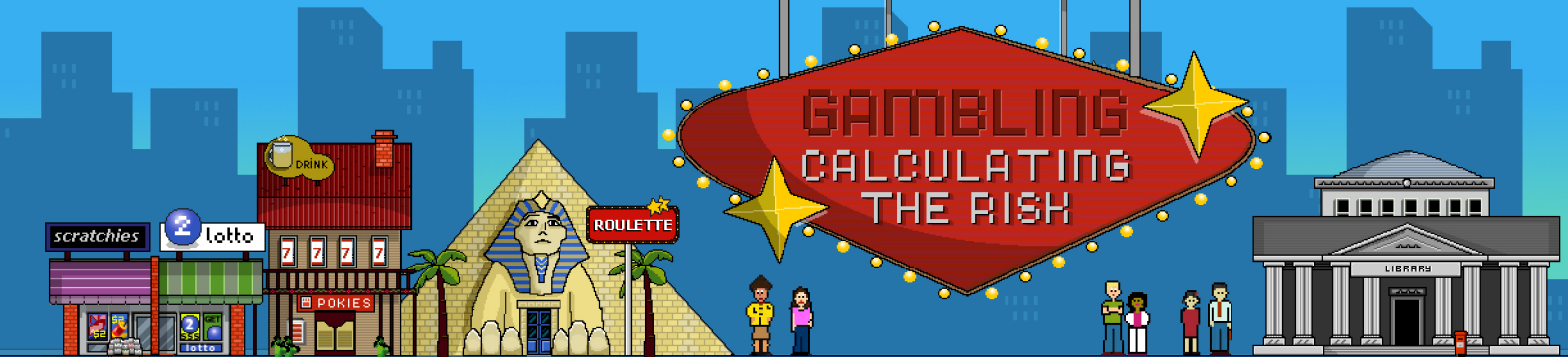
~ Chinese Proverb

**A challenge to any man, woman, dog or cock….**
In Sydney in 1846, Joseph Hilton issued the following challenge:

'I hereby challenge to fight any man in the country of 44 years of age and 12 st.*, and my wife shall fight any woman in the country, bar none; and my dog shall fight any dog in the country 48 lbs.*; and my cock shall fight any cock in the country of any weight; each battle shall be for five pounds a side.'

*Abbreviations for imperial measurements (st.) stone and (lbs.) pounds. One pound is .453592 kg; and fourteen pounds is one stone.

**Supported by G-Line (NSW)**
A telephone helpline for people with gambling problems - **1800 633 635**
**www.powerhousemuseum.com/gambling**

**Illegal if you're under 18**
It is illegal to buy instant scratchie, lotto or lottery tickets, or to participate in other forms of gambling such as horse or greyhound racing, or casino games such as roulette or blackjack, or to play poker machines if you are under 18 years of age.

It is also an offence for a person to buy a scratchie or lottery ticket on behalf of a minor – the maximum penalty for this offence is $2,200. (This offence and the associated offences are contained in the *Public Lotteries Act 1996.*)

**Gambling historically**
- Dice have been found from about 2000BC in Egypt and elsewhere.

- Playing cards were played in China from the 10th century and in Western Europe from the 14th century.

- Life insurance and betting on horse racing began in England in the 16th century.

- Bingo and Keno type games were played at travelling carnivals in England from about 1880.
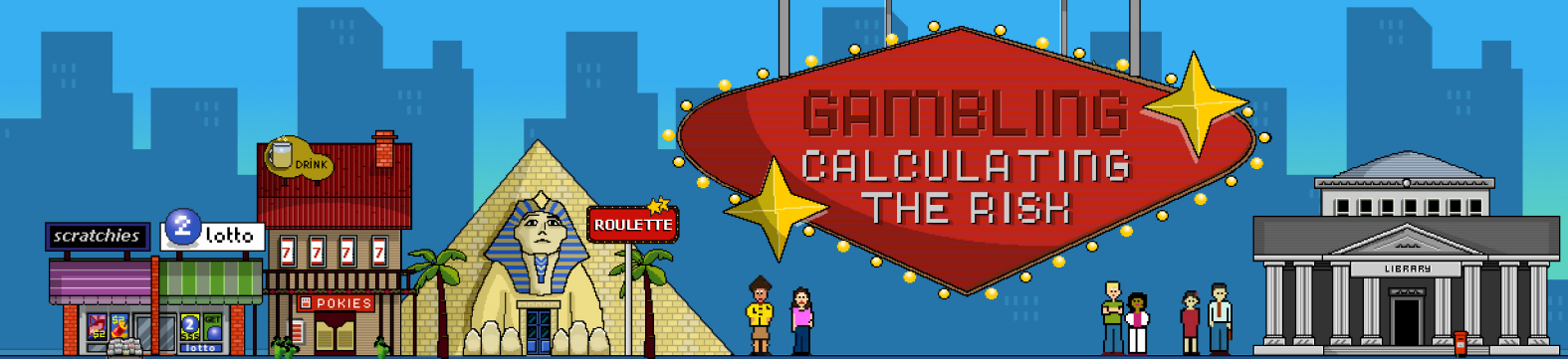
**Probability**
Mathematical probability provides an explanation for why some events happen frequently and others almost never happen. Probability theory underpins many fields of human activity including physics, genetics, insurance, military strategy and business.

Since stock markets appeared in Europe during the 1700s, markets have made chance, speculation and risk management key features of contemporary life.

**Betting on dice**
In the mid 1600s, a French gambler, Chevalier de Mere, made lots of money by betting that in four rolls of a standard die, he could roll six at least once. However, when he modified the game by betting that he could roll at least one 'double six' in 24 rolls of a pair of dice, he began losing.

Puzzled by his huge losses, he contacted mathematician Blaise Pascal for an answer. Pascal together with Pierre de Fermat used probability and solved the problem – the probability of getting at least one 'six' in four rolls of a single die is a bit higher than one in two, while that of at least one 'double six' in 24 throws of two dice is a bet less than one in two.

**Horse sense**
Horse sense is a good judgment which keeps horses from betting on people.

~ W.C. Fields

**Understanding of probability began in the 17th century**
The systematic study of mathematical chance probably did not begin until 1654 when two French mathematicians, Blaise Pascal and Pierre Fermat, began writing to each other about the fairest way to divide the stake in an unfinished game of chance. Their work helped to establish the framework from which the theory of probability is built.

**The social cost of gambling**
The social cost to the community from gambling include fraud, larceny, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, drug abuse and suicide.

The National Gambling Survey conducted by the Australian Productivity Commission for its 1999 inquiry into Australia's gambling industries found that around one in four problem gamblers in the 'severe' category reported having committed some form of illegal activity at some stage of their gambling career. (Source: Productivity Commission 1999, 'Australia's Gambling Industries', Report No 10, AusInfo, Canberra.)
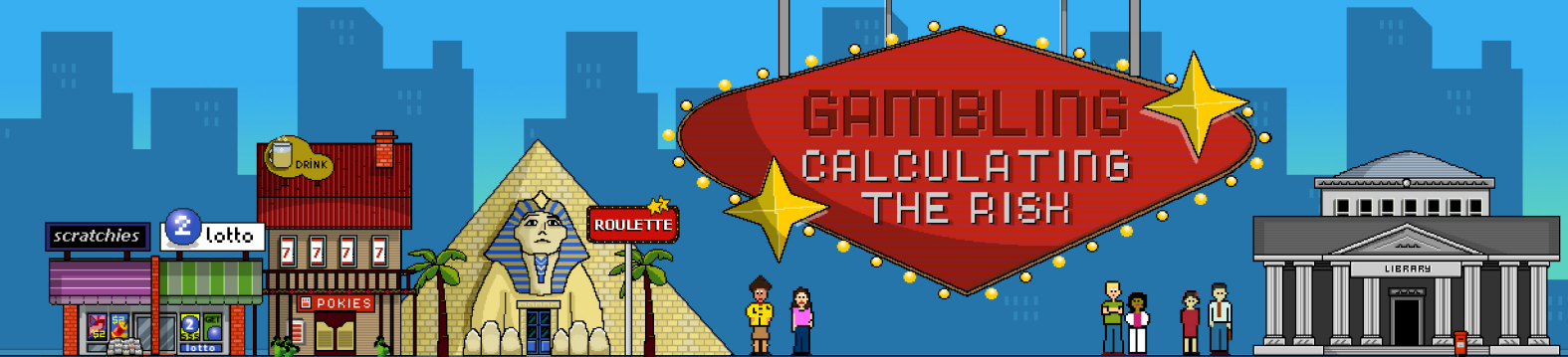
**Oak Valley and Yalata people's approach to gambling**
Betting on card games is common among isolated Aboriginal communities across Australia, and often acts as an important social focus and a means of redistributing resources. Maggie Brady, a visiting research fellow with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, notes that gambling on cards is prevalent among remote communities including the Oak Valley and Yalata people in South Australia:

'People sit around on blankets, with their children and relatives close by, and play intensively, often for hours at a time. People bring food and drink. Others passing by often stop and watch. There is laughter and talking. There is no stigma attached to gambling among Yalata and Oak Valley people. There is no thought of it as pathological – it is a regular feature of daily life.'

The Yalata and Oak Valley people successfully opposed the introduction of poker machines at Nundroo roadhouse on the Eyre Highway. Although many are keen card players, the communities feared that pokies could have a devastating impact. The communities view the two forms of gambling, card-playing and poker machines, as quite distinct activities with different meanings and impacts.

*Wanna bet? Winners and losers in gambling's luck myth*,
by Tim Costello and Royce Millar, Allen and Unwin, 2000.

GAMBLING CALCULATING THE RISK

**Risk management**
The safest guide if you are going to gamble – in whatever form, from cards to the races to roulette to lotteries to pokies to the stock market – is to never gamble more money than you are prepared to lose.

**Heaviest gamblers in New South Wales**
People in New South Wales spend more money gambling than other Australians. In 1999 an average $1068 per adult was lost on gambling in NSW compared with $478 per adult in Western Australia. Most of this is spent on poker machines.

**The many and the few**
In gambling the many must lose in order that the few may win.

~ George Bernard Shaw

**The beginnings of horse racing in Melbourne**
In Melbourne, the first official meeting of what was to become the Melbourne Race Club was held on 6 and 7 March 1838 (less than three years after the settlement of Melbourne was founded), at the site which is now Spencer Street railway station. According to the racing historian Maurice Cavanough, the 'course' appointments could scarcely have been cruder:

'A series of bullock carts did duty as a grandstand, and weighing was accomplished by means of a butcher's steelyard….. Bets were laid and paid in bottles of rum, with the unfortunate sequel that one successful punter imbibed so freely of his winnings that he blundered into the River Yarra and was drowned. Nonetheless the meeting was voted a huge success, and the wind up dinner at Fawkner's Hotel was an hilarious occasion.'

**Australian rates of gambling**
In 1998 Australia lost almost double on gambling what it spent on universities or household energy, and 20 per cent more than the $9 billion it spent on household appliances. Australians lose more gambling than they spend on clothing, textiles and footwear, and almost as much as the annual $13 billion they spend on alcohol. They lose almost as much as our total annual defence budget.

It is estimated that in 2004 Australians lose $15 billion annually through gambling – $1,000 per adult. That's more per capita than any other nation.

Ten per cent of gamblers account for 70% of gambling expenditure.