



Media Release

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'Licence to punt' claim unreal

The Australian Hotels Association and Clubs Australia are now spending \$20m claiming that needing a "licence to punt" is un-Australian. But it is more than un-Australian – it is unreal. There is no proposal to have a 'licence to punt', and those concerned about the damage wrought by poker machines aren't calling for a licence to punt. Wrapping a campaign in green and gold does not change these facts.

SACOSS recently led submissions to the Productivity Commission and the federal parliamentary inquiry into gambling, on behalf of the national network of Councils of Social Service.

SACOSS' Executive Director, Ross Womersley, responded today to the AHA campaign saying:

"Far from being a "licence to punt", the pre-commitment scheme currently under consideration is a basic consumer protection tool that allows all gamblers to budget how much they will spend. It applies only to pokies. If gamblers don't want to set a limit, they don't have to. If they know they have a problem, they can set a limit of \$0—effectively barring themselves from all venues (which they can't do now)—or they can elect to do anything in between. BUT they will do this with knowledge of how much they have spent and how much they want to spend."

Around 600,000 Australians play poker machines at least weekly. A recent report by the Centre for Gambling Research at the ANU, *Survey of the Nature and Extent of Gambling in the ACT*, found that 55% of those who played gaming machines weekly were experiencing some symptoms of problem gambling, and 8.9% were problem gamblers.

Mr Womersley said,

"The Productivity Commission's 2010 report found that consumer protection frameworks, by focusing on *prevention of problem gambling behaviour developing* and *minimising gambling harm*, are one of the best ways to achieve coherent and effective gambling policies. To this end an effective pre-commitment scheme is an important part of a broader public health strategy around gambling, rather than simply clinically 'treating' the worst case problem gamblers. The poker machine industry is responding in the same way big-tobacco has always actively opposed public health initiatives."

"Industry scare-mongering about the government tracking people's gambling (or their beer drinking, as the video campaign implies) is alarmist and misleading."

Mr Womersley concluded,

"Giving gamblers a tool to budget and gamble responsibly should not be controversial. Providing basic consumer information about the price of gambling and the money people are actually spending is not a big ask".

"If the pokie owners would stop screaming about fanciful licences that nobody is actually suggesting, then we could talk about the most effective way to implement this."

For further comment, please contact

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