

STOP THE POKIES PAIN

THE GREENS' PLAN TO CREATE POKIES-FREE COMMUNITIES



Victorians are losing more on the pokies than ever before. The Government's addiction to gambling revenue has allowed the industry to continue to exploit and harm our communities. Enough is enough. The Greens will put our community before gambling profits, and commit to phasing out pokies in Victoria by 2028.

Victoria has a gambling problem. We lost nearly \$2.7bn on the pokies in 2017/18 – the largest loss in a decade. 95% of us gambled at least once in the past year, and the prevalence of problem gambling among adults is as high as 11%.ⁱ

Up to 80% of problem gambling is caused by poker machines,ⁱⁱ which have been carefully engineered by the gambling industry to be highly addictive. Pokies are found in every part of Victoria, but in higher concentrations in disadvantaged communities.

Problem gambling is a serious public health issue that affects individuals, families and communities. The financial stress caused by gambling addiction can lead to family breakdown, job loss, depression and suicide. There are established links between problem gambling, family violence and violent crime.

The Government has failed to tackle our gambling problem. Instead of acting in the best interests of the Victorian community and introducing established, effective solutions, this Government prefers to tinker with the edges of the system.

It has extended pokies licenses for another twenty years, until 2042, and focused its harm minimisation efforts on ineffective voluntary pre-commitment schemes.

The Greens will put the Victorian people first, and commit to creating pokies-free communities in the next ten years.

PHASING OUT POKIES

Current Victorian pokies licences expire in 2022, after which they can be renewed for another 20-year period. This outrageous extension is thanks to legislation introduced by Labor and supported by the Opposition. The Greens opposed it and will move to replace it with legislation to:

- Repeal the 20-year licence extension;
- Create one new 6-year licence – 2022-2028 – with no new licences after 2028;
- Give Councils the power to choose whether to grant a new licence to pokies operators in their community or to remove pokies from 2022 altogether.

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Pokies will still be allowed in Crown Casino.

The Greens believe that pokies have no place in our community. The proliferation of pokies across our pubs and clubs has cost our community billions of dollars and an unmeasurable amount of pain and suffering. Any poker machines that remain in Victoria should be located in Crown Casino, a regulated gaming-specific venue.

We believe that councils are best placed to assess the effect of pokies in the community, and they should have the power to approve or reject new licenses in their area. Councils are already introducing their own policies and planning systems to minimise pokies-related harm. We will support them in controlling the numbers of pokies in their communities by giving them veto power over the 2022 licence renewal.

SUPPORTING CLUBS

We know that a number of clubs and pubs rely on pokies for a significant portion of their revenue. To help clubs move towards a pokies-free Victoria, we will develop a **\$200m transition fund to help venues**.

This fund will include:

- Incentives for venues who voluntarily cancel their licences before 2028.
- Business development advice and assistance, staff training, professional development.
- Grants for clubs to provide new kinds of services to their community, such as libraries, arts and crafts, sports, gyms, and music nights.

Clubs can play an important function in facilitating strong healthy communities, but with pokies they are facilitating isolation and desperation instead.

LIMITING LOSSES, LIMITING HARMS

While pokies remain in our community, there is more we can and should do to reduce harm.

The Greens will immediately introduce:

- **Maximum bet limit of \$1 per spin.** A \$1 limit will reduce the amount an adult could lose on the pokies from an average of \$840 per hour to about \$120 an hour.ⁱⁱⁱ As the vast majority of recreational gamblers already spend less than \$1 per spin when playing pokies, this is specifically designed to reduce harm from problem gambling.
- **A load up limit of \$20.** Limiting the amount of money that can be loaded into a machine at any one time will slow the losses down and prevent people from loading machines up with large amounts of credits.
- **Jackpots of no more than \$500.** Limiting jackpots reduces the volatility of the machines and therefore their addictiveness
- **EFTPOS cashout limits of \$200.** This will have little impact on recreational players but will limit losses to those experiencing gambling harm.
- **Enforceable limits.** A voluntary pre-commitment scheme has been in place in Victoria since 2016, but it has not been effective – pokies losses are now at record levels and the take-up of the scheme is low.^{iv} We would ensure that during the phase-out period all machines are fitted with a system that allows players to set themselves enforceable limits on losses.

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These will remain in place during the 10-year phase out period.

REVENUE IMPACTS

One of the reasons that governments are loath to act on pokies is because of the revenue they receive from gambling taxes, along with their close relationships with the industry.

The Greens have had the Parliamentary Budget Office cost the impact of these harm reduction measures on the Victorian budget. Introducing \$1 bets and \$20 load limits will cumulatively have an impact of \$1.8 billion over the forward estimates.

These figures clearly demonstrate that these harm reduction measures are effective. They will stop significant pokies losses. This money is better spent circulating in the local economy than going into the coffers of the gambling industry.

There are other means for the government to raise revenue than supporting the destructive gambling industry. For example, the Greens have proposed a bank levy that would replace most of the gambling revenue impacted by introducing harm minimisation measures. In the longer term the government must develop plans to wean itself off pokies revenue to ensure safer communities around our State.

i Howe, P, Vargas-Saenz, A, Hulbert, C, Boldero, J, July 2018, *Gambling and problem gambling in Victoria*, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne.
ii Productivity Commission (2010) Gambling Inquiry Report, Report No. 50, Canberra, p13.
iii Productivity Commission (2010) Gambling Inquiry Report, Report No. 50, Canberra, 11.07.
iv <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-22/yourplay-a-waste-of-money/9180288>