

## Hawthorn finally making the right moves away from its pokies addiction

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Hawthorn Football Club's plans to sell off more than half its poker machine holdings is a massive step in the right direction for pokies divestment in Victoria, according to Rev Tim Costello.

Rev Costello, the Chief Advocate for the Alliance for Gambling Reform, said the move was a huge signal to the AFL clubs still owning poker machines that the time to get out is now.

"The reality is that the AFL clubs who still own poker machines are profiting from misery, and owning poker machines is damaging their brands," Rev Costello said. "

"That means Carlton, Essendon, Richmond, St Kilda and Port Adelaide all need to wake up to the fact they're part of a family-friendly game yet profiting from machines that are often part of breaking up families and relationships.

"Hawthorn will still fall into that category too as long as they hold on to their remaining pokies."

According to the [Herald Sun](#), Hawthorn will put 90 poker machines and its WestWaters Hotel in Caroline Springs on the market to help fund plans to build a \$100 million base in Dingley. The 90 machines represents 55 per cent of the club's 165 pokies holdings.

"It is particularly significant that Hawthorn has made this decision given they are the club that profits most from their pokies holdings," Rev Costello said. "Patrons handed over \$24.7 million at Hawthorn's two venues in the past financial year.

"And it's only been in recent weeks that current Hawthorn President and former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett has been decrying the need for Hawthorn to exit pokies, making this news even more unexpected, but thrilling.

"I have often wondered why Jeff was so keen on profiting from gambling harm when there is a clear link between gambling issues and mental ill-health. The dichotomy between Jeff being an advocate for good mental health with Beyond Blue and yet being so steadfastly wedded to Hawthorn profiting from misfortune has always been astounding.

"It seems wiser, more considerate and compassionate heads have prevailed at Hawthorn and we applaud the club for making this decision. We look forward to them selling off their other 75 machines soon too."

Rev Costello said it was time the AFL stopped profiting from harm and ended its own associations with gambling.

"I cannot fathom how the AFL think it's okay to be knowingly complicit in ensuring the next generation of AFL supporters will consider gambling a normal part of the game we all love," he said.

"The cognitive dissonance between the AFL benefitting from millions of dollars from the gambling industry and then punishing players for having a bet is astounding.

"Similar to Jeff Kennett, I cannot understand how the AFL can supposedly be so concerned about promoting good mental health and yet be profiting from an industry that is literally to blame for many people's mental ill-health.

"The AFL's clubs are clearly getting the message that gambling is a dirty, destructive business to be in and it's time the league itself got that message too."