

25 May 2020

## Is the NSW Government taking public health orders from gambling industry?

The Alliance for Gambling Reform is questioning whether the gambling industry is essentially dictating when poker machines are reopened by the NSW Government.

The questions have been raised after a [newspaper article](#) arranged by Clubs NSW claimed poker machines would be switched back on as of 1 June, yet there has been no such announcement made by the NSW Government or published as part of a Health Order.

“It’s absolutely disturbing to think that an industry involved in a product that ruins lives is apparently dictating public health policy in NSW,” Alliance Chief Advocate Rev Tim Costello said.

“As far as we can tell, there has been no [official announcement](#) or publication by the NSW Government referencing the reopening of poker machines, yet Club NSW is apparently confident enough that it is happening that it has discussed such a move in a major daily newspaper.

“If Premier Gladys Berejiklian is not careful she could have another Ruby Princess on her hands.

“Since poker machines were switched off on 23 March we have been advocating for them to be the last thing returned to operation due to the tremendous risks of gambling harm after such a long period of ‘cold turkey’ for many people experiencing gambling issues. It’s frankly dangerous.

“Yet apparently poker machines, which involve the repeated touching of buttons, are allowed back on while a family can’t take their children to the cinema or return to a place of worship. Why is that?”

Rev Costello said the NSW Government should prepare for a “tsunami” of gambling harm.

“We are deeply concerned about a lack of preparation by the NSW Government for the inevitable tsunami of gambling harm that will occur when poker machines are switched back on,” he said.

“The people of NSW have saved more than \$1 billion since poker machines were switched off, and continue to save \$18.1 million per day while they remain off. That is how big of a problem poker machine losses are in NSW; how much they drain from the pockets of families and the local economy.

“Gambling harm is a public health crisis, with connections to mental ill-health, family violence, and homelessness. It’s irresponsible to ignore this when COVID-19 has exacerbated these issues.

“The NSW Government is squandering the biggest opportunity it has ever had to address gambling harm by capitulating to Clubs NSW and the gambling lobby’s demands to reopen.

“In doing so they are massively disadvantaging the majority 86 percent of NSW pubs and clubs that do the right thing and operate without poker machines. Poker machines are a lazy, parasitic business model that cause tremendous harm to patrons.

“If anything, the NSW Government should be favouring and supporting pubs and clubs without poker machines -- every \$1 million spent with them equals 20 jobs versus only 3 in gambling venues.”

Rev Costello urged the NSW Government to urgently enact reforms to reduce gambling harm.

“Both public health experts and the Productivity Commission have repeatedly called for shortened operating hours, a banning of loyalty schemes and a \$1 maximum bet to reduce gambling harm.

“It is absurd and dangerous that venues are allowed to open 20 hours per day, and we don’t want people who have just had a nine week imposed break on gambling to be lured back in via loyalty schemes. A \$1 maximum bet would also dramatically reduce the risk of people losing thousands of dollars in a day. Enacting these reforms now will prevent gambling harm from happening and will undoubtedly improve the lives of people vulnerable to machines that were designed to addict them.”

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