

THE POKIES PLAY YOU

Alliance calls for sweeping pokies reforms in NSW

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The Alliance for Gambling Reform today welcome Fairfield City Council's call for sweeping poker machine reforms in NSW and also released its submission to the NSW process reviewing the Local Impact Assessments (LIA) for poker machine applications.

The present system lacks transparency and is heavily tilted in favour of the poker machine industry with local councils not allowed to assess the damage of pokies when approving applications.

The Alliance is calling for the NSW Government to use the LIA review to initiate a range of reforms including:

No more dodgy pre-election MOUs with Club NSW which prevent meaningful reform and leave NSW as the most pokies-saturated jurisdiction globally outside of Nevada. Instead, the approach should be to pursue reforms based on best practice in other jurisdictions.

A change in policy to focus on reducing gambling harm as a public health issue rather than aiming to grow industry revenues. The Government discussion paper on the LIA review was fundamentally flawed in saying gambling industry growth is a key objective. NSW already has the most heavily exposed Australian citizens to gambling losses with almost half of the \$11.7 billion lost on pokies nationally coming from NSW.

Faster reduction in overall pokies numbers. Numbers have only fallen by 5000 to 95,000 over the past 7 years, when the ACT Government recently promised a 20% cut in 4 years and Victoria only has 30,000 machines.

Councils should be able to assess gambling impacts when looking at a permit – currently this is banned and The Alliance agrees with Fairfield's submission that the current process is "complex, systemically biased in favour of the applicant and lacking in transparency with no requirement for independent, expert analysis."

The Premier has identified reducing family violence as one of her 12 highest priorities when research has shown family violence is 3 times more likely to occur in a family which has been harmed by gambling addiction. Poker machines are easily the largest source of gambling harm, so if the Premier is serious about tackling family violence she needs to introduce companion reforms to reduce gambling harm.

Far greater pokies industry transparency such as the public release of poker machines losses by venue and local government areas, plus the belated release of the study commissioned by the NSW Government into gambling harm.

The commitment to transparency should extend to a proper explanation of projected increases in gambling losses in the NSW budget and a government undertaking to commit to more consultation on the outcome of the LIA review before any changes are announced.

A ban on gambling industry donations and better disclosure of benefits provided by the industry to elected representatives at all levels (free room hire for campaign launches etc)

The biggest losses occur in the poorest areas (Fairfield is easily the worst in NSW with annual losses exceeding \$700 million) so The Alliance is advocating for the introduction of Victorian-style regional caps in the most saturated areas.

The Alliance's NSW spokesperson, Allison Keogh, who grew up in household impacted by gambling harm, said the NSW Government is failing to protect ordinary people and the LIA process is an opportunity to begin the long path to reform.

"NSW is already the most pokies-soaked state in Australia and this is only going to get worse with the government's recent budget prediction that its share of pokies losses are projected to rise by \$332 million to a record \$1.777 billion in 2020-21," Ms Keogh said.

"We don't push addictive cigarettes to get revenue, so both sides of NSW politics need to break their addiction to pokies revenue and escape pokies industry capture with its dangerous products and influence-peddling which results in state-sponsored citizen abuse."

Ms Keogh said that with NSW Treasurer Damian Perrottet claiming the state's finances are "the envy of the western world", surely now is the time to commence the long overdue process of reducing the state's embarrassing and dangerous gambling dependency.

"A good start would be letting the so-called Independent Liquor and Gambling Authority be a genuinely independent regulator and then committing to a transparent review process with a published timetable of outcomes, unlike this opaque LIA review."

"The property boom and asset sales have opened the window for NSW to introduce meaningful reforms such as \$1 maximum bets and slower spin rates," Ms Keogh said.

"Rather than pushing policies designed to increase losses and harm, why can't the government commit to reduce community pokies losses to below \$5 billion a year? It's not a big ask and would still leave NSW as pokies central in world terms."

Full Alliance submission to the review available for [download here](#)

Media contact: Stephen Mayne: stephen@agr.org.au 0412 106 241
Allison Keogh: 0412 555 369