

THE POKIES PLAY YOU

Betrayed by Government, Alliance makes pokies push in Northcote

Sunday, November 5, 2017

After the Victorian Government brazenly rammed its [disastrous pokies legislation](#) through the Legislative Assembly last Thursday, The Alliance for Gambling Reform has this weekend engaged with voters in Northcote ahead of the crucial November 18 election.

The Alliance erected almost 100 corflutes across Northcote over the weekend after spokesman Tim Costello said he was shocked at the conduct of the government, particularly the apparent disregard for the pokies harm suffered by women.

(MEDIA ALERT: Mr Costello will do a street walk in High Street Northcote today from 1pm, commencing at The Peacock Inn Hotel at 210 High Street and then heading north.)

"Last Tuesday, I listened to ten women who spoke at the first ever ["Women Against Pokies"](#) rally which was held on the steps of State Parliament," Mr Costello said.

"The speakers included 4 women – Gabi Byrne, Joanne McKenzie, Libby Mitchell and Anna Bardsley - whose lives were severely damaged by a pokies addiction, something the machines are designed to do."

"All 138 Victorian MPs were invited to attend the rally and all female MPs were offered an opportunity to speak. Sadly, no-one from the government or the opposition turned up, but we did hear strong messages of support from Suzanna Sheed, Colleen Hartland and Fiona Patten."

(The full rally is available [here on Youtube](#).)

The rally heard numerous calls for the Government not to rush its legislation to issue new 20 year pokies licences through until 2042 – a move which will soak an estimated \$70 billion from the Victorian community.

Alas, at 2.20pm last Tuesday, just 3 hours after the 50 women at the rally took their leave, the government brought on the pokies debate in the Legislative Assembly (see [the Hansard](#) starting at p29) as media attention remained on the North Richmond injecting facility debate.

"Would you believe it but the first 10 speakers about the pokies over the next two hours were all male MPs, several of whom from both sides talked about the importance of looking after the pokies industry which has drained \$50 billion from Victorians over the past 25 years."

"The contrast was stark indeed with the events on the steps that morning, where the female speakers spoke about 'blood-sucking pokies' causing misery, family violence, financial abuse, distress and wide-spread community harm."

"The debate inside Parliament was dominated with talk of how clubs, pubs and the government spend their pokies profits. No one mentioned the 400 gambling-related suicides each year."

“No one mentioned that Australians are the world’s biggest gamblers in per capita terms, dropping \$23 billion a year, more than half of which is lost on the pokies.”

Mr Costello urged the government not to rush this 20 year licence extension through the Legislative Council almost 5 years before the current 10 year licences expire.

“It smells like a pre-election cash grab with the wellbeing of women traded off for money and to keep a powerful industry on side,” Mr Costello said. “Our interactions with Northcote voters was loud and clear – they hate the pokies and want government to tackle its own addiction problem.”

The Alliance is [calling for](#) a parliamentary inquiry into gambling regulation similar to what has just occurred in Tasmania, so that some of the tens of thousands of voiceless victims of poker machine addiction – many of whom are women - might finally be heard.

Mr Costello said it was dispiriting to say the least to see the legislation sail through the lower house 81-3 at 5.07pm last Thursday (see [p79 of the November 2 Hansard](#)) with only the Greens and independent Suzanna Sheed voting against.

“When Alliance volunteers explained this situation to Northcote voters this weekend they were shocked and disappointed to hear about the government’s actions,” Mr Costello said.

Mr Costello concluded by saying this Parliament has a once in a generation opportunity to do something about poker machine harm, but we first should have a decent community debate, not just rush the legislation through before Christmas.

“I sincerely ask all MPs to consider embracing some of [these amendments](#) outlined by The Alliance before this legislation is passed by the Legislative Council.”

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