

THE POKIES PLAY YOU

Alliance calls for delay to Victorian pokies legislation

Monday, November 27, 2017

The Alliance for Gambling Reform has called for the Victorian Government and Opposition to delay proceeding with this week's scheduled poker machine legislation debate in the upper house to allow the community more time to engage on substantial amendments.

Alliance director and spokesman Tim Costello has written to the ALP and Coalition leadership requesting that they not be involved in any rushed pre-Christmas law-making in the final sitting days of the year when the new pokies entitlements won't commence until August 2022.

See [Tim Costello letter to Gaming Minister Marlene Kairouz](#).

The Gambling Regulation Amendment (Gaming Machine Arrangements) Bill 2017 has been listed 5th on the [notice paper](#) to be debated in the Legislative Council during the final 6 days of sittings for 2017 which are scheduled for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday this week and then a final three days commencing on Tuesday, December 12.

“The Legislative Council is three weeks behind the Legislative Assembly and with [23 bills listed](#) to be dealt with in the final two sitting weeks of 2017, the pokies legislation should not be progressed this week when most Victorians are not even aware there is legislation before the Parliament,” Mr Costello said.

The Alliance is calling for the Victorian Government to heed the lessons of Northcote – where poker machine regulation was [a prominent issue](#) – and move in a different direction.

“The Premier and Treasurer have provided no public explanation about why more than \$1 billion a year in pokies tax revenue is more important than protecting the community from a dangerous addictive product,” Mr Costello said.

The Alliance has [outlined its concerns](#) about the legislation and believes a number of amendments need to be pursued, including:

1. A ban on cashless gambling.
2. A reduction in the amount of cash that can be withdrawn in venues to \$200 per day
3. An increase in the minimum closing period for venues from 4 hours to 10 hours
4. Maintain the 50/50 split in EGM numbers between clubs and hotels
5. Lower maximum bets from \$5 to \$1
6. Maintain the existing licence term at 10 years

“Victoria has a once in a generation opportunity to do something about the pokies rather than impose another \$70 billion in losses until 2042 and The Alliance has spelt out a [range of amendments](#) which the Parliament should adopt,” Mr Costello said.

“We have been engaging with politicians across the political spectrum and, if the government does attempt to bring on the debate later in the week, we are anticipating a range of amendments will be proposed.”

The Alliance also believes the government should wait for the Woolworths board to complete its review of two specific policy areas – trading hours and daily limits on cash withdrawals at venues – following last Thursday’s detailed AGM debate.

“Woolworths chairman Gordon Cairns undertook to make public the company’s views on these two areas after an Alliance request to embrace reform so the Government should wait for Australia’s biggest pokies operator to complete this review before proceeding with the legislation,” Mr Costello said.

Alliance director Dr Susan Rennie raised a number of issues during her board candidacy [speech](#) in front of Woolworths shareholders last week.

The Alliance distributed [this flyer](#) to almost 200 shareholders before the meeting commenced, which included [this list](#) of the 51 Victorian Woolworths pokies venues which are open 20 hours a day, 7 days a week.

“It is completely unacceptable that Victorian law allows Woolworths to operate 51 of its 81 Victorian pokies venues 20 hours a day, 7 days a week,” Mr Costello said. “Nothing good was happening at 2am this morning when Woolworths had 69 of its 81 Victorian pokies venues open for business.”

“By way of contrast, very few Victorian pokies clubs push the envelope so hard with 20 hours a day trading, which is why the government should also not tamper with the 50-50 split between pub and club entitlements.”

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