

THE POKIES PLAY YOU

World record gambling losses revealed as Victoria locks in pokies

Friday, December 1, 2017

The Alliance for Gambling Reform today condemned Australia's major political parties for failing to tackle gambling harm after [new data](#) was released showing national gambling losses jumped 3.9% to a record \$23.6 billion in 2015-16.

The new data released by the Queensland Treasury (see p55 and 57 of this [820p document](#)) came as the Labor, Liberal and National Parties in Victoria conspired last night to vote in favour of new 20 year poker machines licences, despite [vigorous objections](#) from The Alliance and smaller parties.

Victoria's Gambling Regulation Amendment (Gaming Machine Arrangements) Bill 2017 was passed shortly after 6pm last night after a 4 hour debate in the Legislative Council, which was at times disrespectful of the victims of a predatory industry. Alliance director and spokesman Tim Costello watched the debate from the public gallery with Anna Bardsley and Carmel Harty, two females with a lived experience of poker machine harm.

All three were ejected from the Legislative Council after voicing their concerns about the appalling legislation which, based on current losses of \$2.61 billion a year, could see Victorians lose another \$70 billion on the pokies by 2042.

Mr Costello thanked the Greens and Reason Party MP Fiona Patten for valiantly pushing for both an inquiry and then amendments, before the big parties rejected all calls for delay and brought on the vote shortly before Christmas.

"We [asked for an inquiry](#), we [asked for delay](#), we [asked for amendments](#), we said don't rush this through before Christmas and the big parties ended up ignoring all of this and signing up for more state-sponsored pokies abuse of tens of thousands of victims," Mr Costello said. "It was nothing short of shameful, particularly given the current licences don't expire until August 2022, more than 1700 days away."

"Australians lose more per capita than any other people in the world and it's because of spineless political behaviour like what was on display in the Victorian Parliament last night. As is clear from anyone who reads [the Hansard](#) of yesterday's debate, the Government is addicted to pokies tax revenues, unduly influenced by the pokies industry and has failed to adequately research or implement appropriate harm minimisation measures."

Anna Bardsley and Carmel Harty both said they were appalled by the attitude of the big parties and some of the language used during the debate.

Anna has recently spoken at both the Crown and Woolworths AGMs and met a number of MPs to discuss the bill in recent weeks, plus addressed the [“Women against pokies” rally](#) on the steps of State Parliament on October 31.

“A whole lot of Victorians were thrown under the bus last night,” Ms Barsdley said. “It was a case of ‘a pox on both your houses’ and I felt better for telling them so from the public gallery.”

As Carmel was walking out after making her voice heard, one particularly disrespectful MP said: “let the addicted ones go home”.

Carmel duly returned to the gallery and told the assembled major party MPs: “I’m not the one who was addicted, it was my sister which ended in suicide. You all should be so ashamed of yourselves after today stopping the amendments that were so needed.”

The Alliance is calling for the un-named MP to apologise for using such insensitive language. A number of MPs from both sides later apologised for some of the behaviour and were clearly uncomfortable about being forced to tow the party line for the pokies industry.

The Alliance was particularly heartened by cross-bench support for Fiona Patten’s motion for the legislation to be referred off to the Legal and Social Issues committee for an inquiry into the gambling legislation that would have reported back by March 2018. The motion was defeated 28 votes to 10 but this represented the first time in the current parliament that the entire diverse cross-bench (5 Greens, 2 Shooters and Fishers, James Purcell (Local Jobs), Rachel Carling Jenkins (Australian Conservatives) and Fiona Patten (Reason) had voted together against the combined power of the major parties.

“The big parties need to realise that remaining captured by the predatory gambling industry is not the way of the future and they will continue to lose community supports as long as they do this,” Mr Costello said. “Has the Labor Party not learnt anything from their shock defeat in Northcote where pokies policy was a key issue [advanced by The Alliance?](#)”

The Alliance had [outlined its detailed concerns](#) about the legislation and welcomed attempts by the Greens and Reason Party MP Fiona Patten to pursue a range of important amendments such as the following:

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 8 hours
4. Lower maximum bets from \$5 to \$1
5. Maintain the existing licence term at 10 years

These issues will remain on the agenda right through until next year’s Victorian election where the gambling policies of all major parties will be subjected to vigorous scrutiny.

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