

THE POKIES PLAY YOU

Time to clean up RSL Victoria governance, tackle scourge of pokies

Wednesday, May 1, 2019

The Alliance for Gambling Reform today called for RSL Victoria to clean up its governance and embrace younger veterans pushing for a pokies-free future ahead of tonight's pivotal EGM of the [Tramways/East Melbourne RSL sub-branch](#) at the Fitzroy Town Hall commencing at 7pm.

The Alliance is concerned about claims of branch stacking inside RSL Victoria as younger veterans continue to push for a new ethical direction free of the influence of poker machines.

East Timor veteran and Tramways member Lucas Moon spoke to Raph Epstein on ABC Melbourne last night (listen to audio [here](#)) detailing claims that RSL Victoria has been involved in moves to branch stack the Tramways membership ahead of tonight's vote to determine the future composition of the committee.

The Tramways sub-branch has been a key driver of reform amongst younger veterans which is expected to come to a head at the July 4 RSL Victoria state congress with proposed changes to both the board and the constitution.

Alliance deputy chair Dr Susan Rennie welcomed [the dogged campaign](#) by the younger veterans (see [their media statement](#)) for full pokies divestment by the Victorian RSL.

"The Alliance applauds the [work of younger veterans](#) such as Lucas Moon, Dave Petersen and Dan Cairnes and call on the incumbent Victorian RSL board to play fairly. They should either resign or embrace their reform agenda and come up with a new long term business model which does not rely on predatory poker machines which continue to harm veterans," she said.

Alliance spokesperson and corporate governance campaigner Stephen Mayne said he was shocked by the state of governance inside RSL Victoria and the tactics being deployed to protect its pokies franchise.

"It is disappointing to discover RSL Victoria has poorly conceived governance arrangements such as sub-branch committee members being paid honorariums that increase with the number of poker machines they operate," Mr Mayne said.

"And if genuine combat veterans were being denied the opportunity to join the Tramways branch in recent weeks whilst head office was simultaneously parachuting in more than 50 new affiliate members who were relatives of Vietnam veterans supportive of the current

pro-pokies approach, this represents a significant breach of democratic governance principles,” Mr Mayne said.

Last week [publicity in *The Age*](#) and on [ABC TV’s 7.30 program](#) about the younger veteran insurgency preceded more media revelations this week, including that a number of RSL sub-branches owned shares in gambling giant Tabcorp, sparking claims of a [conflict of interest](#).

“It is clear that the RSL Victoria head office continues to be overly influenced by the gambling industry, including through the inappropriate \$500,000 annual sponsorship from Tabcorp [referenced on 7.30](#) and the revelations about the Tabcorp shareholdings,” Mr Mayne said.

“After [recent failed attempts](#) to expand its pokies empire it is time for a new board to take charge at ANZAC House and end the pokies push once and for all so that younger veterans can proudly associate with an ethical organisation doing no harm in the community.”

“At the very least the Victorian RSL board should commission a full independent audit of the pokies division so members can be informed when they vote at the July 4 State Council. This review should include an assessment of whether the Victorian RSL does indeed only make \$8 million in profit on the \$260 million in revenue generated at its 52 gaming clubs and whether the RSL has the capacity to pay the estimated \$68 million owed to the State Government in August 2022 for the new 20 year pokies licences.”

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