



HEALTH

SHOCKING: Burnett punters lose millions on pokies in July



SHOCKING: Statistics have revealed just how much punters are losing on the pokies every month in the region.

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SHOCKING statistics have revealed gamblers in the South Burnett lost an extra \$600,000 on pokie machines in July compared to the same time last year.

The worrying data suggests punters have been spending more time and money at gaming machines since they were switched on again following lockdown – with a gambling reform group saying the spike was “entirely avoidable”.

The data from the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation reveals just how much punters lose at pokie machines every month.

In July this year, gamblers lost an eye-watering \$1.92 million to the 628 gaming machines in the South Burnett alone (<https://www.news.com.au/privacy>). 

The total losses were up by 42.99 per cent from July 2019, and more than 74 per cent from February this year before the pokies were switched off at the height of the COVID-19 crisis.



The North Burnett has also seen a massive spike, with losses jumping 77 per cent between February and July at its 83 machines, and rising more than 15 per cent in August year-on-year.

In total, gamblers have already lost more than \$5.7 million to pokie machines this year, with the North Burnett losing more than \$1.2 million.

But the shocking statistics came as no surprise to Rev Tim Costello, Chief Advocate at the Alliance for Gambling Reform.

“This increase certainly was expected, and was entirely avoidable if the Queensland Government had listened to public health experts, as they did regarding the coronavirus,” Rev Costello said.

The alliance had been calling for poker machines to remain switched off when pubs began opening for business once more – but these calls weren’t heeded.

“It’s impossible to argue that gambling is an essential service in the middle of a pandemic. If anything, gambling being on offer during a pandemic is yet another public health risk, one that is almost universally overlooked in a crisis,” he said.

“Given we are in a recession, it is a very risky time for people who are experiencing gambling harm.

“Then there are the public health issues associated with gambling harm to consider, including mental ill-health, family violence and homelessness. These are of major concern, now more than ever.”

The reverend said it was also likely much of the increased losses were coming out of people’s welfare and stimulus payments, adding more reasons to why the machines should have stayed off.

“In times of emotional and financial stress people often seek out gambling as a way to soothe themselves, and also with the hope it may rescue them from their financial issues, when it will almost certainly only exacerbate them,” he said.

“There have also been reports about people using the superannuation they have withdrawn due to COVID-related hardship being gambled away. That has not only short-term but also major long-term consequences for individuals, families, and the Australian economy.”

A number of simple steps could be taken to reduce gambling harm, the reverend said, including shutting poker machines from midnight to 10am.

“Nothing good is happening in pokie rooms at 3am, but the industry wants pokies running then because their best customers are people who are experiencing the worst gambling harm,” he said.

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