

2 October 2020

AHA and Clubs NSW clearly values profit over people

Clubs NSW and the Australian Hotels Association has shown its true colours [today](#), clearly putting profit before people in its campaign against draft legislation that will force it to finally take some responsibility for preventing the damage poker machines cause.

Alliance for Gambling Reform Chief Advocate, the Rev Tim Costello, said the notoriously manipulative gambling industry is hiding behind the cloak of COVID19 economic impacts to try and shoot down [sensible legislation](#) to help people who have recognised they have gambling issues and need support.

“Clubs NSW and the AHA should hang their heads in shame -- what an utter disgrace it is to try and fight legislation that will literally save lives,” Rev Costello said.

“There is a myth that pubs and clubs are currently active in ensuring that people who have made the effort to self-exclude from venues actually are prevented from entering. The reality is that every day people who have self-excluded from venues are admitted without any issues. [The ABC proved that just last week](#).

“Why is that? It’s because there is no real financial penalty in place to be a disincentive for the clubs and pub with pokies to actually enforce self-exclusions, and the people who have self-excluded are often their best customers suffering the highest losses.

“It’s not hyperbole to say lives are at risk whenever someone who has self-excluded is admitted to a venue. There are many examples of people who have died by suicide after pokies binges, including the recent [historic findings against the Dee Why RSL](#) in relation to the death of Gary van Duinen.

“The proposed legislation, for the first time, really puts the onus back on clubs and pubs to do the right thing and they clearly don’t like it.”

Rev Costello said the proposed facial recognition technology the AHA and Clubs NSW is railing against is just a small part of the legislation.

“The key part of this legislation is forcing pubs and clubs to have properly trained people actively enforcing self-exclusion, something the industry has blatantly failed to do for decades,” he said.

“This will actually create and cement jobs, not put them at risk. It will mean better training for venue staff, and that there will have to be a dedicated staff member responsible for identifying people who have self-excluded at all times. Is that really too much to ask when lives and livelihoods are at risk?”

“The NSW Government should be applauded for finally recognising just how devastating gambling harm is in NSW and taking steps to reduce its impact on the community, not be vilified for this.”

When people realised how ineffective the current system is at preventing gambling harm they would support the draft legislation, Rev Costello said.

“The current system is an absolute joke and it is obvious why it doesn’t work. We know both regular and casual staff don’t look through a book of photos of people who have self-excluded at the start of every shift, and then actively look out for these people on the gambling floor as they are currently supposed to. When someone is drunk, staff and venues are legally obliged to stop serving the person, but that is not the case when it comes to gambling on machines designed to addict.

“The gambling industry fighting so hard against what could be considered the bare minimum to protect lives shows their true colours of wanting to drain every last dollar out of people. This is akin to the car industry fighting the introduction of seatbelts because it would cost a little more to install them.

“This is an industry that accounts for \$18.4 million a day in losses from the people of NSW. Its business model is predatory, and it is time the industry was held accountable for the damage it does.”

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Key points regarding the [draft legislation](#).

- This overdue reform is simple and modest. Individuals in difficulties are acting responsibly by taking out a self-exclusion -- the venues should also act responsibly by:
 - Actively enforcing the exclusion. Many clubs already link ID sign-in with self-exclusion databases, the legislation will just make this mandatory.
 - Having a staff member on each shift who had undertaken advanced training to help people stay safe, training the industry has already invested \$1million in developing
 - Running a gambling incident register the same way venues already run an alcohol incident register
 - Allowing families to apply to have a loved one excluded to stay safe.

These are all modest and simple reforms that almost all people would expect were already in place.