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Cashless gambling could work in NSW, but needs right approach

The Alliance for Gambling Reform is urging the NSW Government to mandate a [universal cashless gambling system](#) that is not linked to bank accounts and requires individual identification before use.

A well-designed system would not only minimise or even end money laundering via poker machines, it would also reduce gambling harm, Alliance Chief Advocate Rev Tim Costello said.

“For far too long the gambling industry has hijacked pubs and clubs throughout NSW, trying to delay and block meaningful reforms, even reforms as simple as enforcing the self-exclusion deeds signed by people seeking to be safe,” Rev Costello said.

“Now the gambling industry can no longer avoid the [absolute proof that money laundering](#) is occurring in pubs and clubs, they're trying to leverage that as a way to bring in the worst possible version of cashless gambling -- [a digital wallet](#).

“While some features of digital or cashless systems will work to help people manage their gambling, designed poorly they will empty bank accounts quickly and increase harm. It's safe to say which design features the gambling industry will push for and which ones they will fight.”

Rev Costello acknowledged privacy concerns with a cashless gambling card, but said there was no real difference between such a card and something like the Opal public transport card.

“It's clear from industry forums and due to changed behaviours brought about through COVID that clubs and pubs are moving towards cashless trading. That's okay so long as it is done very safely and with serious consideration of how this could affect people who may be struggling with gambling,” Rev Costello said.

“The gambling industry has made it patently clear for decades that they do not have any consideration for the people from whom they profit, and they only want to exploit these people to maximise their highly questionable gains.

“The crocodile tears we've seen repeatedly from Clubs NSW about privacy concerns and the costs associated with introducing new technology are frankly laughable. The gambling industry never hesitates to introduce new technology when it works in its favour.

“Many venues have installed facial recognition technology to monitor their VIP members. Most clubs and many pubs issue venue-specific cards, and often require personal information that they then use to target marketing materials to encourage people to gamble more.

“The Alliance seeks better privacy through a system the Privacy Commissioner can oversee; a cashless gambling card designed to stop money laundering with linked proof of identity and low transaction limits; limits to the number of cards an individual can be issued, and a system that lets people manage their own spending.

“While this is negotiated, it is imperative the exclusion system in NSW is fixed. For 20 years venues have offered self-exclusion deeds, yet there has been no legal obligation to honour them. We look forward to seeing the [Gambling Harm Minimisation Bill](#) tabled in the next parliamentary sitting to compel the industry to uphold its responsibilities towards people who gamble.”

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See [here](#) for a gambling language guide for journalists.

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