

# MEDIA RELEASE

## **VCAT Approves plan for 20 more pokie machines at Hogan's Hotel in Wallan**

**1 April 2021**

Hogan's Hotel in Wallan has been approved to increase the number of poker machines it operates by 20, after an appeal from Mitchell Shire Council [was dismissed by VCAT](#), despite strong community disapproval for the plan.

Mitchell Shire's two year battle to ensure Wallan does not have more pokie machines was shut down by VCAT in a shock decision, stating that they agree with the original decision by the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation (VCGLR) that this application would have a 'net neutral' impact on the community and therefore should be allowed to go ahead.

In 2019 the VCGLR approved the application from Hogan's Hotel to increase their amount of pokie machines from 45 to 65. This increase in poker machines is estimated to take an extra \$500,000 at a venue that typically takes \$4.6 million annually from the Wallan Community.

The Mitchell Shire decided to appeal this decision at VCAT and the hearing for this matter took place in October last year. The council conducted community consultation sessions and collated letters from residents that were presented to the members of VCAT that presided over the matter.

75 letters from community members and a community video was submitted by the council and disappointingly the VCAT panel assessed that no weight would be given to this negative social impact of disapproval of the proposal.

"This VCAT decision is nothing short of bewildering," said the Alliance for Gambling Reform's Chief Advocate, the Rev Tim Costello. "The panel has dismissed and disregarded the views of the community, demonstrating that there is an inefficient process in place to assess and review machine applications."

"It's clear that there is a lack of education around the harms of gambling among some members of VCAT, and a complete lack of respect towards community members who decide to share their views on shaping their own community. It's unacceptable to minimise the views of the community members and organisations that made submissions to council and label them as a 'small minority', when there were hardly any submissions supporting the proposal."

"The Mitchell Shire Council has done its' best to represent the views of the community and should be commended for their efforts in trying to minimise and prevent gambling harm in residents in the Mitchell Shire. It is disappointing that their best efforts have not been met with success in this instance."

Residents in the Mitchell Shire lost \$12.7 million dollars in the 2019-2020 financial year at pokies venues, which equates to almost \$48,000 lost per day.

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The Alliance is a national advocacy organisation which works to prevent and minimise the harm from gambling. Our aim is to remove the shame that surrounds gambling addiction, have the problem treated as a public health issue, and achieve the legislative changes needed to protect our communities.