

New problem gambling campaign on track to protect consumers

Media Release Wednesday, June 25, 2008 from the Minister for Gaming

The Brumby Government will use a Melbourne icon - the tram - as the centrepiece of its latest problem gambling advertising campaign to highlight the importance of gambling responsibly.

The \$950,000 campaign, which is based on new Player Information Standards for gaming machines being implemented in gaming venues across the state, aims to minimise harm associated with the effects of problem gambling.

The campaign uses the images and messages from the new standards and encourages Victorians to change high risk behaviour and to identify their own actions when it comes to gambling. The campaign will be featured on billboards and at outdoor locations such as bus and tram stops, on the internet and will also reach culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

However both the campaign and the new standards are aimed at all Victorians who choose to gamble - not just those at risk of problem gambling.

Gaming Minister Tony Robinson said the new standards reminded Victorians to stay in control when gambling and to 'walk away and not chase their losses'.

"When people walk into gaming venues across Victoria, this is the image they will see - regular Australians reminding them to stay in control of their gambling habits," he said.

"These standards, based on extensive market research and consultation between government, industry and the community sector, are intended to reach all people who choose to gamble - not just problem gamblers or people at risk of problems associated with gambling.

"Gambling is a legitimate recreational activity in Victoria, but it's important that people remember to set themselves a limit of how much they are willing to play with, and not exceed that."

The Gambling Regulation Regulations 2005 require that all gaming venues display printed player information standards to provide information about gaming machines to people who play them. Gaming venues have until 31 August 2008 to display the new standards.

Mr Robinson said Victoria had led the way in tackling problem gambling.

"In 2006 we introduced the five year, \$132 million Taking Action on Problem Gambling commitment; this year we have announced we will ban ATMs from gaming venues and introduce new mechanisms that allow players to pre-commit to the amount of time and money they spend on machines," he said.

"However, we recognise a continual effort is needed to fight problem gambling and to help protect vulnerable Victorians.

"These new standards and new campaign will remind Victorians to stay in control when playing on the machines."

Victorians lose \$4.8 billion gambling

The Age October 30, 2008

Victorians lost a record \$4.8 billion in gambling last year.

- Record gambling losses
- Anti-gambling groups angry
- Pokies responsible for lion's share

Poker machines in pubs and clubs were the biggest money magnet, draining \$2.6 billion from players' pockets.

The remainder was blown at Crown Casino and on lotteries and wagering.

The biggest winner was the Victorian government, with gambling revenue injecting almost \$1.6 billion into state coffers in taxes and levies.

This is about \$36 million up on revenue the previous year when losses were about \$85 million less.

The windfall - detailed in a Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation report, tabled in state parliament today - has raised the ire of the opposition and anti-gambling groups.

Opposition gaming spokesman Michael O'Brien said the government was relying on gaming revenue to run the state and warned that would only worsen with the slowing economy.

"Labor is now so dependent on gambling to fund basic services that its gaming tax collections are around the same as Victoria Police's annual budget," he said.

"Victorians don't want police numbers dependent on pokie numbers. Hospital beds shouldn't rely on horse racing. The state Labor government should be prepared to fund basic

services without this over-reliance on gambling taxes," Mr O'Brien said.

There are almost 27,000 poker machines at 520 licensed venues across the state - excluding Crown Casino.

The \$2.6 billion lost at the pokies equates to \$647 per Victorian adult.

Victorian Interchurch Gambling Taskforce chairman, Mark Zirnask, said the cost of problem gambling was mounting and called on the government to act.

"There's still a long way to go before you can argue they've taken all reasonable measures to reduce the harm, and these losses are paid for in the sense of more people going through marriage break-ups ... losing their homes and all the hardships families have to go through as a result of gambling problems."

Dr Zirnask called for an urgent increase in funding for research into problem gambling solutions. The current \$1.4 million yearly budget equated to less than \$1 for every \$1,000 reaped in gambling taxes, he said.

Dr Zirnask also wants maximum pokies betting limits further reduced to \$1 per spin, plans for mandatory time and spend limits, fast-tracked and training to enable staff to intervene when problem gamblers are playing.

Health Minister Daniel Andrews said the government had provided record funding of about \$130 million to help problem gamblers.

"For the vast majority of people gambling is a legitimate recreational activity but there are some in our community who do have a problem and our job is to properly support them," he said.